

**BILVAVI**

**ELUL**

**TALKS**

**BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH**

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## Intro | The Rav's Personal Journey<sup>1</sup>

### FEELING EMPTY

I remember about 17 or 18 years ago I looked on the calendar and saw that it would be *Rosh HaShanah* soon. Since the *Yomim Noraim* were approaching, I knew that I must feel something, but I didn't know what to feel. I didn't see anything in my life that is missing. I knew that I felt empty, but I didn't know what it was that I was missing.

Why did I feel so empty? I learned all day; I had three full *sedarim* in the day where I learned. I *davened* and did all the *mitzvos*. So why did I feel empty inside?

I sat and thought: Am I missing something? Why do I feel empty if I am doing everything I am supposed to? It bothered me very, very much.

I started to look at others to see if I could know how others are happy, and I saw that everyone else was happy except myself. Then I became very lonely, because I felt that everyone else was happy and enjoying their learning – everyone except me.

After many years, I met many people who felt what I felt then – people who feel like they're empty inside and haven't found themselves in life. There is no one here in *Eretz Yisrael* who hasn't found themselves when it comes to *mitzvos* and *Halacha*. So what was missing in my life that I have to change myself?

I began to ask people if they felt like me. No one understood me – they were like Pharaoh's servants who couldn't interpret his dream. No one gave me answers I was satisfied with.

This was one of the hardest times in my life – I can't forget it. I had no idea what to do and where to go in my life. But I knew that I shouldn't give up; I knew I'm not an old person at the end of his life, that I'm young and that I have hope.

### I DAVENED TO HASHEM TO HELP ME

After some time, I went to a private room and cried to Hashem. I asked Hashem, "Hashem, I know there is no more prophecy anymore, but what do You want from me? Tell me what You want from me!"

I cried terribly to Hashem. But I had faith that Hashem would send me my answers and show me what He wants from me in my life.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/droshos-rav-speaks>

I hope no one goes through what I went through then. But if you ever went through this too, I want you to know that I was there too and went through it – and I came out of it.

After this, I remember that I made a list of all the things I was unhappy with my life, and I wrote how I feel like an old person who has no satisfaction in life. But I told myself not to give up, and I knew that Hashem will help me and show me what He wants from me. I didn't know where my answer would come from, but I trusted in Hashem that He would send me the answer. How?

I knew it wouldn't come from my mind. I knew that when Hashem opens up my **heart**, it will be then that I understand – to understand what the reality of this world is.

## THE REALIZATION

I remember this clearly. I was sitting and learning with a *sefer*, and suddenly it hit me: I felt the reality that Hashem exists. Then, everything became clear to me.

I grew up in a *frum* home and learned in a good yeshivah, and I knew all about *Emunah* that a person is supposed to have. I was taught the 13 principles of faith of the Rambam about belief in G-d. But I realized that although I *knew* a lot, I didn't *feel* what I knew.

Then I knew what I was missing.

This is what I realized: There is a place in one's heart where he can feel the Endlessness of Hashem's existence, and when a person doesn't feel this, he feels empty. He will search and search and he will not find the answers to his emptiness.

Some people were not blessed by Hashem with much feeling, and this emptiness doesn't bother them, the same way a table doesn't feel anything. They get up and go to work or even if they go learn, they simply don't feel this emptiness. They feel fine. But any person with a little feeling can see how this world is full of so much emptiness – *tohu* and *vohu*, and utter darkness. They want light – the light of Hashem – to illuminate their darkness.

There are a few people who are very deeply feeling people and they are in a lot of pain. They see others who are fine and look happy, and they don't know why they themselves aren't happy. These people suffer greatly inside. In addition to this, they are searching to fill their emptiness, and they don't know how.

The more feeling a person is, the more unhappy he is with what the reality is. He sees others sitting and learning and enjoying their learning – he sees how by others, the Torah is their life. But he doesn't feel in his own life how the Torah is life. He knows that it is supposed to give him life, but he doesn't feel it. He feels that Torah doesn't give him life, so maybe life is found elsewhere... such as the streets...

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We must know one thing. The world is full of false pleasures; the Sages say that our soul will never be satisfied with this world's pleasures, whether it is forbidden pleasure or whether it is permissible pleasure. Why? It is because our soul comes from Heaven; it wants something else.

### THE ROOT OF ALL PROBLEMS

At one point in my life, I realized what the root of all problems in the world is.

*Baruch Hashem*, people know most of the statements of *Chazal*, but they only *know* it intellectually - and that's it. People *know* that *Chazal* say that the world stands on Torah, and that Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world, etc. But what is missing from us? We only *know* it – but we **feel** differently in our own life.

What we need to do is truly **feel** the truths about Torah and how it is everything, and then everything will change.

### FALAFEL AND VACATIONS

For many years, I thought about this until I finally came to this conclusion.

One time I passed by a falafel store and I saw a long line waiting out the store; a new kind of falafel came out, and everyone was waiting in line to try it. I thought to myself, “Maybe they're right – maybe there really is something to this falafel? Maybe this falafel will make me happy?”

I waited on line, I bought it, I ate it – and I was very disappointed.

I began to think about what makes people feel more happy and alive.

I realized that some people feel a certain vitality from the honor they receive from other people, but I knew right away that that this was a false kind of vitality.

I saw people who were always going on vacations who seemed to really be enjoying it, though. I thought maybe there really is something special to all these vacations. I went on one of these vacations, but I was terribly disappointed. I rented a car, checked out into the hotel room, and as soon as I got into the room, I threw the keys onto the bed in frustration. I realized that while going to a hotel may have given me some more relaxation, it didn't make me feel happier with my life.

It took many years for me to go deep into my soul and realize that I couldn't be happy with my life based on anything external, but that it has to come from within myself. The more connected I felt to Torah and to Hashem, the more alive I felt. The more I would run after pleasure from the outside of myself, the more I realized I was chasing wind.

This is not a lecture. I am talking about a true story of my life – I am talking about my search, and what I found. Candies, cigarettes and walking on the beach can all give a person relaxation, and sometimes a person does need to relax in order to have some *yishuv hadaas*, but these things don't give a person life. A person can only feel alive when he is truly connected to Hashem and the Torah.

### MORE FRUSTRATION

It took me a lot of time to come to this conclusion.

One of the hardest times in my life I remember was when I learned in Yeshivah. I learned in Yeshivas Ponovezh, and I learned a lot. But I didn't feel that my learning was giving me more life. I knew that the Torah is supposed to give me life, but I didn't feel it. I thought that maybe I am the kind of student that the Sages say doesn't see success in his learning. It wasn't that I didn't know how to learn; I knew how to learn very well. I was regarded as an excellent student. But I didn't feel like the Torah is what is giving me life, which is what I am supposed to feel.

I thought maybe I should leave yeshiva – I didn't feel like I came onto the world to learn Torah. I knew that there are people who feel that they came onto this world to learn Torah, but I just didn't feel that way.

I went to Jerusalem and decided that I will speak to one of the Gedolim who was there and ask him for his advice.

I went to his house, but he wasn't available. I was very frustrated that I didn't get into him, and I didn't know what to do. I was very, very frustrated!

### THE ANSWER

At some point later, I realized what the answer was. I thought to myself and realized clearly that if Hashem was the one who said that the Torah is our life – "*Ki heim chayeinu*" – then it must be so, and that I should never give up.

### MY MESSAGE TO YOU

**Don't ever give up**, even for one moment. Hashem is *Avinu Av Harachaman* – He is a merciful Father, and He wants you to have life. If you really want to find life in the Torah, you will find it.

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If someone feels empty inside – or even if he doesn't – he must know that he will not find anything pleasurable on this world; it's all in his imagination that maybe there is something good out there other than the Torah.

Any pleasure on this world is fleeting and will not give a person enjoyment out of his life. If you really want to have a true life, cry to Hashem from the depths of your heart, “*Open my heart to Your Torah*” – not just that Hashem should open your mind, but to open your **heart** that you should have the true life – and then you will become a truly happy person, plain and simple.

I hope with all my heart that all of you should merit this and that Hashem should open up your hearts to realize that besides for a deep connection to Hashem and learning the Torah, there is nothing else we have that will give us enjoyment out of life.

# 1 | The Power To Renew Yourself <sup>2</sup>

## HASHEM RECREATES THE WORLD CONTINUOUSLY

Hashem created the world on the 25th of *Elul*. On the surface, it seems that Hashem created the world one time, 5,773 years ago. “*Hamechadesh betuvo b’chol yom tamid ma’asei bereshis.*”<sup>3</sup> (He renews, in His goodness, every day constantly, the act of creation.) Every single day Hashem re-creates the world. Not only did this happen the first time on the 25th of *Elul*, 5773 years ago, but in fact, every single day, Hashem re-creates His world and renews it.

What difference does it make to us whether the world was created only one time 5,773 years ago, or if Hashem keeps re-creating his world every day anew? With Hashem’s help, we will try to answer this question and explain how the fact that the world is constantly being re-created is relevant and has practical implications for every one of us.

We will look into the immense repercussions of the fact that Hashem keeps re-creating the world. Hashem created the world, on the first day, on the second, third, fourth, fifth, and on the sixth day he created Adam.

On each day of Creation, it was said to be “*ki tov,*”<sup>4</sup> that it is good, and when Hashem completed the Creation, He testified that it was all very good. “*Vayar Elokim es kol asher asah, v’hinei tov me’od.*”<sup>5</sup>

But after Hashem had created the Creation, which was **all very good**, Adam and Chavah did not listen to Hashem, Who commanded them not to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* (*Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*). By eating from it, they not only damaged themselves, but they also damaged the entire world.

If a person would not have the energy he needed for each day’s spiritual work, then every morning he would start it from an imperfect, unclean, contaminated place.

But because Hashem continuously re-creates the world every day, He gives each person the opportunity to start each day from the depths of his soul, from a place that is totally innocent, totally pure and totally holy [thus providing perfect conditions for his spiritual growth].

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-chodesh-avodah-006-Elul-renewal>

<sup>3</sup> *U’mechadesh bechol yom ma’asei bereisheis* – “Who renews the Creation every day” (*Chagiga* 12:2). Also in the morning prayers, just before *K’riyat Shema*.

<sup>4</sup> After each day, Hashem saw that it “*ki tov* – was good” (*Bereishis* 1)

<sup>5</sup> Hashem saw that “*v’hinei tov meod* – and it was very good” (*Bereishis* 1:31)



## CONTINUATION VS. RENEWAL

There are two frames of reference that Hashem gives us in order to observe the world. One view is that there was only one Creation, that Hashem created the world once 5,773 years ago and, ever since, the Creation continues every day from the previous day, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. Just about every one of us has been reincarnated many times during the 5,773 years since the “first” Creation. Sometimes we did good deeds, and sometimes, G-d-forbid, we did not-so-good deeds, sometimes we were good and holy and sometimes, *chas ve’shalom*, we were not so holy. If a person lived with only this perception, then they would live their life with all their past, which was sometimes good and sometime less good.

The second view is that Hashem planted in the world a force of re-creation continuously every day, every hour, every minute, every instant. Hashem re-creates and gives a person energy to always start with a new beginning that is not affected by the defects of the past— not affected from all the transformations the person has gone through in all the years since the world was created.

## KNOWING OUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Each and every one of us knows their own soul to some degree. We all have our own weaknesses, which are expressed differently by different people. In some people, it is expressed by a tendency for sadness – some people get stressed easily while others get overwhelmed. For other people, it is expressed by fears. In other people, it is expressed by a tendency to be suspicious and in other people it is expressed in low self-esteem.

There are many other predispositions that people have, depending on their particular history. A great many of these tendencies are the results of the many situations that the person went through during his life in childhood, in adolescence, or at various other times in their life.

If a person would try to remember where certain difficulties stem from, he may be able to recall and sort through all kinds of adverse situations that he went through, along with the particular situation when this mishap was implanted in his soul.

Sometimes these situations happened in this life, but very often, these emotional difficulties do not stem from this lifetime, but from the many other lives that the person lived during his various incarnations (*gilgulim*) since the start of Creation.

## GETTING RID OF OUR EMOTIONAL BLOCKS

Our soul, which is now clothed in our current body, went through thousands of years in This World, in *Gan Eden* or even in, *chas veshalom*, *Gebinnom*. We have a lot of baggage that has

accumulated in our soul— we are an accumulation of a lot of scars and many emotional disturbances. And these disturbances can combine generating whole new disturbances!

If each one of us had only one disturbance, or even a couple, it would have been much easier to deal with. But usually each one of us has at least a few disturbances, and many times dozens and even hundreds.

How can a person get rid of all these emotional blocks? Here we arrive to the special power we spoke about that is imbedded in the month of *Elul*.<sup>6</sup>

The advice seems to be to deal with one problem— to try to figure out how it started, what is its reason, and by finding its root reason, it would be possible to try to remove the source of that disturbance. Sometimes we can find the reason for a disturbance if we could track down its source. Sometimes, however, it is more hidden, especially if the reason for the disturbance was not in this life, but was in a previous incarnation. It is almost impossible to get to the bottom of any disturbance using the mind alone.

So, if it is difficult to solve one disturbance, how much more difficult is it to solve them all. Therefore, it is impossible to accomplish fixing everything. Of course, if we could clearly see the reason for the disturbance, we should go through it and fix it.

But for everything else, either because the reason is hidden or because there are too many disturbances, we have the power of renewal of “*Mechadesh betuvo bechol yom tamid ma’asei bereshis*”.

The *koach* (strength) that Hashem uses to renew the Creation every day gives us a new, tremendous and amazing ability to deal with the tribulations of our *nefesh* in order to attain a more *pnimi* (internal) and pleasant life.

## THE RENEWAL WITHIN

This force of renewal is found in the inner recesses of everyone’s soul.

In the parts of the soul that a person is aware of which are closer to the physical, a person feels that every day is a continuation of the previous day. But in the very depths of everyone’s soul, is the

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<sup>6</sup> How do we balance this idea of concentrating on renewal with the *avodah* of *Elul* which is focusing on what we did wrong and doing *teshuvah*?

In response to this question, the Rav answered: “In fact there is an *avodah* of the part of the soul that sees the continuation of day after day. A person should do a *cheshbon hanefesh* with their lower soul for 5–10 minutes a day and it will fix what is needed, but the majority of our outlook should be on renewal.

The Ten Days of *Teshuvah* are also days of renewal, because if a person only does *teshuvah*, and only looks at the past, he will only focus on his shortcomings of the past.

The Rambam says that a *ba’al teshuvah* is called a *breiah chadashah* (new being).  
If a person doesn’t regret the past they cannot feel the renewal of *mechadesh bechol yom* ... If someone does *cheshbon hanefesh* 5–10 minutes per day, then they should try to go back to the place of renewal also. This is the depth of a *ba’al teshuvah* who feels like a new being.”

place of “*Asher yatzar es ha’adam b’chochmah* – That He created man with wisdom.”<sup>7</sup> Iyov asked “*Chochmah mei’ayin timatza?* – Wisdom, from where is it found?”<sup>8</sup> The answer is that in the root of the creation of a Jew is the place that is known exclusively only to Jewish souls – Hashem is constantly re-creating continuously.

This phenomenon, that Hashem re-creates the world continuously (and one’s private soul in particular) means that the soul is re-created without any defects, impressions, or disturbances imprinted from the beginning of Creation.

“*Chadashim labekarim, rabbah emunasecha*” – “They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness,”<sup>9</sup>; “*Briyah chadashah mamash*” – “In actuality, a new creation”.<sup>10</sup>

As such, a person is like a newborn baby or like a new convert. He starts anew in that place in the soul, where there are no imprints. The *Mishna* in *Avos* explains, “*Kotev al neyar chalak v’lo kotev al niyyar machuk*”, that we can “write on a clean slate and not on an erased piece of paper”.<sup>11</sup> There, a person can start anew; there he has a future that starts growing from a new beginning.

A person first must know that there is such a place in the soul, and then reach that place. He needs to understand that there is such a place in the soul where he could start anew, every day, every hour, and any time.

[When *bnei Yisrael* were in the desert for forty years, Hashem gave them *manna* from Heaven every single day for their sustenance.] What was the necessity for the *manna* to descend daily? Hashem could have brought it down once a week or once a month so that it would stay fresh. Hashem gave them the *manna* every day so that they will feel “*Chadashim labkarim rabbah emunasecha*.”<sup>12</sup>

Every morning when the *manna* fell, they felt that there was new food in the world, because it was a new world. This *manna* was white, and whitened their sins, and clearly allowed them to start every day from this new, white, blank page in their soul.

## BELIEVE IN RENEWAL, THEN SEE IT

First of all, as we explained, a person must know that the inner strength in his soul experiences a new beginning every day.

<sup>7</sup> *Gamara Brachos 80b*

<sup>8</sup> *Iyov, 28:12*

<sup>9</sup> *Rashi, Eichah 3:23*

<sup>10</sup> “*Briyah chadashah mamash*” (*Chesed l’Avraham 3:22*).

<sup>11</sup> *Pirkei Avos 4:25*.

<sup>12</sup> “*Chochmah mei’ayin timatz – Wisdom where is its root?*” (*Iyov, 28:12*)

It is only the external part of our soul that feels the world as if it is merely continuous; a day follows from the previous day, from the previous week, from the previous month, from the previous year. But in the depths of our soul, we can access the power of renewal.

After a person knows and believes the fact, that the world is always being re-created, a person should try to observe the world and see all the things that are renewed each day.

*Chazal* say that a chicken lays an egg every single day.<sup>13</sup> *Chazal* also say that in the future a woman will be able to give birth every day instead of after nine months. This is simply because the world is constantly being re-created!

We need to observe this in order to silence the external noises in our soul in order to listen to the deepest internal place in us. If we do that, we can access the place of the inner wellsprings in the soul, where the soul is continually renewed. In the language of the Mishnah in *Avos*, it was said, “*Na’aseh k’ma’ayan hamisgaber*”. A person becomes like a flowing wellspring,<sup>14</sup> which keeps renewing.

A person who does not quiet his soul is only aware of things that happen externally, so he only sees the world as a continuation of the past.

## INTERNAL QUIET

A person has to quiet his soul, either by listening to a *niggun*, or nibbling on something tasty, or by relaxing in a comfortable position. All these are tools to reach the place of internal quiet where he can quiet their heavy feelings and thoughts.

When he is in a place of quiet, he can then dwell on this simple thought: **“I am being renewed. Hashem is in my heart, and is renewing me every moment.”**

Repeat this sentence dozens of times. This should only happen when you are in this quiet place – the deepest place in the soul. Try to repeat this from total awareness and slowly try to experience them as deep as possible in your soul.<sup>15</sup>

Each one of us should try to do this “quieting” every morning for a few minutes, and feel the reality of Hashem in the heart, and then try to believe and try to experience that “Hashem infuses in me every day new *koach*, renewing me from the start.” We can realize that “Hashem gives me a new *koach* to succeed. Even though I couldn’t succeed in the past, I was given new energies to succeed

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<sup>13</sup> “*Asida ida sheteled b’chol yom.*” *The Gemara compares it to a chicken laying eggs every day (Shabbos 30).*

<sup>14</sup> *Mishlei, 18:14*

<sup>15</sup> *In response to a question, the Rav explained that the best time to try this is at the very beginning of the day, before you start your daily routine. It’s best to get up a few minutes earlier, and do this before everyone else wakes up. Then you would start your day from this clean, pure and internal state.*

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and if today I will not succeed, tomorrow I will be given again new energy so that I will succeed then.”

If a person starts each day with this process of internal observation it will fill him with mighty power. The whole day will be built from this great infusion from Hashem that resides in each of us and gives us power every day.

Also, during the day, especially after a person fell in *emunah*, or did something inappropriate, or expressed something that had disappointed him, the advice is to go back to the place where we were at, and to believe that “Hashem is planting in me new power, which is not affected by all the failures of the past.”

If a person works on this correctly, with patience and clarity, from a stable place with the understanding that on one the hand the world continues forward to the next day, but that the world is also re-created every day, then he will receive great powers of strength and purity, beauty and liveliness.

The ones who work on this will merit, with Hashem’s help, that their obstacles will become smaller so that they will be able to overcome them. But even more so, the person will live an uplifted and happier life.

## 2 | Recognizing The King<sup>16</sup>

### THE CONCEPT OF HASHEM'S KINGSHIP

מלך עוזר מגן ומושיע In the end of the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we express how Hashem is our מלך, King. In the days of *Elul*, we prepare for Rosh HaShanah, in which we declare Hashem as King over us; שתמליכוני עליכם, “That I rule over you.” What is the *malchus*, the Kingship, of Hashem?

There were kings in the Jewish people, but these were just to give us somewhat of an idea to the Kingship of Hashem. Hashem’s Kingship is totally different than what we understand about a human king.

*Chazal* state, “There is no king without a nation.” It seems that there can be a *nation* without a *king*, though. The Jewish nation wanted a king at one point, but they were still a nation even without a king.

It seems that a person can survive without a king. A king is more like a luxury. But the Kingship of Hashem is a whole different understanding than how we view a human king. From Hashem’s perspective, not only is there is no king without a nation, but there can be no nation without a king. There is a very big difference between how we accept Hashem’s Kingship, with the way other nations relate to a king. Our whole existence depends on how we accept upon ourselves the Kingship of Hashem.

What is the concept of a kingship, a *malchus*? The *sefarim hakedoshim* say that *malchus* is a revelation that there is a king. In a *malchus*, there is a root of the *malchus* and the branches of the *malchus*. The “branches” are the rules of the king which the nation must follow, but the root of the *malchus* is the very fact that there is a king, and that the nation must recognize this.

“*It is our desire to see the King*” – our very will to see and recognize the king is what defines the kingship of Hashem. The behavior that this obligates us in are the “branches” of that recognition, but the root of the *malchus* is to simply recognize that there is a King and that we desire to know the King. To recognize the King is how we realize that Hashem is the King.

To illustrate, we have 365 negative commandments; there are levels of punishment. But if someone rebels against the King, he is liable to capital punishment. All of the 365 commandments are like a rebellion against the King, and in that aspect, a person deserves death for committing any of the 365 commandments. Since there is a *malchus* of Hashem, everything we are doing is being committed in front of Hashem.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-027-recognizing-king>

### The Avodah of Elul

We are in a time in which we declare Hashem as King (through reciting *Selichos* and asking Him for mercy) and we are also in a time in which we must seek out Hashem; “*Seek Hashem where He is found.*” These two recognitions are not two separate concepts; they are intertwined. If we recognize that Hashem is King, that makes a person realize that wherever he is, he is in front of the King. This is the depth behind the words of the Rema, that a person must always be cognizant that he is in front of Hashem, wherever he is.

Thus, to declare Hashem as King is to realize that we are constantly in front of Him.

A king cannot forego his honor. If so, how does Hashem forgive us? The simple answer is that a human king cannot forgive, but Hashem can forgive. The deeper answer is that when we ask for forgiveness, we are asking Hashem that he should not see our sins in the first place, as Bilaam declared in his song, “*I do not see sin in Yaakov.*”

Thus, we have two parts to our preparation for Rosh HaShanah, during these days of *Elul*. These are days of *yirah*, in which we fear Hashem, in order to declare Him as King.

The other aspect is to realize the meaning of the possuk, "וה' אלוֹקֵינוּ עִמּוֹ, וְתִרְוַעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ" – the word *teruah* (תְּרוּעָה) comes from the word *reia* (רֵיעַ), “friend”. *Chazal* say “*Do not abandon your father and the friend of your father*”, and this is referring to Hashem, that Hashem is the “Friend” whom we must not abandon.<sup>17</sup> *Chazal* say, “Either a friend or death.”<sup>18</sup> The question is who our “friend” will be...

So on one hand, *Elul* is a time of *din* and *yirah*, in which we do *teshuvah*, and we make *cheshbon hanefesh* and take upon ourselves various resolutions; each to his own. But this is just the external part of *Elul*. The inner aspect of *Elul* – which all of the external *avodah* is supposed to lead to – is to realize that Hashem is our true Friend. “Either a friend or death.” A human friend, a *chavrusa*, is only temporary. You are not bound together forever with him. A real friend is someone who never leaves your side and you can always be with him. The only real friend you can ever have is Hashem, because you can always be with Him.

We cannot live a lonely kind of life. If you know anyone who lives alone, you can see what kind of lonely and sad life he has. But that is only true regarding the external part of our life. In the inner place in our soul, we can live “alone” with Hashem – inside a deep place in our soul, we can be in His palace.

These days of *Elul* are days to prepare for accepting Hashem’s Kingship upon us. The way we prepare, with our soul, is by realizing that we cannot live alone. We need a friend, a true friend, and the only One whom we can connect to eternally is Hashem. As we declare on Rosh HaShanah, “And

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<sup>17</sup> See *Rashi to Shabbos 31a*

<sup>18</sup> *Taanis 23a*

You are the King, the Almighty G-d, Who lives forever.” We need an “inner” and true kind of *chavrusa*.

These are days in which we can reach deeper layers in our soul. We need to clean ourselves out inside, by doing *teshuvah*, but that’s not the ultimate goal. We must be aware of why we are cleaning ourselves out inside. It is because we want to make way for the King to enter. That is the goal of all our *teshuvah* during *Elul*.

*Elul* is thus not just about doing *Teshuvah*. These are days in which we can enter deep into our soul.

Our heart is a *Kodesh Kodashim* within us.<sup>19</sup> This is not an exaggeration. The Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur would enter into the innermost chamber on Yom Kippur; so too, during these days of *Elul*, we need to reach deeper and deeper into our soul, by getting in touch with our heart, until we reach our innermost chamber of the heart.

May we merit to recognize the Kingship of Hashem, from the depths of our soul, to realize the possuk, "וה' אלוקיו עמו, ותרועת מלך בו".

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<sup>19</sup> *Nefesh HaChaim, shaar aleph*



## 3 | Pondering The Meaning Of Life <sup>20</sup>

### HASHEM HELPS US WHEN WE CONNECT OUR ACTIONS WITH HIM

Hashem is our עוזר, our ultimate Helper. מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן

Hashem is our true Helper. When a person helps another, the one receiving the help is considered the main person. But when Hashem helps us, we realize that Hashem is the main one, and we are just secondary. As it is written, “*My help comes from Hashem.*”<sup>21</sup>

*Chazal* say that our evil inclination gets stronger every day, and if not for Hashem, we cannot overcome it (Sukkah 52a). On a deeper note, our every action needs Hashem’s help. How indeed does Hashem help us?

Whenever we do an action, it is considered alive only if we put Hashem into the equation. Although we use our power of *bechirah* to do good actions, our actions can only be considered ‘alive’ when we realize how we need Hashem to help us, and this gives life to the actions we do. A person might do many good deeds, but inwardly, he can be dead, because there is no life-source to his actions; Hashem is missing from the equation. Once we put Hashem into what we do, Hashem is providing life to our actions, and then the actions we do are alive.

### LIFE VS. IMAGINATION

A person needs to live an inner kind of life, in which all that he does is inwardly connected to Hashem.

We must know what it means to really live *life*, and what it means to merely *imagine* what a good life is – to see the differentiation between these two.

To illustrate, a child plays a game and is having a good time; he thinks that this is his life. As he begins to get older, he realizes that all his fun was the world of imagination, and that this is not life.

The life which we see in front of us, on this world, is all a world of imagination! In order to really know what our life is, we have to merit from Hashem that He open our hearts to understand what it really is. If our heart hasn’t been opened a little, we do not understand what “life” is at all. We might know what death is, but we won’t know what “life” is.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-028-pondering-meaning-life>

<sup>21</sup> *Tebillim* 121:2

Our existence is that we are a soul clothed by a body. Therefore, we initially perceive life from the perspective of our body, even if we learn Torah and *mitzvos*; from the perspective of the body, we have an erroneous perception of what life is about. We have to daven to Hashem that He should open our heart (as we daven in the end of Shemoneh Esrei, “*Open my heart to Your Torah*”) in order to understand what life really is.

We should look back at our past and see that whatever we thought until now as “life” is not really life, just imagination. Most people are not experiencing the true meaning of life, even if they live for 70 or 80 years. People often do not even experience one moment of true life on this world!

Our *neshamah* in us knows what real life is. Even when we ask Hashem for life, we do not always know what it is. The meaning of life is really a secret; only our *neshamah* knows what it is. Sometimes we receive sparks of understanding of what the meaning of life is. But to actually arrive at a total recognition of what life is, we need to have our hearts opened.

During *Elul*, what are people asking Hashem for? People have all kinds of things they want and ask Hashem for a whole list of things. The more a person asks for various things, the more it shows that he doesn’t understand what life is. We are all asking Hashem for **life!** In Shemoneh Esrei of Rosh HaShanah, we daven *Zochreinu L’Chaim, Melech Chofetz B’Chaim, Kosveinu B’Sefer HaChaim*...we keep asking for life, because that is really our central request in *Elul*. As for our personal requests that we ask of Hashem, most of these requests are not for life itself, but rather about various details that branch out from our life, such as *parnassah*, etc. The main request which we ask for in Shemoneh Esrei is that we should have **life!**

Since we are young, we think that we know we are alive. But the truth is that most people don’t even realize what it means to really be alive! People ask Hashem that they be granted life only because they don’t want to die. But as for **life** itself, to know what it means to be alive – people often do not know what it is. We don’t want Hashem to take away our life, as we daven in the prayer of *Shema Koleinu*. But what *is our* life to begin with? What is the life that we are asking for more of? Do we realize the true meaning of what it means to be alive...?

If our hearts begin to become a little opened, we can realize that the kind of life we think we have been living until now is really the world of imagination. Compare this to a child. A child’s perspective on life is not life – it is imagination.

It is hard to verbally express this concept in words. The point is that your heart needs to become opened, and then you will know what is being discussed here.

In *Elul*, we ask for life. We must realize that this world we see in front of us is all imagination! Ever since Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, this world became like one big imaginary kind of existence. This is the depth behind the curse of “death” that came to the world – it was a “death” to the ideal state of mankind. So when we ask for life in *Elul*, the depth of our request is that we are asking Hashem that we be granted the power to leave our imagination, and instead taste of the true life – the *Eitz HaChaim*, the source of true life.

It is not only a person who is immersed in physical interests who is living in imagination. Even a person learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*, who is not entrenched in physical pursuit, can also be living in imagination. We see from this from the fact that we have all kinds of dreams at night.

When we reveal the inner essence of our heart, we will then understand what the true meaning of life is, and then we will be able to truly have *d'veykus* with the Creator.

4 | True Salvation<sup>22</sup>

מֶלֶךְ עֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמַגֵּן Hashem is our מוֹשִׁיעַ, our “Savior.” What is the concept of a *yeshuah*, of seeing salvation? Simply speaking, it is when a person has a difficulty, and Hashem saves the person from his predicament; we call this a *yeshuah*, salvation.

But the deeper meaning is that *yeshuah* comes from the word *shaah*, which means to “turn.” [We will soon explain].

When a person is in need of a *yeshuah*, the *yeshuah* is when Hashem reveals His light in the person’s life. When a person is going through a time of *hester panim*, he is in a predicament. When Hashem removes His *hester panim*, He turns His Face to the person, so to speak – and that is the essence of the *yeshuah*.

The simple understanding of *hester panim* is that when there is *hester panim*, He doesn’t protect us and instead leaves our fate up to the hands of people on this world. *Hester panim* implies an absence of *Hashgachah Peratis* (Divine Providence), so when this is removed, there is *yeshuah*. But the deeper understanding is that when Hashem shines His Face on us, so to speak, there is *yeshuah*.

A person who has troubles might view this as a situation of *hester panim*, while a person with health and livelihood and good children seems to be enjoying *he’aras panim*. That is the way we simply understand the difference between *hester panim* and *he’aras panim*.

But the deeper understanding is that *hester panim* is when a person doesn’t live with Hashem in his life, while *he’aras panim* is when a person lives with Hashem in his life. The true *hester panim* of Creation is when people don’t feel Hashem’s *he’aras panim*. In turn, *hester panim* is when people don’t feel Hashem enough in their life.

Moshe spoke with Hashem “face to face”. Only Moshe saw Hashem face-to-face, but we can also have a face-to-face relationship with Hashem. This is more than just feeling *he’aras panim* of Hashem every here and there in our life. It is when we feel a yearning for Hashem all the time in our life; this is *panim b’panim* with Hashem.

A person might feel Hashem in his life taking care of him, in all areas of his life. Whenever he feels like he needs Hashem, he asks Hashem to save him, and indeed he always feels like Hashem is taking care of him. He feels the *he’aras panim* of Hashem in his life. This is wonderful, but he is still missing something.

There is a higher kind of relationship we can have with Hashem: *panim b’panim* (face to face). This is like a person who receives good from his friend, but not only does he receive what he wants,

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-029-true-salvation>

but he is given a smile and radiant countenance along with it. A person who only feel *he'aras panim* from Hashem in his life, but not *panim b'panim*, knows that Hashem provides all his needs, but he only turns to Hashem when he needs something. A person who has the higher relationship with Hashem, *panim b'panim*, feels Hashem all the time in his life – not just when he receives things from Him.

There are people who learn *sefarim* about *emunah* and *Hashgacha Peratis* (Divine Providence), which is wonderful, but they are still unaware that they can have a deeper feeling of Hashem in their life – *panim b'panim*. When people have troubles and they ask Hashem to take them out of their troubles, because they believe that Hashem can help, this doesn't always mean that the person is close to Hashem. Such a person looks at Hashem as someone who can help him get out of his troubles, and that his how he relates to him. He looks at Hashem like his "*ezer k'negdo*" ...a mere helpmate...

## DAVENING DURING ELUL

A person who hears these words might wonder: "What do you mean? We are supposed to *daven* during *Elul* for all our needs. It is our *chiyuv* (obligation)." We need to *daven* for our needs, but there is a lot more to what we should be *davening* for in *Elul* besides for our needs!

In *Elul*, the *sefarim hakedoshim* say that we are entering the Palace of the King, where we are surrounded by Hashem's light. We cannot see Hashem face to face, but we can definitely feel, in our mind and our heart, that we are face to face with Hashem. This is the true meaning of having a *yeshuah*. The main trouble in a person's life, from all his troubles, is when he doesn't feel Hashem in his life.

What is the worst thing you went through this year? Everyone has a different answer. But the true, inner trouble we have is that we don't feel Hashem in our life, that we don't feel His Face shining upon us. That is the true *tzarah* (painful situation) of all *tzaros* in a person's life.

In *Avinu Malkeinu*, we ask Hashem for mercy, because we are undeserving. Are we asking for reward? Or are we asking Hashem that we should merit to see and feel Him in our life? Are we just asking Hashem for various things, or do we want to see our Father? A child, who is good to his father, mainly wants to see his father, more than anything he wants. "*It is our will to see our King*" – this should be our main request.

Imagine a father who gives so much to his children, all their needs, and all his children do is ask him for things, never wishing to see him....

The way we declare Hashem as king is when we desire to see His Face; "It is our will to see our King." Is this really our desire when we declare Hashem as King? Do we mean what we say? If we don't really want it as we express the *malchiyus* in Shemoneh Esrei, then we are lying in our *tefillos*.

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Of course, during *Elul* we also need to do *teshuvah* and make a *cheshbon hanefesh*. But that is all an introduction, to be able to enter the Chamber of the King, which is when we come to *Rosh HaShanah*. The goal of all our *teshuvah* during *Elul* is to be able to see our King, to wish to see Him.

It is not enough for us to feel Hashem's *he'aras panim* in our life. We need a relationship of *panim b'panim* - to feel Hashem in our life on a more regular basis, not just to feel Him from time to time when He saves us from troubles. We need to uncover a yearning for Hashem, "our will to see the King" – to live a life of yearning for Hashem. This is what we should cry for during *Elul*.

May we all merit a good year and be written in the book of righteous.

5 | The Final Judgement<sup>23</sup>THE MIDDAS HADIN/ATTRIBUTE OF JUDGMENT

אתה גיבור לעולם – “You, Hashem, are eternally mighty.”

[As we brought in the previous chapter], When Hashem first created the world, He wanted to create it with *middas hadin* (attribute of judgment); Hashem saw that the world wouldn't survive, therefore, He included in it the *middas harachamim*, the attribute of mercy. The “might” of Hashem in this blessing is referring to His *middas hadin*.

What is the *middas hadin*? There are different judgments we go through. One opinion in our Sages is that we are judged every day. We are also judged once a year on Rosh HaShanah. After a person dies and his soul returns to Heaven, he is judged again, and in the future, there will be a final day of reckoning, which is called the *Yom HaDin HaGadol HaGibbor V'haNora* – the “great, mighty and awesome day of judgment”.

THE FINAL DAY OF JUDGMENT

What is the day of reckoning in the future? We will be judged for all our previous lifetimes, from the start of Creation all the way until our last lifetime. We will be judged from the first day of Creation, in which Adam lived, for all souls were once part of Adam's soul, as *Chazal* revealed. This will not just be a judgment for various details we know of from our life, but it will be an all-inclusive judgment that includes every single detail from all our lifetimes together. This is described in the possuk in the end of sefer *Koheles*,

"סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלוקים ירא, ואת מצוותיו שמור, כי זה כל האדם" – “*In the end of things, all will be heard; fear Hashem, and guard His commandments, for this is all there is to man.*”

Another factor of the future judgment is that each person will also be judged along with all of Creations. It will not just be a judgment on our “private” kind of existence – all the actions we did since we began to exist – but it will be a judgment of the entire Creation in its totality.

This begins to help us gain a new picture of our actions. Our actions are not just our private actions per se, but they will be affected by all other actions from everyone else in Creation.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-033-final-judgment>

In the future, when *Moshiach* comes, there will be a great new revelation. Hashem will judge the entire world, all at once. The future *Yom HaDin* will be a judgment on the entire Creation, every last detail – *all at once*. This is the depth of judgment, which only Hashem can do Himself. We will all one day have to give an accounting before Hashem Himself. This will differ from the judgment of the Heavenly Court; it will be a judgment coming from the ultimate Judge – Hashem Himself.

As a person matures, his sense of fear of judgment gets deeper. He fears the judgment of Rosh HaShanah, and he begins to fear how one day he will have to give an accounting to Hashem.

A person might know a lot intellectually about these concepts, and he can know many sayings of *Chazal* about it, yet, his understanding of this concept can still be superficial. He knows about the future day of judgment, but he doesn't connect to it, and thus he doesn't fear it.

## THE DEPTH OF LEARNING TORAH

Thus, it is not enough to learn Torah – a person has to live a life of Torah, in which Torah is his very life. A child can learn Torah, but it is not yet his life. “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”. The Torah is the source of Creation which Hashem used to create the universe with. The Torah is the source of life.

Hashem is exacting with *tzaddikim*, and the depth of this is because *tzaddikim* are found on a higher plane. They are immersed in the holy thoughts of Torah. A true Torah scholar, when he learns Torah, scrutinizes every word. He lives in a realm where every word of Torah is scrutinized and endlessly analyzed, a world of constant refinement.

That is the difference between a Torah scholar, whose Torah is his life, than someone who just sits and learns Torah. (A superficial person can't tell this difference. He looks at a Torah scholar and thinks, “What's the difference between him and someone else sitting and learning? Both people are sitting and learning...”)

This helps us conceptualize the future day of reckoning, which will analyze every detail in Creation together. “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world” – in other words, *from* the Torah, which includes all of Creation, Hashem will judge the entire Creation. The Torah is really all “one piece”, and Hashem will also see the entire Creation as all one piece in the future, seeing every detail at once.

However, it is very possible that a person is learning Torah, day and night, yet he doesn't realize how all of the Torah is all one piece. He doesn't enter it deeply; he doesn't see how the Torah is the source for all of Creation, thus, he doesn't analyze properly every detail in what he learns.

When we hear about the concept of the future day of reckoning, in order for it to affect us, we need to be deeply connected to the Torah. When we are deeply connected to Torah, we analyze its every detail, and that helps us conceptualize what the future judgment will be like – a very detailed



kind of judgment. If a person isn't deeply connected to the Torah – if he doesn't seek to analyze his learning – he won't be able to connect to the fear of the future day of judgment.

## THE FUTURE JUDGMENT WILL BE ON THE LEVEL OF TORAH WE REACHED

Until now, we explained how a person can connect himself to the future day of judgment. On a more subtle understanding, there are several kinds of judgment – there is a judgment on the actions we do, which we are judged for on Rosh HaShanah, and there is a higher kind of judgment, which will be the judgment of the future. It will be a whole different kind of concept of judgment than our current time.

In the first blessing of Shemoneh Esrei, we describe the *middos* of Hashem as "הגדול, הגיבור והנורא" and we explained how each of these *middos* is referring to the *middos* that our three Avos personified. The future day of judgment, however, will incorporate all of these *middos* together. Therefore, it will be the day that is the *Yom HaDin HaGadol HaGibbor V'haNora*, because it will incorporate all of the aspects of all our Avos, since the start of Creation. It will not just be a judgment on our actions, but on our level of **Torah** that we reached.

These days if a person goes to a Beis Din, he sees *dayanim* (judges) giving a judgment. This is nothing compared to the *din*/judgment of the future. The judgment will be on everything, just like the Torah is all-inclusive. Therefore, in order to merit a good judgment in the future, we need to deeply connect ourselves to the Torah. It is not enough to do *teshuvah* on our deeds. In the future, there will be no more deeds - just Torah. The entire question then will be about "How much Torah did I reach...?" We need to really connect ourselves to the Torah, to understand that the Torah is really the source of the entire Creation, that it is all-inclusive. The ultimate judgment of the future will be on our level of Torah that we reached.

## THE HIGHER KIND OF YIRAH/FEAR

This is a whole new *yirah*/fear that we need to acquire. It is the inner kind of *yirah*. We are used to the concept of being afraid of punishment for sin, and to fear perfection, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* describes; but there is a higher kind of fear, the fear of the Torah, which we also need to acquire.

We can only get this fear if we really connect ourselves to the Torah – "*Fear of Hashem is wisdom.*" If we really connect to the Torah's wisdom, we will attain the true fear of Hashem.

6 | Revival of the Living <sup>24</sup>THE ONGOING REVIVAL IN CREATION

In the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we say "מחי' מתים אתה" – "You revive the dead." It is written, "*Hashem revives the dead with His expression.*" Our Rabbis point out that there are five times in this blessing which we mention how Hashem revives the dead. The first time we mention the revival of the dead, it is referring to the general revival of the dead which will be in the future.

But as we know from the words of our Sages, Hashem is constantly reviving the world. Just as He supports life all the time - as we say later on in this blessing, מכלכל חיים בחסד - so does He revive the dead all the time.

The simple understanding of this is that when a person goes to sleep, he returns his soul to Hashem, and when he gets up in the morning, Hashem gives him back his soul; this is the simple understanding of how Hashem revives the dead every day.

But the deeper understanding is that Hashem revives the various parts of our soul. The five times we mention the revival of the dead in this blessing are an allusion to the five parts of our soul.

Generally speaking, there are five parts to our soul. The highest part of our soul<sup>25</sup> is our *ratzon* (will), followed by our power of *machshavah* (thought) then *hisbonenus* (reflection), then our *middos* (emotions and character traits) and finally, our actions, which are the lowest layer of our soul.

It is written, "*Hashem renews, in His goodness, every day, the act of Creation.*" This does not just mean that Hashem revives the world every day, but that He revives one's personal soul, every day.

THE RENEWAL OF OUR RATZON/WILL

We will start with the highest layer of our soul, our *ratzon*. How does our *ratzon* get renewed every day? We are referring to a *ratzon* for holiness, not *retzonos* for various physical pursuits. How do we feel any *ratzon* for holiness?

It is really engraved deeply in our soul to always strive for holiness. "It is our will to do Your will, but the yeast in the sourdough [the evil inclination] prevents us." Our *ratzon* gets revived all the time because there is a personal revival of the dead that is constantly taking place in one's personal soul.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-034-revival-living>

<sup>25</sup> These five layers of the soul are the external layers of the soul, but our actual essence of our soul is deeper than our will. It is our actual "I" – our *neshamah*, which is a "piece of Hashem." Refer to the author's *Getting Know Your Self*.

Whenever I want to do learn or daven or do something spiritual, my *ratzon* is getting awakened, and this can only happen if **I recognize that Hashem is reviving me**. It is not enough for a person to know about this intellectually - he must have an inner recognition of it.

When a person isn't connected inwardly to the concept, then it doesn't work for him, and he is kind of asleep in his soul. Just like our body goes to sleep, so our our soul can be asleep – when it is not connected to spiritual realities. But when we believe and recognize that Hashem keeps reviving us, our *ratzon* is revived, and then we are able to keep having a *ratzon* for anything holy.

From where does anyone get the power to sit and learn Torah every day? It is because they have a *ratzon* which is active. What is the difference between someone who shows up to the *Beis Midrash* every day to learn, on a regular basis, and someone who only comes once in a while, when he feels like it? The first person has a *ratzon*. He is connected to the concept of the soul's revival, and therefore his *ratzon* is always ignited.

To give another example, when people begin *Daf HaYomi*, their *ratzon* is active, but as Daf Yomi goes on, many people lose interest. Their *ratzon* stops. Why do people lose their *ratzon*? It is because they don't realize that Hashem can keep reviving us. The only ones who are able to last through any spiritual undertaking are the ones who understand that Hashem keeps reviving our *ratzon*, and that is where they get strength from. Those who lose their *ratzon* are unaware of the concept of how their *ratzon* can constantly be revived by Hashem.

## THE RENEWAL OF OUR ACTIONS

From where do people get the ability to always be active in doing the *mitzvos*? How can people just do, do, and do more good deeds? Don't we need *menuchah* (rest)? How are certain people able to always be doing so many *mitzvos* and never cease doing *mitzvos*? It is because they are connected to the soul's revival. Therefore, their actions are constantly getting revived by Hashem. They are constantly experiencing an ongoing *techiyas hameisim* (revival of the dead) in their realm of action.

## THE RENEWAL OF OUR MIDDOS

From where do people get the strength to always work on the *middos*? There are many people who were working on their *middos* when they were younger, but then they got married and “move on” with their life, leaving their aspirations behind, and they stop working on their *middos*. They have “*tekufos*” (periods) where they work on their *middos*, and “*tekufos*” when they don't work on their *middos*.

But there are people who are constantly working on their *middos*, for years and years. How are they able to work so hard on themselves? It is because they are connected to the power of the soul's

revival. They realize that their *middos* need to always undergo *techiyas hameisim*, and that is how they get the strength to work on themselves.

## ELUL AND BEYOND

People work on themselves every *Elul*, but very few people remain with their progress. How are people to continue their growth? Inspiration cannot build us. We need to build and develop in ourselves a power in our soul that can keep us going. That power is to connect ourselves to the ongoing *techiyas hameisim* in Creation. This will supply us with a constant, inner source of revival.

### Attaching Your Entire Soul to the Ongoing Revival

All of us **know** – in our minds, at least - that Hashem exists. But do we *feel* it? We **know**, intellectually, that Hashem keeps us alive, but do we actually feel that way? When we have a *ratzon*, we should feel that it is being enabled by Hashem. When we reflect deeply, we should feel that it's coming from Hashem. When we think, we should feel that it's coming from Hashem. When we work on our *middos*, we should feel that it's only possible because of Hashem. When we do any act, we should feel that it's only because Hashem helps us.

### Listening To Your Breathing

It is written, “*Every soul praises Hashem*”, and *Chazal* interpret this *possuk* that for every breath a person breathes, a person should thank Hashem. Every day, for a few minutes, take some quiet time and listen to your breathing, and feel how Hashem is allowing you to breathe.<sup>26</sup> (Don't do it a whole day. We are not angels.) Our breathing is something we can feel; it is not just something we know about. So pay attention to your breathing, feel yourself breathing, and make sure you are very calm when you do so. You can begin to feel how Hashem is keeping you alive with each breath, reviving you every second with each breath.

We all know in our mind that Hashem keeps us alive, but in order to feel it, we must be able to clearly feel it. Listening to your breathing is a good way for you to feel Hashem's existence. If you do this throughout the day, you will uncover a deep closeness with Hashem, feeling how Hashem is constantly giving you life. Don't just do this mechanically.

If someone practices this with inner calm, every day, he will slowly begin to actually feel his *ratzon* for holiness. His entire life will feel like an ongoing *techiyas hameisim*. This can be applied to the entire spectrum of our soul – our will, our deep reflection, our thoughts, our *middos*, and our actions – that Hashem is supplying us with energy to do any of these things.

When you get up in the morning and you say *Modeh Ani*, you can feel how Hashem has given you back your life. In the same way, you can constantly feel how Hashem is giving you your life,

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<sup>26</sup> For more specific guidance on how to do this breathing exercise, see the *shiur* of Rosh Chodesh Avodah: *Cheshvab: Breathing*.

when you connect throughout the course of the day to the concept of the ongoing *techiyas hameisim*. When this becomes your way of life, you will uncover a deep connection with Hashem, in all your soul layers – all the way from your *ratzon* down to your actions. This will happen slowly, not all at once.

This is the *maayan hamisgaber* (mighty wellspring) that a person can access in his own soul.

### THE POWER TO GET PAST ALL FAILURES

This is how we can gain a constant renewal and always start anew, no matter what failure we went through that day. When you connect to the source of your life – Hashem – and to believe that He is constantly reviving you – you will be able to get past all your major failures. Even when you fail, you will be to immediately get up from the failure, because you are tapping into the power of your soul's constant revival.

The root of all failures is really because after a person fails, he doesn't believe he can get up again afterwards. He isn't connected to the concept of the constant **revival**, therefore, he doesn't feel renewal in his soul.

### WORKING ON THIS CONCEPT

This is a matter which does not come to you just by knowing about it intellectually. You need to actually connect yourself to the concept, to actually feel where your source of life is coming from [Hashem]. To work on this, take some quiet time and sit in a calm, quiet place [as the Chazon Ish writes to do, in *sefer Emunah U'Bitachon*] and try to feel this concept we have described here.

### IN CONCLUSION

The meaning of these words of *Shemoneh Esrei*, that Hashem is *מְחַיֵּה מֵתִים* is that Hashem doesn't just revive the dead in the future. He revives us every second; when we believe in this, that there is an ongoing *techiyas hameisim* that we can connect ourselves to.

7 | Teshuvah: Returning To Our Source <sup>27</sup>TESHUVAH - RETURNING TO HASHEM THROUGH ABANDONING PAST SINS

"השיבנו אבינו לתורתך" - "Return us, our Father, to Your Torah."

When a person sins, (*rachmana litzlan* – May Hashem have mercy upon him), there are three aspects of *teshuvah* that he needs, as we say in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*. Besides for the fact that he has sinned against Hashem, he has also distanced himself from the Torah. Thus, when we seek to do *teshuvah*, not only do we ask Hashem to return us to Him, but we also ask to be returned to the Torah, that we should once again keep the Torah. The final step of the *teshuvah* is when we merit a "complete *teshuvah*" – החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך.

So first, we ask Hashem to return us to the state in which we recognize Him as our Father. השיבנו אבינו. Then, we ask Hashem that we be returned to His Torah. השיבנו אבינו לתורתך. We can then merit to come to a "complete" *teshuvah*, which this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* concludes with – החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך.

*Teshuvah* is to return. To where are we returning to? To Hashem.

Returning To The Proper Path In Life – To Abandon The Indulgence In Permissible Desires

On a more subtle note, even if we wouldn't sin, we still need to do *teshuvah*, because even if a person doesn't sin, he can still be far from Hashem, because the essence of *teshuvah* is to return to our Source.

For example, there is a concept of "a disgusting one who acts within the permission of the Torah."<sup>28</sup> When a person lives for his body and not for his soul, he indulges in physical pleasures that are not prohibited by the Torah. He needs to stop abusing his body as well and return to his source, his soul's source - which is Hashem and the Torah.

When a person sins, the sin holds back the connection with Hashem. That is clear. But even if a person doesn't sin, and even if he has done *teshuvah* over the sin, he can still be heavily attached to materialism, and this also constrains a person from connecting to Hashem.

*Rabbeinu Yonah* in *sefer Shaarei Teshuvah* writes that a person has to abandon his improper path. This can even be referring to a kind of person who lives religiously, but his soul is not revealed in his life. He does not feel his soul, and instead he lives life through his body. Sure, he puts on his Tallis and *Tefillin* in the morning, but it's only on his body. He lives life through his body. *Teshuvah* is not

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-057-returning-our-source>

<sup>28</sup> See Ramban to *Parshas Kedoshim* 19:1

just about leaving our sins – it is about abandoning the very path a person is at [initially] in his life, which is heading towards materialism.

השיבנו אבינו לתורתך וקרבו מלכינו לעבודתך – “Return us, our Father, to Your Torah; and draw us close, our King, to serve You.” After we return to keeping the Torah, we can return to serving Hashem. But the very first thing we need to realize that Hashem is our Father - and that we are His children. The blessing starts out with the words השיבנו אבינו- “Return us, our Father.” That is the first thing we need to realize – that Hashem is our Father.

If a person doesn't realize this, he is saying words that aren't true. Although *Chazal* established that we all say this *Tefillah* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, if a person doesn't realize what he is saying, he is saying something that's not true to who he is.

## GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR INNER SOUL'S DESIRES

So a person must ask himself how much he is in touch with his soul. Our soul loves spirituality – Torah, *mitzvos*, and connecting with Hashem. Our body loves this world and its desires.

For example, let us examine the emotion of love which we are familiar with. What do we love? Is our love only being experienced through our physical desires? Desire is not love. If we “love” something of this world, that's not love – it is desire.

The first part of *Teshuvah*, simply, is to repent from our sins. That is the obvious part. But in addition, we need to uncover the deeper aspect of *Teshuvah*, which is that we must realize that we are returning to our Source, our Father.

Ask yourself the following: If we would be given more life on this world, would we stay here so we can do more *mitzvos*? Or we would we want to stay here so we can continue to enjoy this world's pleasures...?

*Teshuvah* is a deep power in our soul, to wish to return, to our point of origin. When a person learns Torah and does *mitzvos*, he can still be living a life of the body... even if he still sits in Yeshivah for many years and always learns Torah every day!!

The deep aspect of *Teshuvah* is to realize that we are children of Hashem, that we are a *neshamah* (Divine soul). And just as the body likes this world, so does our *neshamah* yearn for Hashem, for Torah, and for *mitzvos*. We do not need to acquire an enjoyment for Hashem and for Torah; it is already there in our soul. The problem is that the soul isn't revealed, because the body is concealing it. Our *avodah* is rather to **reveal our *neshamah***, and then we will naturally love Hashem and Torah.

People who are able to sit and learn their whole life and love learning Torah are able to learn not because they always have the answers to all their questions when they learn. It is rather because they have succeeded in uncovering their natural yearning for Hashem and for his Torah.

Therefore, we must be aware when we do *teshuvah*, that we need to return to our original Source, the way we were originally, when we were pure. To illustrate, a child cries when he is looking for his home. Why does he cry? It is because he yearns to return to his home, to his source. If a person lives life through his body, even if he learns Torah and does *mitzvos*, he lives an animalistic kind of existence!

A person has to reveal the light of his soul in his life – that is part of the *teshuvah* that one needs to do, in addition to how he needs to abandon sin. If a person doesn't have a constant yearning to return to his soul, if a person doesn't feel himself burning inside for this, if he doesn't feel a burning desire of his soul to return to Torah and to do Hashem's will with the *mitzvos*, then he has to do *teshuvah* about this!! He needs to yearn to return to an inner kind of life in which he recognizes that his **soul** is his true source, in that he wishes he could return to his original state of purity!

## THE MAIN KIND OF TESHUVAH THAT IS NEEDED IN OUR TIMES

Most people today are not entrenched in sin. Rather, the main problem we see today is that people are simply entrenched in a body-kind of life.

*Teshuvah* is not about learning “more” Torah and “doing” *mitzvos*. It is about living a life of *neshamah*. It is that when we go to sleep at night, our *neshamah* continues to yearn for more closeness with Hashem and with Torah. It is that when we get up in the morning, we feel this yearning of our *neshamah*, and that we continue to feel this yearning even as we walk in the street.

Therefore, besides for doing *teshuvah* for our past sins, an essential part of our *teshuvah* is that we need to search for an inner kind of life, in which we feel ourselves yearning to return to our original purity. Do any of us want next year to be the same as this year? If we want next year to really be different than this past year, we must have a constant yearning every day and all the time to live a life of yearning for Hashem, for Torah, and for *mitzvos*.

To help give yourself an idea of how you can work on this, each of us should imagine what the day of death will look like, when our soul will leave our body. If we always think about this – in a serene way of course, and not to be sad or morbid about it – we can begin to feel that our **body** is **not** who we **are**. We will then be able to feel that our real self is our **neshamah**. One day, we will leave our body. This will help you realize the inner world that resides inside of you.

We must realize that the kind of world we see in front of us, even though there is much Torah and *mitzvos*, is a lifestyle that is centered on interests of the body. We need to uncover the perspective of our *neshamah* and experience life through it. Of course, this will involve a tremendous *avodah* to get there.



*IN CONCLUSION*

May we merit from Hashem to understand that there is a kind of inner life we can live, in which we can return to our Source – to merit to return to our Father, and to thereby come to have complete *teshuvah*.

8 | Complete Teshuvah <sup>29</sup>

In the blessing of *השיבנו*, we mention three kinds of Teshuvah – returning to Hashem, returning to the Torah, and returning in “complete” Teshuvah. What does it mean to do complete Teshuvah? Teshuvah means to return, to return to the original state we were in. Every sin affects a certain part of the body; when a person does teshuvah, he returns the damaged part of the body, to its original, undamaged state.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* says that every word of Torah is pure, even words such as “Pharaoh”, “Bilaam”, and “Amalek”, who represent the most evil and impure forces in Creation. Therefore, first we ask Hashem to return us to the Torah, because from the power of Torah, we can have the strength to restore everything back to its original purity. That is the first part of the blessing, in which we ask Hashem to return us to the Torah.

But what is *teshuvah shelaimah*? The soul of man is comprised of five layers – *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*. Each part of our soul requires a different *Teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* doesn't end with stopping to sin. *Shaarei Teshuvah* writes that a person has to abandon the improper path he is on; it's not enough to abandon sin – a person has to leave the very path he is on. Our soul abilities are mixed together, thus, we need to give ourselves inner order to our soul.

The *Teshuvah* we can do during *Elul* and *Tishrei* can rectify the entire soul, all five layers. It can be a *Teshuvah shelaimah*. If a person only does *Teshuvah* for the bad deeds he did that year, he has only done Teshuvah on the lowest part of his soul, the *Nefesh*, which is the sphere of his actions. A person has to penetrate into his entire soul and do *Teshuvah* for all of the soul's layers.

Our soul is like a ladder footed on earth, and its head reaches the heavens. The *Yechidah*, the highest part of the soul, is really in the Heavens.

Our soul, beginning from lowest to highest, is: actions (*Nefesh*), emotions (*Ruach*), thoughts (*Neshamah*), life-source (*Chayah*), and connection to Hashem (*Yechidah*). When we do *Teshuvah*, we need to clarify what's going on in our soul, beginning from lowest to highest.

For example, we are examining our actions. We need to become aware of the emotions behind our actions – like if we are doing the *mitzvos* with enough enthusiasm. This is how we connect *Ruach* with our *Nefesh*. Then we need to connect *Ruach* to our *Neshamah*, which is by analyzing if our emotions are in line with the thoughts of Torah we learn. If our feelings aren't matching our thoughts, and if our actions are lacking feeling, we see that there is more *Teshuvah* to be done.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-058-complete-teshuvah>

What is *Teshuvah*? The superficial answer is that we repent from our sins. This is what we are used to thinking ever since we were young. This is true, but that is not all there is to it. The first thing we must know is how we begin doing *Teshuvah*. First we need to begin with the lowest part of soul, our *Nefesh*, which is our deeds. But at the same time, we must be aware of the goal of all this, which is to arrive at the highest part of our soul – to deeply connect with Hashem, to stand “before Hashem”.

So if a person does *Teshuvah* for his deeds, and when it comes Yom Kippur he takes upon himself resolutions to better himself, and he feels elation and purity from Yom Kippur (anyone who doesn't feel purity on Yom Kippur is very far from any vestige of spirituality...) and then he stops doing *teshuvah* at a certain point, it shows that he's missing a certain understanding. We need to really understand what *teshuvah* is, by using our power of *daas*. To just go through learning *Hilchos Teshuvah* of the Rambam is being superficial. Even if a person feels some purity on Yom Kippur, this is not enough. We can't be satisfied from this. *Teshuvah* is a five-step process, as we said, and the goal is to deeply connect with Hashem, to be able to stand in front of Hashem pure. A person has to see how much he came to realizing that he is in front of Hashem after all the *Teshuvah of Elul*.

Moshe went up to Heaven for 40 days to receive the Torah, after the sin with the Calf. The depth behind this was not just so that he should wait for 40 days until Hashem forgave us. It was because he wanted to receive the Torah from the One who gave it. This helps us understand what *teshuvah* is.

Hashem breathed into a man a breathe of His life, so to speak. When a person does *teshuvah*, he has to return to the original breathe of life which Hashem breathed into us.

When we come to do *teshuvah*, we must seek *teshuvah shelaimah* – to do *teshuvah* with awareness of the goal, that we want to be able to stand before Hashem in purity when it comes Yom Kippur, after we do *teshuvah* from *Elul*.

Thus, we ask Hashem to return us to the Torah and to serving Him, because this will prepare us to have to be able to have complete *Teshuvah*. Real *Teshuvah* is not just to “return” to Hashem from sin. It is to return to our “Father”, as we express “Return us, our Father”. We must understand that only Hashem can return us to *teshuvah*. It is all due to the spiritual light which Hashem allows us to have during these days. We can only do *teshuvah because* Hashem helps us, and in addition, we need to do *teshuvah with* Hashem in the equation. We return to Hashem *from* Hashem's help and *with* awareness of Hashem, as we do *teshuvah*.

This understanding will totally change how you approach *teshuvah*. “Your right hand is open to accept those who return.” These are days in which Hashem can return us to Him. All of our *avodah* during *Elul* must be done with awareness of the goal, that we want to arrive at deep closeness with Hashem. We must do *teshuvah* with Hashem in the equation. We can only do *teshuvah* with Hashem's help, and our goal of doing *teshuvah* is to reach closeness with Hashem.

We must absorb this inner perspective on how to do *teshuvah* – the perspective that comes from our *neshamah*, as opposed to the superficial perspective towards *teshuvah* that comes from our body.

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May we all merit to reach complete *teshuvah*.

9 | The Root Desire To Do Teshuvah <sup>30</sup>TESHUVAH: RETURNING TO HASHEM

In the end of the blessing of השיבנו we say **החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך** – “Return us to complete repentance before You.”

We ask Hashem to return us to *teshuvah*, not just *teshuvah*, but a *teshuvah shelaimah* – complete repentance - the kind that is “before You”, to be in front of Hashem.

## Teshuvah Shelaimah – Aligning Your Will With Hashem’s Will

*Teshuvah shelaimah* is reached when we access our inner *ratzon* (will) of our soul, and this is hinted to in the words that we end off with in this blessing – **הרוצה בתשובה**, “He Who desires repentance.” The will of Hashem is that we should return to Him with *teshuvah*. **When we reveal Hashem’s will within our own will** - when we make Hashem’s will into our will - we are thereby connected to Hashem’s will, and this is the deep meaning behind *teshuvah*.

Let us reflect on what it means to do *Teshuvah Shelaimah*, complete repentance.

The soul of man is compared to the ladder that Yaakov *Avinu* saw in his dream, which was “footed on earth, and its head reached the Heavens”. There are two ways how a person can view himself.

A person might see himself as a ladder that can ascend to Heaven, but, he focuses on the fact that the bottom of the ladder is on earth – he focuses on his earthly state. He focuses on the fact that he’s part of a lowly generation, a generation of *yeridas hadoros*, and that since we are found in the era of the “footsteps of *Moshiach*”, our little Torah learning is much more beloved to Hashem than in previous generations. This is stated in the *sefarim hakedoshim*, and it is true.

However, this mindset is only one side of the coin. To only think like this is to view life in a immature, small minded way of *katnus*. There is another aspect a person can focus on other than the above mentioned perspective, which is deeper.

During the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*, a person is supposed to act above his normal level. It is true that we are currently in a very impure world which are considered to be the lowliest of all generations. But at the very same time, Hashem is still with us. We can remove the blockage from our heart and realize how Hashem is with us, when we sense His existence in our heart. The higher part of our self, the “head of the ladder” is in Heaven. Thus, we can really live a Heavenly kind of existence in spite of the fact that our body lives on this lowly earth.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-060-root-desire-do-teshuvah>

If a person thinks that he lives in Heaven, of course, he is deluded, and he is being haughty. The true perspective to have is that **Hashem can be sensed in one's heart**, and therefore, we can align our will with Hashem's will.

## THE DEPTH OF OUR POWER OF FREE WILL

We have the power of free will (*bechirah*) to choose between good and evil and we can get our very free will as well to become aligned with the *Ratzon Hashem*. This is not just a level of intellectual knowledge, but something one can feel. Actually, all of the things we want are really stemming from the primary will in Creation, which is Hashem's will.

Whenever we feel a will for holiness, for Torah or for *mitzvos* or for anything holy, how do we view this? Is it viewed as what "I" want, that "I" am wanting what Hashem wants? If a person looks at his will for holiness as something that "I" want, this is superficial! The real perspective to have is that a will to do *teshuvah* - although it certainly depends on accessing my free will - is really stemming from the will of Hashem! We are only enabled to do *teshuvah* because Hashem wants us to do *teshuvah* - **הרוצה בתשובה**.

During the Ten Days of Repentance, we all want to do *teshuvah*. But from where is our *ratzon* to do *teshuvah* coming from in the first place? It is coming from the One who wills that we can have a will to do *teshuvah*: Hashem, Who has a desire that we do *teshuvah* - **הרוצה בתשובה**. How can I have a will to do *teshuvah*? Is it because "I" want to do so? If a person thinks this way, he will never arrive at the real level of *teshuvah*. We must be able to realize – and to truly feel this – that our entire *ratzon* to do *teshuvah* does not even come from our self. It comes from Hashem, who is allowing His will to be manifest in you - when you feel the *ratzon* to do *teshuvah*.

The *Ratzon* of Hashem is really found in you, for every *ratzon* is really an offshoot of the primary will in Creation, the *Ratzon* of Hashem. Hashem is the One allowing all my movements to happen, and that is how a person should view his *ratzon* to do *teshuvah*. It's all because Hashem is **הרוצה בתשובה**.

This is really the deep way to understand our power of free will. Simply speaking, free will is to choose between good and evil, to get ourselves to want the right thing. "*Retzoneinu Laasos Retzoncha*" – "It is our will to do Your will." Deep down we want to do Hashem's will, so the simple understanding is that I have to get my will to be in line with Hashem's will; I want something that is improper, while Hashem wants me to do something else that is good and proper. Therefore, I have to get myself to do what Hashem wants, by using my power of *bechirah* and choosing to do the right thing even though I want otherwise. That is the simple understanding.<sup>31</sup>

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31 This is still the initial level of developing your power of *ratzon* - see Bilvavi Part 2: Chapter 26: Our Will Is To Do Your Will, and Bilvavi Part 4: Chapters 14-21. See also Getting To Know Your Soul Part II: Chapter 4: Ratzon.

But the depth of free will is that when I choose good, it is only being enabled because Hashem has placed His will in me, and He is behind all my movements, and I am allowing myself to let my will become Hashem's will. So it's not merely that "I" am doing "His" will, as if my will is different than Hashem's will and that I have to get myself to want His will. It's rather that when *I access my true ratzon/will – which is to do Hashem's will – I am revealing how my own very will is really to do the will Hashem.*

## APPLYING THIS CONCEPT TO YOUR WHOLE LIFE

If you live like this, your whole perspective towards other areas in your life changes as well.

For example, when you learn *Gemara*, if you're learning the words of *Tosafos* or the *Rashba*, how you are being allowed to think? Is the thinking coming from your own ability to think? If a person thinks that his ability to think into the words of the *Gemara* and to understand its logic is coming from his own intelligence, he will never really succeed in learning Torah. Our entire power to think as we learn Torah is all being allowed entirely by Hashem!<sup>32</sup> When you think like this, you will also discover that your power of thought to delve into the depths of Torah has become vastly deepened.

During these days of repentance, we *daven* that Hashem "should not remove His spirit of holiness from us". Each of us is able to feel that we are our movements and that actions do not come from our own power. It is really Hashem who is the One behind all our movements. This is not a contradiction to our power of *bechirah*/free will. I can choose between good and evil, but even as I choose, it is still Hashem controlling my movements and allowing it to happen. When I get up in the morning and I go walk to shul, of course I chose to do so, but it is Hashem allowing me to walk there. "*For Hashem, G-d, is with him, and the sound of the King is in him.*"

This perspective will bring a major overhaul to your life. Only a totally delusional person thinks that his power to do anything is derived from his own human strength.

During these days of repentance, we especially need to bear in mind this concept. If we internalize this concept, we have the key to entering a world in which we feel how Hashem is behind our every movement and allows us to yearn for holiness. "Hashem made everything, continues to make everything, and will always make everything" – we must feel this. Any positive action we do, any positive thought we have, any positive word we say – it's only if Hashem allows it to happen. This does not just mean that we have *siyata d'shamaya* (Heavenly assistance) in what we do. It is that I am choosing to reveal Hashem in my life, to reveal how He is behind everything.

Living life with this perspective is how you live with Hashem in your life as the *Chovos HaLevovos* describes that a person can live with Hashem in the hidden depths of his heart.

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<sup>32</sup> For more on this concept, see *Tefillah #054: Recognizing the Source of Torah Thoughts*.

## THE TWO STEPS OF TESHUVAH

There are thus two steps in how to do *teshuvah*.

The first step is as we say in the beginning of this blessing, **השיבנו אבינו לתורתך**– Return us our Father to Your Torah – first we need to repent from sin, and this is how we return to keeping the Torah.

The second step of *teshuvah* is, **החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך**– “Return us in complete repentance before You” – to be “before You”, to return our entire being to him; to live with Hashem in our life, to recognize how He is behind our every movement. It is to return every part of our soul to him. *Teshuvah* is only *teshuvah shelaimah* when it is “before You” – when we live with Hashem in our life, when we return our entire self to Him. If not, then it is not *teshuvah shelaimah*.

## PRACTICALLY WORKING ON THIS CONCEPT

To work on this concept, as you are thinking about anything that involves some yearning for holiness, pause your thoughts a bit and ask yourself where the thoughts are coming from. For example, if you are in middle of learning with your *chavrusa* and the two of you are arguing back and forth, pause your thoughts for a moment and ask yourself where your logic is coming from. Think: Why are you thinking the way you are thinking right now – why aren’t you thinking otherwise? It is because Hashem is guiding your thoughts and allowing them to progress from Point A to Point B. Hashem is providing you every second with life-giving energy, therefore, you are being allowed to think. We need to feel how Hashem is giving us life every moment.

Throughout *Elul* and Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, we keep asking for life. “Remember us for life.” “Write us in the book of life.” When we feel attached to Hashem, that’s life. “*And you will cling to Hashem your G-d, and all of you will thus be alive on this day.*” Feeling attached to Hashem is called being alive. The first step in *d’veykus*/being attached with Hashem is to feel a simple sense that Hashem exists. The second step is to feel that Hashem provides you with your energy every second.

## THE DEEP METHOD OF HOW TO AVOID ANY SIN

If a person misuses his power of speech and he talks *lashon hora* (evil gossip) he definitely chose to do so. But had he felt that Hashem allows him to talk, he would immediately remind himself [subconsciously] that he can only talk according to how Hashem wants him to talk, and thus he would hold back from talking *lashon hora*.

Getting used to thinking like this – that my entire *ratzon* for any action, thought or speech that I do is really being allowed by Hashem’s will – is something that will help distance you from any sin,



because since you can realize that your *ratzon* is being allowed by Hashem, and therefore you will automatically catch yourself and realize that your *ratzon* needs to be aligned with Hashem's will, which is that you should not commit the sin. Get used to thinking that Hashem is behind all your movements – every action, thought, and word.

We have explained here the depth of our power of free will – to choose how we recognize where our will is coming from. If one internalizes this perspective, he comes to the Day of Judgment being very close to what it means to have *teshuvah Shelaimah*. This is not to say that it automatically cause you to do *teshuvah shelaimah*, but it will certainly bring you very close to the understanding of *teshuvah shelaimah*.

## THE INNER METHOD OF CHANGE

Rosh HaShanah is the “head” of the year. The head represents the beginning; it can be a new beginning for you. There are two different methods of change that people try.

One method of change is to accept upon yourself resolutions. This is based on truth and it is stated in our *sefarim hakedoshim*, and it is wonderful to make such resolutions, but often, the resolutions don't last.

There is another method of change we can apply that will help us start over from a new beginning. It is to acquire the deep perspective which was described here. It is the way how we can focus on the “head” of our ladder, which reaches the heavens. It is to realize that Hashem's light is really found in ourselves, and we just have to choose to believe in this, that one's entire *ratzon* to do anything is only being enabled by Hashem Who lets it all happen, thus, our *ratzon* to do *teshuvah* can only happen after we choose to recognize this, that even when we choose good, it still Hashem who is allowing our *ratzon* to work.

May we merit that all of us be written in the Book of Life, not just with a superficial understanding, but with the understanding that we can only do Hashem's will because our entire will to do anything is enabled only by Hashem. May we merit that the entire Creation should know that Hashem is the Source behind everything, that “all handiwork should understand that You are its Worker, and that all creations should understand that You are its Creator.” And *that* is how we will merit a good year.

## 10 | Asking Hashem For Forgiveness <sup>33</sup>

### WHY WE ASK TO BE FORGIVEN FOR SIN

**סלח לנו אבינו** “Forgive us, our Father.” We are asking Hashem for forgiveness in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

As we know, the words of *Shemoneh Esrei* were composed by our Sages, the Men of Great Assembly, who were prophets. If so, we are saying words they composed, which apply to all the generations. These words were composed with prophecy applicable to all the future generations. When we say these words, when we ask Hashem for forgiveness from our sins, we need to know why we need to say it. Why did the Sages enact that we say all these words – and in addition, we need to know the personal motivations inside us as we say these words. Why do we ask Hashem to be forgiven? What are our intentions as we say these words?

Simply, it is because after committing a sin, we must recognize that there is retribution for each sin, unless we are forgiven. We have to be aware that there is Authority who rules over us.

#### Sin Harms Our Relationship With Hashem

“*Their sins separated them.*” Our sins damage our relationship with Hashem, and that is why we need to be forgiven, so that the effects of the sin should be removed. Our sins distance us from the Creator. Thus, our prayer for forgiveness should be emanating from our soul’s yearning to improve our relationship with Hashem. When a son rebels against his father, if he is a good son, it hurts him that he has pained his father. In the same way, it should hurt us that we have sinned and rebelled against our Father.

### SIN HURTS OUR VERY SOUL

But there is yet an even deeper understanding of why we ask Hashem to be forgiven from sins.

“The soul You placed in me is pure.” Our soul comes from a pure place, and it yearns not only for our Creator, but it also yearns to dwell in purity, because that is its nature. Our soul has been carved out of the Throne of Glory. When it becomes dirtied from sin, it really coils in disgust. Since our soul comes from a pure place, from Heaven, it is disgusted when it comes into contact with the spiritual muck created from a sin.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-061-asking-hashem-forgiveness>

If a person sins, *chas v'shalom*, he should feel pained at this, no less than if his hand has been cut off. It should feel painful to the person, for the act of sin has removed him from his real place. If someone feels the light of his soul, the holiness of a Jew, the fact that his soul is pure and from Above, a piece of Hashem – the very fact that he is on this world will be painful to him. Our soul feels like it has been exiled to this world. The fact that our soul is here on this materialistic world is an exile to our soul, that the soul has been placed in our physical body, is already painful to our soul.

If someone doesn't feel his soul, this doesn't bother him; he doesn't notice how the situation of this world is a contradiction to the soul's nature. But the more a person feels that he is a soul, the more it bothers him that there is a contradiction that he has been placed in a body, with its desires for this materialistic world, which contradict the yearnings of our soul.

When a person commits a sin, *chas v'shalom*, a spirit of impurity surrounds him, and the more a person sins, the more and more the soul feels pain that it has been contradicted again and again. If someone doesn't feel his soul at all, he isn't bothered after a sin. But a person who does feel his soul feels bothered by a sin. The *tzaddikim*, who are much more in touch with their soul, feel a much more acute suffering after a sin, because they are very aware of their soul.

Thus, when we ask Hashem for forgiveness, one of the reasons for this is because we have an inner yearning for purity. A hint to this is that the Hebrew word for “forgive”, *selach*, has the same numerical value in Hebrew as the word *tzach*, which means “pure”.

## EXAMPLES OF THINGS THAT CONTRADICT THE PURITY OF OUR SOUL

Our soul can feel all kinds of contradictions in this world. One example is when a person indulges in permitted pleasure; this is called a “disgusting one who indulges within the permission of the Torah.” When a person indulges in desires, even desires that are permissible and not forbidden by the Torah, his soul can feel disgust inside. This is a simple example of materialism that makes our soul inside recoil.

But in our generation, there is a new kind of problem, in which our surroundings engage in certain actions that appear to be *mitzvos*, but a person can sense that if he does such an act, it furthers him from holiness.

There are things which other people do which appear to be fine, but just because others are doing it doesn't mean it's fine for **you** to do...

When a person only has intellectual prowess and he doesn't develop his soul's sensitivity, he won't be sensitive to things which harm his soul. Besides for learning Torah in-depth, we also need to develop our soul's sensitivity to feel what is holy and what isn't, what is true and pure, and what isn't.

Our soul can become sensitive to what truth is; even if we are not prophets, we are “sons of prophets”, which implies that our soul can still have an inner sense for what the truth is and what isn’t.

## STAY AWAY FROM MACHLOKES/ARGUMENTS

We are living in a very confused generation. *Chazal* say that each day is more cursed than the day before it; if this was true about previous generations, how much more so does it apply to our current generation. *Chazal* say that when in doubt, one needs to make for himself a Rav. It was always hard to choose a Rav. Nowadays people have a harder time finding a Rav, because people don’t know who to ask in the first place about who should be their Rav. How do you choose a Rav in the first place to tell you who should be your Rav...?

If someone searches for purity in his life, he will recoil from any *machlokes*/arguments that are not for the sake of Heaven, *rachmana litzlon* (May Hashem have mercy on us).

In every argument that takes place, there are elements of *lishmah* (pure motives) and *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motives). If someone never argues with any pure motives at all, his soul is from “*Erev Rav*”. But most people, when they engage in arguments, are doing it with both kinds of motivations together – that are elements in it that are for the sake of Heaven, and there are also elements involved that are **not** for the sake of Heaven. A person who searches for truth should avoid any argument, because all arguments contain some ulterior motivations.

There is no such thing as a *machlokes* that is totally *l’sheim shomayim* (for the sake of Heaven). Since this is the case, there is no justification for entering into a *machlokes*, because nobody can say that they get into a *machlokes* that is purely *l’sheim shomayim*.

Every *machlokes* has both good and evil motivations contained in it, since every *machlokes* has in it elements of both *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*. When someone enters a *machlokes*, there is no telling what will be his end! Anyone who enters *machlokes* is entering a mixture of good and evil, and he is danger of being swept up by the evil motivations involved in it – no matter which generation he lives in. Even in previous generations, if a person ever entered a *machlokes* and he had motivations that were *l’sheim shomayim*, he lost out from this, by losing both this world and the Next World. A person who entered fiercely into a *machlokes* would be swayed by the evil motivations involved in it and lose all of his spiritual levels in the process. And this is referring to a kind of *machlokes* that also had in it some elements of *lishmah*! How much more so does it apply to a modern-day *machlokes*, in which there is much *shelo lishmah* going on within the *machlokes*.

*Chazal* say that everything on this world is a mixture of good and evil, and it is mostly evil. Therefore, in anything you encounter, see how everything on this world is a mixture of good and evil, and try to separate yourself from the evil. If you notice something that it is definitely a sin or if it seems like a sin, stay away from it; that goes without saying. But even when you do a *mitzvah*, we

should notice how some of our motivations are *shelo lishmah* and try to do it a little more *lishmah*. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't do the *mitzvah*, *chas v'shalom*. Do the *mitzvah* regardless, but just try to become aware of how there is *shelo lishmah* involved in it, and try to increase the element of *lishmah* in it.<sup>34</sup>

To illustrate, *Chazal* say that Hashem was angry with Avraham *Avinu* for taking Lot with him, because Lot's shepherds caused *machlokes* with his shepherds, and therefore he was an indirect cause for the *machlokes*. *Chazal* explain that Avraham *Avinu* took Lot with him because he saw that *Moshiach* would come from him. Here we see an example of a mixture of good and evil in one act. It was good that he took Lot with him, because Lot is the ancestor of *Moshiach*. At the same time, Avraham *Avinu* is also criticized for taking Lot with him, because Lot's shepherds caused *machlokes*. *Chazal* criticize Avraham *Avinu* for this! How much more so should we avoid arguments that contain ulterior motives. For example: telling *lashon hora* (gossip) "for the sake of Heaven" - even when it follows all the rules of "*toeles*" in *sefer Chofetz Chaim*).

When a person enters a *machlokes* for the sake of Heaven and he gets involved with *lashon hora* and *machlokes*, even when he's not transgressing the *halacha* - how can he know if he is doing this for the sake of Heaven?! People usually do not stop to consider if they are saying *lashon hora* or getting involved in a *machlokes* for the sake of Heaven. And if anyone does stop to think about it and he thinks that he's doing it entirely for the sake of Heaven, he is totally delusional.

Shamai and Hilel always argued, but *Chazal* say that they only argued for the sake of Heaven. However, their students misinterpreted their teachers' arguments, and because of this, many arguments arose between the Jewish people. Here we see that even a *machlokes* that was purely for the sake of Heaven eventually evolved into a *machlokes* that wasn't for the sake of Heaven [in the later generations]. How much more so it is a problem when it's a *machlokes* like *Korach* and his colleagues, whose intentions were not for the sake of Heaven....

The Sages<sup>35</sup> say that in the era preceding *Moshiach*, "the wisdom of scholars will rot." Why? The Sages explain elsewhere that even though jealousy of scholars is a good quality, still, jealousy makes the bones rot. This is because if the jealousy isn't coming from a pure place in the soul, it is infected with impure motivations, and it instead becomes detrimental to one's Torah wisdom.

## IMMERSE YOURSELF IN TORAH AND DON'T BE INVOLVED WITH THE WORLD!

A person who avoids arguments, even arguments that are for the sake of Heaven, lives an elevated kind of life. This is someone who searches for truth. When someone really searches for truth, he wants peace as well, and this involves a yearning to dwell in a world of purity and pleasantness. He wants the revelation of Hashem to fill the entire Creation, and thus he yearns for pleasantness, and

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<sup>34</sup> See *Bilvavi Part 2: Chapter 27*, *Bilvavi Part 4: Chapter 12: Beginning To Act Lishmah* and *Bilvavi Part 6: Chapters 6-7*.  
<sup>35</sup> *Sotah 49a*

he recoils from what goes on outside the world of Torah. When someone doesn't work on this point, he enters into arguments and gets caught up in the external aspects of the arguments.

A person needs to be able to run away from the superficiality of the outside world, and enter into the inner world of Torah and keep himself immersed **there**. Don't get involved with what goes on in the world. Live in an inner world, in which all that goes on in the outside world is painful for you to hear. Whenever you have to leave the world of Torah and go out into the world for anything, it should feel painful to you. **In fact, these days, going out into the world that is outside Torah is as dangerous to the soul as death.** Immerse yourself in Torah, in your mind and heart, and make sure you are deeply connected to it. Identify yourself as mainly living in your Torah learning – and make sure you have *Ahavas Yisrael* too – but don't involve yourself with what goes on outside the world of Torah. Otherwise, you are in danger from what goes on in this world.

### IN CONCLUSION

This is the meaning behind our prayer of **סלה לנו** we ask Hashem for forgiveness from sin, because it is our soul's wish deep down to be able to live in a pure world, a world of pure spiritual light in where there is no darkness.

May we all merit to desire this inner world, to realize how lowly the outside world is - and that going out into the world is like walking into a dangerous place. Wherever we go today in the world, outside the inner world of Torah, it is a dangerous place to walk in – simply put. May we all merit to live in an inner world, and may Hashem remove the impurity from the world and its place return His light to it, whereupon a *“new light shall shine forth on Zion.”*

## 11 | Examining Our Deeds<sup>36</sup>

### STAYING AWAY FROM CHEIT/SIN

"סלה לנו אבינו כי חטאנו" "Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned."

A *cheit*, a sin, is when someone diverges from the goal. *Cheit* can refer to a sin committed unintentionally (*shogeg*) or it can refer to a person who misses a goal when a person is distanced from the truth.

In every action, there is an outer and inner layer. The outer layer of our actions is what we are allowed to and what we are not allowed to do.

Let's say we are allowed to do a certain action and it is not forbidden by the Torah. Still, what are our intentions behind it? The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that any action we do is "either or" - either it is a *mitzvah* or a sin. Therefore, we always have to know if what we are doing is a *mitzvah* or a sin.

### BECOMING AWARE OF OUR INNER MOTIVATIONS

But on a deeper note, even in the *mitzvos* we do, we need to also have the right intentions. This is not just referring to "having in mind for the *mitzvah*" as we do it. Even as we fulfill all the aspects of the *mitzvos* according to *Halacha*, the inner layer of the *mitzvah* must be in line with the outer layer of the *mitzvah* – our inner motivations must be on par with what how we are acting on the surface.

*Chazal* say that Hashem will reward a person, as long as he does the *mitzvos*. But that is as far as the external aspect of the *mitzvah* concerns. There will be a separate judgment on the inner layer of the *mitzvah*: What were the intentions of the person as he did the *mitzvah*? Even if the *mitzvah* was done perfectly according to *Halachah*, this doesn't always mean that the person's motivations in it were pure. Often, the intentions in doing the *mitzvah* are for various, ulterior motivations.

For example, a person is eating *matzah* on Pesach. Why is he eating? Because it's a *mitzvah*. Are there any other reasons why he is eating the *mitzvah*? Yes, there is another reason involved: because it tastes good. So is the person really eating it to fulfill the *mitzvah*, or he is eating it because he has a desire for the taste of *matzah*? He has both intentions. But the real issue is: What is his main intention in doing the *mitzvah*? Which reason here is his primary reason, and which reason is the one secondary one?

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-062-examining-our-deeds>

This is just one example of the idea. But it can be applied to many other cases.

A person learns Torah. He definitely has some pure intentions, but how much of a percentage of pure intentions does he have when we compare this with the ulterior motivations involved? Is it just a little bit of pure intentions and mostly ulterior motivations?

When a person leads a superficial kind of life, his main concern is if a certain action is obligatory, or if it is permitted, or if it is prohibited. If he has a question, he asks a Rav or someone else who can answer him. He has some *Yiras Shomayim* (fear of Heaven). He does what he is told to do. It seems like he is living his life in the right way. But it could very well be that his entire religious observance is sorely lacking, because his various motivations inside are not reflecting the nature of his deeds.

Here is another example. If a person is asked to be a Rav over a community, and he agrees, is he doing this because he wants to do Hashem's will? Or is it from other motivations, such as the desire for honor or to have rule over others? There are many personal interests that his will can be coming from. Although he is "doing" Hashem's will in being a Rav, who says he is doing it from pure motivations? He might just be following his heart's various inclinations, and it is not coming from a pure place in himself. As time goes on, he might develop various other motives, which had nothing to do with the original reason of why he was sent to be a Rav there...

*Chazal* say that in the era preceding *Moshiach*, truth will vanish (Sotah 49a). If a person has a bit of inner sensitivity, he can sense how true this is in our days. A person might do a *mitzvah* and fulfill it perfectly, but the "smell" being given off from his action smacks of some motivation that is not truthful. The less pure motivations that a person has, he lives a life that is not truthful - even if he has a Rav he listens to and he does all that he is told. He will get rewarded of course for all his *mitzvos*, but after he gets his reward, he will also get judged for the lack of truth involved in whatever he did...

## AWARENESS TO OUR OUTSIDE LAYER AND INSIDE LAYER

Of course, a person has to make sure that his actions are in line with *Shulchan Aruch*, no matter what kind of situation he is presented with. Whatever action we do must be clarified if it is according to *Halacha* or not.

But there is also an inner world taking place within the actions we do, and we must become aware of it.

## SELF-SERVING REQUESTS IN OUR DAVENING

Another example: A person is *davening Shemoneh Esrei*; what are his intentions as he reads the words? Let's say he is saying the blessing of ולמלשינינו, in which we daven that Hashem should get rid



of the slanderers and the wicked. Is he saying this because the wicked people are preventing the reality of Hashem from being revealed onto the world, or he is saying this out of simple hatred for those wicked people, because they bother him....

*Tzaddikim* constantly suspected themselves all their life that maybe their actions were not being done with pure motivations. When they *davened*, they suspected that maybe they still had some degree of self-interest. This is the true meaning of someone who has *Yiras Shomayim* (fear of Heaven). To have *Yiras Shomayim* is not just to be aware of the actions you do if they are in line with *Halacha* or not; that is just the beginning of *Yiras Shomayim*. The *Yiras Shomayim* must continue into what our inner motivations as we do a *mitzvah*. This is by always suspecting that perhaps there are some *negios* (self-serving interests) that are motivating us. *Yiras Shomayim* is to be afraid - to be afraid that maybe I am not living my life in a truthful way.

## GOING BEYOND THE SUPERFICIAL LAYER OF OBSERVANCE

*Chazal* say that when in doubt, “make for yourself a Rav (teacher)”. This refers to a doubt that one has in *halachah*; for example, if you’re not sure where to place your *mezuzah*, you ask your Rav where to place it on the doorpost. But why does a person have to take a picture of the Rav affixing the *mezuzah* on his door....

Keeping *halacha* is the beginning of a Torah life, but it is not everything. We must not remain satisfied with our level just because we keep *Halacha*. If keeping *Halacha* is all there is to our *Yiddishkeit*, what kind of level is our Torah learning at?! We must discern what our personal interests (*negios*) are in what we do.

If someone thinks that he always has pure motivations, he is being delusional. Rather, a sensible person is someone who is constantly self-aware of what his personal interests are in whatever he does, and he seeks to purify his motivations more and more. He wonders if perhaps he is doing something so he can feel eternal, or because he wants to fuel an argument, and other such motivations that a person can have.

## HOW TO MERIT THIS

A person has to cry to Hashem for success in this, that he should become aware of his personal motivations in why he does any act, and that he should be able to separate himself from the personal interests and purify his motivations are. And the truth is that a person needs to cry to Hashem to succeed in anything, not just this topic we are discussing. A person needs to keep examining himself inside, and along with this, he needs to cry to Hashem for help that he should succeed in having purer intentions in whatever he does.

## GOING INWARD

Another example: Why does a person go to sleep? Because he is tired, or because he needs to have strength to serve Hashem better? There is both *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* involved.

Without being self-aware of one's motivations, a person does things without any thinking, and all he thinks about at best is how to fulfill the *Halacha*. Even if he fulfills every word of *Mishna Berurah*, he should remember that it was authored by the Chofetz Chaim, and he is still very far from the kind of life that the Chofetz Chaim lived....

This is a question about how we view our life, how we approach it.

A person is learning Torah. Why is he learning? What are his motivations in learning? Even if a person taught Torah to others his whole life and influenced the masses, he might be told in Heaven after 120 that it's all worthless, because he did it all for himself. Of course, he will get rewarded. But he will be told that he did not live a life of truth, for he did not reach a *Toras Emes*, a Torah of truth, and he did not reach a truthful connection with Hashem.

## COMING OUT OF SUPERFICIALITY

We are living in a generation that is very superficial. Anyone with a little awareness to life can recognize that in the last 15-20 years, there was a big change in our very lifestyle. In the last 15-20 years, the world has undergone a change in lifestyle that seems like we are 100 years later, and it all took place in such a short span of time. There used to be *dikduk hadin* (being strictly careful to keep *Halacha*); there used to be *dikduk hamitzvos*; and *dikduk* when it came to matters of *kasbrus*. There are constant "*heterim*" (Halachis 'leniencies') that people are very quick to make use of simply because people can't handle to keeping the exact *Halacha*. Even in *Eretz Yisrael* there has been a decline in *dikduk hadin*, and there are *Rabbonim* who used to be very exacting with applying *dikduk hadin* now apply *heterim* more quickly.

When a person's inside isn't matching the actions he does on the outside, there is no way for him to live a correct kind of life. This is true even he fulfills every *mitzvah*. We have to keep suspecting ourselves that we contain some ulterior motivations of self-interest (*negios*).

Sometimes a person is standing in *Beis Din* and he says something slightly disrespectful to the Dayan, and the Dayan can be a little angry deep down at the litigant, and issues a negative verdict on the litigant because he is insulted. Even if the litigant deserved that particular verdict according to the *Halacha*, it can still be issued out of some *negios* on the *dayan's* part...

It is therefore not enough for a person to learn Torah; he must strive to live a life of a truthful kind of Torah. Life for a Torah Jew is not just about avoiding *lashon hora*. There is much more that we have to avoid. These days, we have to keep away from the current lifestyle, which is very far from the way we stood at Har Sinai. We must live a life in which we search for the truth.

The *tzaddikim* in previous generations suspected themselves in the previous generations of having *negios*/self-interests. If this was applicable in the previous generations, how much more so does it apply to our current generation, which is very far from the true way that life is supposed to look like.

We are currently in an exile within exile within another exile. Of course, we must accept this decree of Hashem upon us with love. Indeed, only Hashem can take us out of this exile. But the first thing one must realize, if he searches for truth, is that he needs to separate himself from the current lifestyle and realize that he has nothing to do with this current generation.

Our real life is supposed to be the kind of lifestyle which our *Avos* and *Moshe Rabbeinu* lived, the way we stood when we were at Har Sinai. “Remember the day you stood at Har Sinai.” It is not possible for a Jew to live the lifestyle of this generation and have *Yiras Shomayim*. We must be connected in our heart to the state of standing at Har Sinai. This is through always making sure that we are searching for the truth. Of course, our body is found here, on this physical world. But in our soul, we do not have to be connected to this world. Our body can live on this world while our soul can remain connected to our inner world.

We must be afraid that our perhaps our actions of *mitzvos* that we do are stemming from *negios*. Even when you put on *tefillin*, ask yourself if there is some *negios* involved in this. This shouldn't stop you from putting on *tefillin* or *tzitzis*, of course; just become aware of the *negios* in your actions, and be afraid that perhaps maybe everything is stemming from *negios*. This is true *Yiras Shomayim*, and it will protect you [along with your Torah learning] from ulterior motives of self-interest and help you reach the truth.

## IN CONCLUSION

May we merit the complete redemption, the light of the truth of Hashem, and to experience the pleasantness of being completely attached with Hashem.

12 | Mercy Towards Creation <sup>37</sup>MERITING HASHEM'S MERCY THROUGH REVEALING MERCY UPON OTHERS

מחל לנו מלכינו כי פשענו – “Forgive us, our King, for we have been negligent to sin.”

Our Rabbis wrote that there are three levels of sin – אטא (unintentional sin), עון (iniquity) and פשע (intentional sin). In the beginning of Shemoneh Esrei we asked Hashem **סלח לנו אבינו כי הטאנו** – we ask Hashem to be forgiven from sins that we committed unintentionally. Here in this part of Shemoneh Esrei, **מחל לנו כי פשענו**, we are asking Hashem to forgive us from even sins that we committed intentionally – פשע. How are we able to ask Hashem to forgive us from sins that we did intentionally?

When we ask Hashem here to be forgiven for sins that were committed intentionally, we use the word מחל, which can be rearranged to form the word חמל, mercy. Hashem has mercy on His creations.

A person grows in his mother's womb, which is called *rechem*, from the word *rachamim*, compassion. This alludes to how a person is raised by his parents, who had mercy on him. Without mercy, a person wouldn't be able to be nurtured properly. Parents have pain from raising their children, but Hashem imbibes the parents with a trait of mercy on their children, so that their children will be raised with mercy and thus survive.

In this blessing, we ask that Hashem have mercy on the Jewish people. But Hashem also has mercy on the other nations of the world. He has mercy on His entire Creation, on animals, plants and even on inanimate objects. (The *sefarim hakedoshim* state that even inanimate objects have feelings in them; there is a saying in the *Talmud Yerushalmi* which supports this concept). The non-Jews can do *teshuvah*, and Hashem has mercy on them. The *sefarim* discuss about how exactly a non-Jew can do *teshuvah*. So there is such a concept that a non-Jew can do *teshuvah* and merit the mercy of Hashem.

If a person has *rachamim* on others, he can awaken the *rachamim* of Hashem, for Hashem deals with us *middah k'negged middah*. If we don't awaken mercy for others, we don't awaken Hashem's mercy. Hashem forgives, but that is only when He exercises compassion, which we need to awaken. If we don't awaken His *middah* of *rachamim*, then there is no point in asking Hashem to have *rachamim* on us. Hashem's trait of *rachamim* must be awakened by our own *middah* of *rachamim*; if we want to be forgiven by Hashem, we need to forgive others. Let us reflect into this concept, how Hashem has mercy upon His entire Creation.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-063-mercy-towards-creation>

## HOW TO VIEW THE OTHER NATIONS

[Here in *Eretz Yisrael*], in our communities, we often see some Arabs or Africans hanging around. How do we feel towards them?

There is a rule that “Esav hates Yaakov”; although Esav kissed Yaakov, deep down Esav hates Yaakov (This was said about Esav, not Yishmael). The nations of the world hate Jews. Ever since we received the Torah, *Chazal* say that hatred for the Jews entered the nations of the world; the word *Sinai* comes from the word *sinah*, hatred, because hatred for Jews descended onto the nations ever since we stood at Har Sinai.

The non-Jews hate us, so our natural reaction is to hate them back. After all, the rule is “just as water reflects one face to another, so does the heart of man reflect one to another man”. *Tosafos* (Pesachim 113a) states that if a person knows that someone else hates him, he will naturally hate him back.

The truth is that although we must, indeed, feel separate and apart from them. Ever since we stood at Sinai to receive the Torah, we were elevated from the other nations, and this applies that we need to feel how we are elevated and apart from them. If a Jew is not aware of this and he merely showers love and mercy upon non-Jews, this will cause him to have an abysmal descent from his spiritual level. Thousands of Jews had a complete downfall by showing unrestrained love to non-Jews and by mixing with them.

A person needs to deeply realize that we are separate from the gentile nations. Not only must we make sure that we don't change our names, clothing and language to be like them. Our whole lifestyle has to be different than them.

A Jew must first make sure that he realizes how a Jew must be separate from a non-Jew, before he seeks to increase his mercy upon them. The natural feeling of a Jew is simply to feel hatred to a non-Jew, for we know that they hate us. But the truthful perspective is that while it is true that we must be apart from them, we also need to reveal mercy towards them.

When we see an Arab or an African, do we ever think that he is deserving of Hashem's mercy? Hashem has mercy on all His creations. If something bad happens to a non-Jew, how should we react? Often a person thinks, “Good. He deserves it.” But this reaction is really coming from cruelty!

But there is something we should know even before this. If a person doesn't feel a love for another Jew, why would he feel any mercy on a non-Jew? If a person skips the stage of *Ahavas Yisrael*, he won't be able to love a non-Jew either. There are people that want to shower mercy on a non-Jew, when they haven't yet worked on developing love for other Jews; they might claim that they are trying to emulate how Hashem has mercy on all His creations. It's really because such a person can't deal with the truth, therefore he runs away from the truth, and attempts to show mercy to the nations of the world. There are people who have mercy on dogs, but they don't act so nice to human beings.

We must first reveal compassion to other Jews, if we hope to have any compassion on Hashem's other creations. We need to be compassionate to every single Jew, even on those whom we are permitted to hate – because Hashem has mercy on all of His creations.

## REVEALING MERCY UPON OTHERS

Take some time to make the following reflection.

Who are the people you love? Sometimes a person doesn't even love his own family members. Make sure you are revealing love for those who are closest to you.

After this, you should progress to a higher level, and feel compassion on those who you feel act differently than you. Sometimes other people's way of life is right, and sometimes they are wrong; in either case, you need to feel compassion towards a person who lives differently than you do, even if his way of life is definitely wrong.

This requires caution, because if you develop a deep love and compassion for others, you might become too attached with others who act improperly, and this will endanger your own spiritual level. A person has to make sure he is totally separate from this generation, and at the same time, he must feel love and compassion on all people of this generation. If a person doesn't make sure to keep himself away from this generation, he will foolishly connect with people who are totally wicked, such as souls of the Erev Rav, and then be negatively affected by them.

First, separate yourself [both in the physical as well as on an inward level] from all your surroundings; feel that you are apart from this generation. Then, seek to improve how you connect with others and feel mercy upon others. First make sure that your home situation is good, that you are showing more and more compassion towards family. This is the first basic step you need to go through. After that, expand that arousal of love upon all other Jews as well. After that, feel bad for others who are in pain, both physically and spiritually. Feel bad for other Jews who are lacking in their spirituality.

In order to merit Hashem's mercy, we need to awaken it by having mercy on others. The world is full of terrible suffering; we all know this. There are all kinds of problems – health, children, *shidduchim*, *parnassah*, etc. Each person has his own problems. But there is much suffering as well that is taking place in the souls of people. People these days live in darkness; they are living in an inner kind of imprisonment.

The first step in this [as we said] is to make sure that you are separated from the generation, and after that, arouse your compassion on them. Cry for others and feel sorry for them. If you do this, you can then feel compassion on non-Jews, such as the Arabs and Africans you see.

We need to feel merciful towards the *entire* Creation! There is a famous story that the Chazon Ish didn't want to walk past a small chicken, so that it shouldn't become afraid and maybe die from fear.

This was not because the Chazon Ish thought deeply about this. It was rather because he felt compassion towards the entire Creation.

The degree of how much compassion you need to have differs. The main compassion you need to have must first be developed towards other Jews. You also need to feel compassion to a non-Jew, but not as much as you need to feel towards another Jew. You also need to feel compassion towards animals, but it doesn't have to be as much as you feel towards a non-Jew. You don't have to be as compassionate on a plant or rock as you are towards an animal. But you definitely need to feel compassion on all of Creation, because Hashem has mercy on His entire Creation.

When a person lives without palpable *emunah*, he does not see how all of Creation is Hashem's handiwork. When he kills a mosquito, he thinks he's just getting rid of a pest, and he does not think for a second that he has just killed a creation of Hashem.

However, mercy alone, without any restraint, is not the way of a Jew. This is the path of a gentile. When a Jew is merciful, he needs to realize that Hashem has mercy on all of His creation, and therefore, he too needs to have mercy. A Jew needs to incorporate a sense of G-dliness into his trait of mercy.

If a person wants to develop his mercy on others, he is pulled towards what it means to feel others' pain; perhaps he will want to go to places in which he can observe how other Jews are suffering. This is only half of one's *avodah*. First, a person needs to realize what the essence of mercy is: because Hashem has mercy on all of His creations, therefore we also need to have mercy towards His creations. Upon gaining this perspective, we can act truly merciful towards others.

# 13 | Teshuvah – Feeling The Inner Contradiction <sup>38</sup>

## ASKING HASHEM TO REMOVE THE “YAGON”/PAIN OF THIS WORLD

In the blessing of **השיבה שופטינו** we ask Hashem, **והסר ממנו יגון ואנחה**, “And remove us from worry and groans.” This is the second time in Shemoneh Esrei in which we ask Hashem to help us to do *teshuvah*. The first time was in the blessing of **השיבנו**. The concept of *teshuvah*, in essence, is about returning to our Source, to Hashem, and this is what we daven for in the blessing of **השיבנו**.

In this blessing, **השיבה שופטינו**, we are asking Hashem that our judges be returned – in other words, we are asking that the world should become returned to the ways of the Torah, which is the source that Hashem used to create the world with, for “Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world.” But we also ask in this blessing that our worries be removed. When our judges will be returned, our *yagon*/worries will be removed as a result.

## FEELING PAIN OVER A SIN – THE INNER METHOD OF DOING TESHUVAH

We ask Hashem to remove our *yagon*, our worries. Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* that there are 20 facets to *teshuvah*, and the third is called *yagon*, to feel pain about the sin. He writes that a person attains *yagon* through “purifying his soul and mind”. Thus, *yagon* is not just another aspect of *teshuvah*, but it is rather a major factor in the *teshuvah* process.

There are two root methods in how a person does *teshuvah*. One way is to realize that sins ruin our life. A person makes a *cheshbon hanefesh* and can realize that sinning causes him to lose the Next World, and since we believe in the reality of spirituality, we can realize this in a real sense, and be afraid of losing the Next World if we don’t do *teshuvah*. However, such *teshuvah* is not coming from purifying the soul. It is coming from the body, which worries for itself and fears retribution.

The second method of *teshuvah*, the deeper way, is through *yagon*. *Yagon* is that one realizes that his soul is holy, and he comes to realize how far he has sunk by sinning. He feels sharp pain at this. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that the more *yagon* a person has, the greater level his *teshuvah* is.

## YAGON – YEARNING FOR THE STATE OF BEFORE ADAM’S SIN

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-095-teshuvah-feeling-inner-contradiction>



*Yagon* comes from the word *gan*, which alludes to Gan Eden. In other words, *yagon* is to yearn for the state of Gan Eden which man lived in before the sin.

How can a person begin to do *teshuvah*? *Elul* are days of *teshuvah*, and then there are Ten Days of *teshuvah*, and then Yom Kippur. *Elul* is the month in which man was created. Why is the time of man's original creation, *Elul*, the time in which we begin to do *teshuvah*? It is because during the rest of the year, if we want to do *teshuvah*, we need a beginning point to start with.

How does a person start to do *teshuvah*? If he thinks a little, he does *teshuvah* for all the sins he has done this year, since the year 5774 began. A person who is a bit deeper will do *teshuvah* for all the sins he committed since his bar *mitzvah*. A deeper person will do *teshuvah* for even sins he committed when he was a child, for *Chazal* say that there is a concept of doing *teshuvah* even for sins committed during childhood, because the Heavenly Court also takes such sins into account.

However, the inner way to do *teshuvah* is not to begin with last year's account or from your childhood. When we do *teshuvah*, it begins with our very first source, and our very first source was when we are part of Adam's soul, before the sin. We need to return to our original source, which was before the sin of Adam, and thus come to regret the repercussions that were caused to mankind as a result of Adam's sin.

Of course, a person must certainly do *teshuvah* for any sins committed this year as well, and this should not be ignored. But the main part of the *teshuvah* is not about doing *teshuvah* on the private level (as important as this is), but rather to do *teshuvah* over the sin that caused all sins - Adam's sin. The depth of *teshuvah* is to return to the state of pre-sin. The more *yagon*/pain over sins that a person has, the deeper his *teshuvah* is, as Rabbeinu Yonah writes. It is to yearn for the state of Gan Eden, before the sin.

A person who thinks superficially, when he hears about this concept, will think: "What do I have to do with Adam *HaRishon*? This has nothing to do with me." But if a person looks into the words of *Chazal* about this concept, he'll discover that his existence is connected with Adam *HaRishon*. When Adam *HaRishon* sinned, he had to leave Gan Eden, and all of mankind was cursed. So many sins have happened since then – sin leads to another sin – how many sins have piled up until the current year of 5774! When a person does *teshuvah* over his sins, he needs to do *teshuvah* over the source of the sin, and the source of all sin was the sin of Adam, which paved the way for all sins that ever happened in history.

Of course, nobody remembers when he was originally in Gan Eden. But we know that the Torah tells us the story of Adam in Gan Eden. If we look deeper and deeper into our soul, we will have more pain over our sins, and according to the pain from our sins and the yearning to return, our *teshuvah* will be greater.

What indeed should we feel pain about? We should feel pain that had Adam not sinned, we would have all entered the eternal Shabbos, where we would have eternal *menuchah* (serenity). But a person is generally self-absorbed, in his private life or in the problems of the current generation, and thus when he does *teshuvah*, he is doing *teshuvah* over the more recent sins of mankind. But these

sins are just the branches. The root of all sins, Adam's sin, is the main sin we have to do *teshuvah* over, for it is the root that caused all sin. If we really want to do *teshuvah*, we need to do *teshuvah* over the very first point that began the sin, which was the sin of Adam – the sin that has caused so much repercussion.

## THE REMEMBRANCE ON ROSH HASHANAH

Based upon this, we can now understand the following amazing point. On Rosh HaShanah, we ask Hashem to remember Creation from its beginning, all the way down to remembering our private good actions. On Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Remembrance, why are we asking Hashem to remember the original events of Creation since its beginning? It is because we must remember our own beginning state, of Adam before the sin. Each person needs to remember this.

How can we remember it? We don't have *Ruach HaKodesh* to remember the beginning of Creation. But if a person penetrates more and more into his soul, he can feel that the essence of the soul is pure, and then he can feel a yearning to return to the original state of purity.

## FEELING THE INNER CONTRADICTION

One method of doing *teshuvah* is because a person is afraid of punishment. He doesn't want to die and he wants to be signed in the Book of Life. He wants to be written in the Book of the Righteous. That is one approach. The second method of *teshuvah* is to build upon on the first method: to yearn to be close to Hashem again. It is to yearn for our beginning point, in which we were all pure.

Even the biggest tzaddik has sins, for it is written, "*There is no righteous person in the land who does not sin.*" Every person has sins, and the more a person feels the righteousness and purity of his soul, the more he can feel an inner contradiction inside himself. He knows he is pure deep down, but he is also aware that he has sinned and dirtied himself. By dwelling on this, a person can reach a deep feeling of pain and regret, and this will spur him on to have yearnings to be pure again. This feeling of pain can help him do true *teshuvah*.

But in order to feel the inner contradiction, a person first needs to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul-accounting) and become aware of the sins he committed this year. In addition, he also needs to recognize the purity of his soul. Although we don't always feel the purity of our soul, sometimes we feel it, like on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Remind yourself of this and then you will be able to feel pain over your sins, which contradict the purity of your soul. That is *yagon*.

To fear the **judgment** of Rosh HaShanah is the external fear we need to have during these days of *Elul*. It is real, though, and a person should therefore not dismiss it, *chas v'shalom*. But the inner

layer of *teshuvah* is: *yagon*, as Rabbeinu Yonah writes. We can reach *yagon* when we **feel the yearning of soul to return to our purity**, upon feeling the inner contradiction between how we are acting in our life with how pure our soul is deep down.

When you read these words of Rabbeinu Yonah about doing *teshuvah*, don't just read these words like an intellectual. His words are not 'intellectual' matters. His words about how we can come to feel pity our soul, our inner essence. If we realize this, there will be an overhaul to how we do *teshuvah*.

We must realize that sins have dulled the purity of our soul since a year ago. It is to become aware of the inner contradiction between our soul and the actions we do. The outer part of *teshuvah* is to become aware of our sins and feel regret about them, while the inner part of our *teshuvah* is to feel an inner contradiction in ourselves. (Both parts are necessary for *teshuvah*).

You can realize what a contradiction we live in. A person can realize that he is trying to live an inner kind of life, in which Torah rules as the truth, while the world around him is not, and it is instead burning in the opposite direction of the truth. This generation in particular contradicts our inner world of spirituality, of truth, of doing Hashem's Will, of Torah - because we are living in a generation where the 'Erev Rav' rules over us! Reflecting on this predicament we are in can cause us to have *yagon*. If a person yearns for holiness, for Torah, for a world which will be run according to the Torah, he can see how much this generation contradicts his aspirations, and this can bring a person to have true *yagon*.

## FEELING THE "YAGON" WILL REMOVE THE "YAGON"

However, there are people who don't have aspirations for holiness, because they feel that we are living in a lowly generation anyway. The answer to this is, to yearn for a purer world is not just something you should wish for. It is to realize that Hashem is with us, no matter what generation we are in or what the situation is.

This is the meaning of why we ask Hashem to remove from us *yagon*. **והסר ממנו יגון ואנחה**. When we feel Hashem with us, our pain and worries will be removed.

The more a person realizes that our inner world of truth contradicts the external world we live in,

*Elul* keeps coming back every year. How do we do *teshuvah* each *Elul*? It is by doing *teshuvah* over everything that has happened since the beginning of Creation, for *teshuvah* is about returning to the beginning. When a person internalizes this perspective, this is the meaning of doing *teshuvah shelaimah*. May we merit from Hashem that all *yagon* should be removed, and that His Kingdom be revealed.

## 14 | Days of Building "Ratzon"<sup>39</sup>

The forty days from the beginning of *Elul* until Yom Kippur are known as “Days of Ratzon” – appeasement, satisfaction, desire. On the simple level this means that G-d is well-disposed towards us during this time frame, which has always been a period set aside for repentance.

However, in a deeper sense, these are days during which it is our job **to develop our own ratzon – our satisfaction with and desire for holiness.**

Do We Really Want To Be Jews?

Am Yisrael stood together at the foot of Har Sinai and received the Torah. Did they *want* to accept the Torah, or not?

True, they said “We will do and we will listen” – but on the other hand we are told that G-d forced the Torah upon them (“He upturned the mountain over them like a vessel”).

Let us imagine that we can go back in a time machine, and think about this question as if we ourselves were there. We are told that in a few days we will hear G-d, commanding us His Law. Do we *want* to accept the Torah? Or not?

Do you think it’s such a simple matter? It’s true that we would all be ashamed to say “No” – but that doesn’t mean that the answer is “Yes”. Is it really clear to us that we want to accept the Torah?

There is a very deep story told by Rabbi Ezriel Tauber sh’lita, about a boy who learned in yeshiva just like everyone else. One day a doubt arose about whether he was actually Jewish. His parents were from some out-of-the-way place, nobody really knew them. The father was known to be Jewish for sure, but there was some doubt about the mother’s Jewishness, and so, by extension, about her son’s being Jewish.

The young man went to his Rosh Yeshiva and asked him what he should do. The Rosh Yeshiva told him that since there was some doubt, he should undergo formal conversion. The boy listened thoughtfully to what his Rosh Yeshiva said, did some more thorough research on his mother’s Jewishness, and found out in the end that there was really no doubt at all: she – and he – were definitely not Jewish.

Now the young man thought to himself, “Who says it’s worth it for me to become Jewish?” – and he decided not to! Until that day he had learned in yeshiva like everyone else, but *when he found out that he wasn’t Jewish he decided that he’s not interested in bringing himself under the yoke of Torah and mitzvos.*

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-010-days-building-ratzon>

Now, let us attempt to imagine ourselves in the same situation. If we would find out that we aren't really Jewish. The door is open, though, and anyone who wants to may convert. Would we do it?

The question can be phrased more specifically: Certainly not? Maybe not? If maybe, what percentage yes and what percentage not?

Even someone who would choose to become Jewish, let's examine our feelings even further: Let's say that G-d would suggest a compromise – out of the 613 *mitzvos*, choose for yourself ten *mitzvos* that you want. If you want you can choose all 613, but at least 10. How many would we choose? Which ones?

Do we really want to keep all 613 *mitzvos* or are we doing it by force?

After all, every one of us has some difficulties keeping the *mitzvos*; one person has a hard time keeping Shabbos 100% according to the book, someone else has a hard time with shemiras haloshon, and so on. Even if a person arrives at the conclusion that he really does want to be Jewish, still – does he really want *all 613 mitzvos*? Perhaps he feels that a percentage of them would be enough for him?

Now let's think about this for a while. A person who arrives at the conclusion that if only he had the possibility, he would give away his obligation to keep the *mitzvos* – such a person is truly unfortunate. All his life he lives the way he does because “there's no other choice”, “what can he do about it”, “min hashamayim” this lifestyle was decreed upon him! Some people are born lame, some are born blind, and some... are born Jewish! What can you do? A non-Jew can do whatever he wants except for just seven “*mitzvos b'nei Noach*”, whereas the life of the Jew is difficult and complicated...

We don't mean to say for a minute that a person's obligation to keep *mitzvos* depends on his wanting to. “A Jew is a Jew even if he sins.” It makes no difference whether he wants to or not, he must be a Jew. But is this “question of questions” not relevant to us? The fact that we are Jews, is that really what we want?

This is a question that's so simple, so essential, and a person needs to think about it, really, deeply, not just from the lips and outwards, and arrive at his own conclusion. If he arrives at the conclusion that he would really rather not be Jewish – then he needs to begin his new path to being Jewish from the ground up. If he arrives at the conclusion that he does want to be Jewish, still he needs to check which parts of Judaism he really wants, and which parts – not, and begin his new path from there.

The work of these “Days of Ratzon” is for us to develop within ourselves a true desire to be Jews!

THE CHOICE IS OURS – WHETHER TO WANT

We are all accustomed to a certain cycle of life: Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Succos, Chanuka, Purim, Pesach, Shavuot, Tisha B'Av, and back again to the beginning. Was it always this way? Before the Jews left Egypt, were these holidays in place? The only thing that always existed was Shabbos, but it was a world without the familiar holiday cycle.

Our forefathers, Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov, didn't have Pesach, Shavuot or Succos. True, they could keep the entire Torah without being commanded to, but there were no holidays as we know them, they couldn't say "a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt" during Kiddush, because the children of Israel had not yet left Egypt, or even gone into it in the first place for that matter!

Now, let's stop a moment and think. If we could be born into a world with the holiday cycle or without it, into the time before they existed, which would we prefer? Do we really want this year cycle that includes the holidays, or maybe not? Let's try for a moment to get off the merry-go-round of life and check whether this is a life that is forced upon us or whether we really want it.

This is a basic question of the soul: Are we living as we want to, or is most of our entire life the way it is simply because nobody asks us and nobody is interested in what we want, and whether we want it or not, it's going to happen. We are all part of Am Yisrael, whether we want to be or not. The only choice that *is* ours is *whether or not we really want it*.

The question is not that if we don't want it we can change anything; we indeed cannot. The thing we *can* change, though, is whether we want this package or whether it is to remain a package that comes upon us against our will.

## LOOKING FORWARD TO ROSH HASHANA

These days are called "Days of Ratzon" because that's what it's all about – *wanting!* A non-Jew who realizes the basic fact that he is to be judged, doesn't look forward to Rosh Hashana. He doesn't want to be judged, no being judged would make things easier for him.

But a Jew can look forward to Rosh Hashana. There is one time in the year that each individual Jew from among all of Am Yisrael, regardless of his level of piety, is called up to come before the Creator. When? On Rosh Hashana. "All the inhabitants of the world pass before Him in single file like sheep." They all go in to be judged, and the Judge is none other than G-d Himself.

*The most unique and special thing about Rosh Hashana is the very fact that every Jew has a connection with G-d, Who looks down at him, checks him out, and takes interest in what he does.*

Imagine for yourself that you owned a few acres of land somewhere, containing within it a few thousand ants. Would it interest you what each ant was doing? Not at all. The ant can die, the ant can live, there can be a few hundred less or a few hundred more – who cares?

Logically, should it really concern or interest the Creator of the universe, who we are and what we are, just another small creature within the vastness of the entire creation? Imagine it were a person,

who owned the world. He has 5½ billion human beings. Would it matter to him that there is some Jew living somewhere in Canada? Does the Creator of the world really take any interest in us and in what we do?

The fact is that He does judge us – in other words, he takes a keen interest in every detail of our lives. Our lives, every thing that a person does 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every moment – it interests Him. We must be pretty important in His eyes.

### DOES THIS MAKE ANYONE HAPPY?

If it does, such a person will certainly look forward to Rosh Hashana. It's then that he receives the greatest distinction: I am being judged on 365 days, 24 hours a day, 60 minutes in an hour, what I have done. They will not skip even a single second. All the deeds of people, all open and known before Him, nothing is hidden from Him.

For a person who is looking for this kind of connection, Rosh Hashana holds very great interest. However, a person who looks upon Rosh Hashana as one looks upon a court of law, the kind every city has downtown – such a person will of course not look forward to Rosh Hashana. Have you ever known of someone who looks forward to his day of judgment in court?

The first thing about which we will be judged, is whether we looked forward to this day, or whether we fell into it because we had no choice. A person goes on a sea voyage, there's a terrible storm and he falls in. Now he tries to save himself. He certainly didn't want to fall into the sea. After he fell in – he tries to save himself.

Have we fallen into Rosh Hashana because we have no choice, or do we count the days to it, unable to wait a minute longer till the wonderful day will arrive? If a person does not look forward, we could say in other words: the day known as Rosh Hashana has been forced upon him. He arrives at the judgment sad, nervous, with no smile on his face, and just as he appears, the Creator also shows him back the same kind of face, as it were.

This is the day when we declare the Creator to be the supreme king. He directs every point in a person's life, cares about every detail. Is the person interested in this kind of connection? Or would the person prefer that He doesn't enter into his private life, doesn't know what he does, as it were.

It's a new year, we can turn a new page, in which a person is ready to be transparent with the Creator 24 hours a day, seven days a week – not only ready, but rejoicing about it, that G-d Himself is a full partner in every part of his life. This is the depth of why “declaring G-d to be king” is connected to the “day of judgment”. We declare Him to be king over every detail of our lives, and we are judged as to whether or not we do just that.

## OUR JOB IS TO WANT!

Truthfully, most people do not think about this. They live another day, and another day, and, as everyone knows, one day life ceases. But life in its true inner depth is the life of “You chose us from among all the nations”, and just like You chose us, we choose You. It’s a choice, a choice each one of us must make within himself.

The difference it makes is clear: a person who chooses willingly to keep the *mitzvos*: in the first place, he will keep them, and in addition he will do so with more joy, and thereby connect himself more and more with the Creator. The person who does not choose this, it will be difficult for him to keep the *mitzvos*, and all the more so to be happy with this role.

## STOPPING TO THINK

Let us conclude this discussion with one simple resolution that will be a proper preparation for Rosh Hashana and all the High Holy Days. Take five minutes a day to stop everything and think: “Just a minute, what am I living for? I know I’m a Jew and I feel that I’m living for G-d. But is this really what I want? If so – I need to work to make the things I do all day long align with that desire.”

If we don’t stop everything, and do this little bit of contemplation, advancement will not occur all by itself. Nothing grows all by itself except weeds!

Please – let’s stop everything once in a while for a few minutes, to think about who we are, what we are, why we came into the world, what is our goal in life. Then, once we’ve clarified to ourselves what our true goal is, let us attempt to check whether it’s something we want, or whether it is that way against our will; and then try to align our lives with the true conclusions that we have come to.



15 | Going Above Our Level <sup>40</sup>THREE REASONS WHY WE NEED A KING

In the blessing of השיבנו we ask Hashem, ומלוך עלינו “And rule over us.” What is the concept of a kingship (*malchus*)? The Torah gives a *mitzvah* to appoint a king: “Place upon yourselves a king.” The kings which we had in the Jewish people are mainly the Davidic dynasty.

There is a difference of opinion in our Sages of how to view the need for a [Jewish] king. One opinion is that we needed a king to lead wars for us, and another opinion in the Sages is that we needed a king to judge over us so we can have an established court system. (Another opinion in the Sages is that we do not need a king at all, for Hashem can fight wars for us and judge us perfectly; so appointing a king is optional, and it is not obligatory.)

What we learn from the concept of a king is how we need to relate to Hashem as our king. The first reason why we need a king, according to our Sages, is so that our wars will be fought. We need to realize that Hashem can fight our wars for us, as it is written, “Hashem will fight the wars for you, and they [the enemies] will be silenced.” A second reason why we need a king is so that we can have a judge. This is also how relate to Hashem as our King. In order to merit a merciful judgment, we declare Hashem as King over us.

But that is not all there is to why we need a king; there is a deeper reason why we needed a king. Another opinion in the Sages of why we needed a king is because we needed someone to fear. This is also part of how we relate to Hashem as King, because we need to accept ourselves the *kabalas ol malchus shomayim*, the “yoke of Heaven”. Thus, we needed to appoint a king because we needed someone to fear; the way we view Hashem as our King is because we fear Him by accepting ourselves His *mitzvos*, and this is a very necessary part of our life.

Thus, there are three reasons why we need kingship – to fight wars; to be a judge over us and mete out proper judgment, and because we need to have someone that we will fear.

A FOURTH REASON WHY WE NEED A KING: TO BE A PRINCE

There is also a fourth reason that we find in why we need a king – yet a deeper reason. It is because the Jewish people are called “sons of kings”, *bonei melochim*, and even more so, we are called “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” This is the higher reason that we need a king - it is not just

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-096-Elul-going-above-our-level>

because we need to realize that we are the “servants” of the King, but because we are the “children of Hashem”. Thus, we need to recognize Him as our Father, and that is the depth behind accepting Him as our King.

We will try to explain this further, but this is the basic outline of the concept.

## DECLARING HASHEM AS KING: CONNECTING OURSELVES TO THE KING

We have an *avodah* during *Yomim Noraim* to declare Hashem as King over us (*malchiyos*). Part of our *avodah* in declaring Hashem as King is to declare Him as King over us and accept His rule over us, as was explained earlier. But there is a deeper reason of why we need to accept Hashem’s Kingship over us: so that *we* can connect ourselves with His very kingship and become a part of His Kingdom.

## YOMIM NORAIM: CONNECTING TO A HIGHER LEVEL

The Rema writes that during *Aseres Y’mei Teshuvah*, a person has to act on a higher level and practice certain stringencies that he doesn’t normally practice during the rest of the year. The depth behind this is because since we declare Hashem as King, and as our Father, we are really sitting in His palace. We are enjoying a status of being His princes that reside in the King’s palace. We are being enveloped by Hashem’s Kingship, for we are in His palace during these days.

Declaring Hashem as King is that we are ascending to Him in His palace, not that we are bringing Him down onto our level so we can place Him on top of us! It is that we are connecting ourselves to the King above us. That is the depth of declaring Hashem as King.

To explain this more: Hashem is the Creator, and we are His creations. On Rosh HaShanah, we return to the beginning of Creation. How do we view this? Do we focus on the fact that it is the beginning of Creation in which all creations were first made? There is more to the beginning of creation. It is the time in which we can come out of our perception of seeing Creation just the “creations”, and to instead enter a higher perspective, that we see the *Creator* behind all of the creations.

Because we are supposed to act on a higher level during *Yomim Noraim*, this shows us that it is a time in which we can enter into a higher perspective than we are used to from the rest of the year. The 30 days of *Elul*, along with the Ten Days of *Teshuvah* (which are a total of 40 days) are days in which we are essentially above the rest of the year, just as Moshe *Rabbeinu* was in Heaven for the entire 40 days, which included *Elul* and the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*.

We know that the *beinonim* (“average” people who are not totally righteous but not totally wicked) are “hanging” in the balance during the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*. Simply, this is because it is

not clear if the *beinonim* are righteous or wicked, thus their judgment is hanging until Yom Kippur; if the *beinoni* does *teshuvah* during the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*, it is apparent that he is a *tzaddik*. But the deeper meaning is that a *beinoni* can hang onto a higher level and connect himself the level above himself, which is the level of *tzaddikim*.

Therefore, during *Elul* and *Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah*, the *avodah* is to see how the Creator is behind everything you see. It is about connecting to a higher level, to see the root behind all that you see, whether it's an action or a thought. This is how these days reveal Hashem more.

So whatever level you are on, you can take upon yourself one thing during these days that is really above your level and try to practice it during *Yomim Noraim*. Realize that you can connect yourself to a higher level during these days. Don't attempt to live with that high level during the rest of the year, though, because that would be acting delusional. You're not on that high level during the rest of the year, so don't fool yourself. But during *Yomim Noraim*, we can act on a higher level, even if we are not actually on it (as the Rema writes). And by doing that, we can make a mark on ourselves for the rest of the year as well, even though we aren't on the level of *Yomim Noraim* anymore.

This is essentially the power of *emunah* in the soul – the power to believe that we can become connected to higher levels that are really above us.

Through this, may we merit to place Hashem as King over us, and connect with His kingship, completely.

## 16 | Changing Your Actions (Part 1 of 3) <sup>41</sup>

### ENTERING A NEW YEAR

We are, *Baruch Hashem*, less than two weeks away from the new year. If we want to do anything properly, we need to prepare for it. Without preparation, we usually cannot do it properly.

For example, if a person doesn't learn how to shake a *lulav* and *esrog*, he might take it upside down, and he doesn't fulfill the mitzvah. Without preparation, the actions after that will not be performed properly. We are speaking about the coming new year. We must prepare ourselves for it. How do we prepare for the new year?

In any learning institution, they don't learn the same thing every day. The new year should also not be the same thing as last year.

If a first grader is left back in first grade, has a problem, how embarrassing is it to get left back even one year, and surely two or three years. I never heard of a child who gets left back three years in a grade. Anyone who gets left back has a major problem, and it's bad for *shidduchim* when people hear of such things.

So too, when we enter the new year, we must leave the previous year behind.

Life tends to flow along by itself. Either we can take life as it comes and just let ourselves flow along with it [which is to become complacent], or we can realize that we must begin again anew when we enter a new year.

When the year ends, we need to ask ourselves, "What have I gotten from this year?" This is the first thing to examine. The year is almost over. Before we prepare for the next year, first we need to see what this year was.

Take a pen and paper and think a little and write down what you gained this year. First write down general things, like the fact that you learned Torah and did mitzvos. Then ask yourself: "Has my heart changed? Has my way of thinking changed?"

What changed from Elul of last year to Elul of this year? What happened to you this year?

This takes time, but it's the minimum, not the maximum. Now when it comes Erev Rosh HaShanah, think, what do you want to get out of the next year? What came out of this year, and what do you want from next year?

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-023-believing-you-can-change>

If you see that this year was a good year, that's wonderful. But if you see that this past year was unfulfilling, you need to examine your mistakes. Learn from others and from yourself. You learn from yourself when you see that you keep making the same mistakes. If you only made a mistake once then it's just a mistake, but if you keep making the same mistake again and again, it must be because you're not paying attention to it. You need to become aware of it so that you don't make the same mistakes again this year.

## REFLECTING

Every one of us, *Baruch Hashem*, usually has a will to live. We all want to live. But are we clear how we want to end our life, what we want it to look like?

People want money and all kinds of ambitions, and they want to end their life like that. What about our inner accomplishments? How do we want to look on the day we die?

Usually people respond to this, "I want to end my life being very happy." Yes, we all want this, but how do we want our life to look like, to where do we want to get to? When traveling from place to place, a person can be very clear to where he has to get to. What do we want our day of death to look like?

Dovid HaMelech said, "*My heart is empty within me.*" He had an empty space in his heart. We all have good and evil in our heart. Dovid emptied the evil from his heart, so he was left with an empty space, a *chalal*. The Sages say that Dovid killed his *yetzer hora* through fasting. Do any of us aspire for such a thing, to empty ourselves out from evil in the heart?

If you ask anyone if he wants to be a millionaire, the answer is "Yes." If you ask someone, "Is that realistic?" The answer is "No." How many people actually become millionaires, even though they all want to be? People want to be millionaires, but they don't believe they can do it, therefore, they don't become millionaires, even though they would like to be.

Here is an example that can apply to those who have been learning Torah for years. Is there anyone who doesn't want to know the entire Shas? Probably all people want to know it. Is there anyone who wants to know it by the time he dies? This sounds like a miracle. So we all want, but we don't believe we can actualize what we want. If we aren't clear where we want to get to, there is very little chance for success.

Are we clear in where we have to get to at the end of our life? Usually miracles don't happen. So the question is very clear and simple: How would we want the end of our life to look like?

For example, if a person wants to have a *lev tov* and think good of others and not have jealousy, does he really believe he can get to that aspiration? We can bring many examples, but it's a clear and simple question. Chazal say that desire, jealousy, and honor takes a person out of this world. Does a person believe that by the time he dies he will rid himself of jealousy, or desire, or seeking honor? "A

person does not die with half his desires fulfilled.” Does a person know that running after honor only makes honor run away from him? Does he believe in himself that he can ever get to such a level in which he doesn’t seek honor...?

We are presenting a very clear question.

When a person lends money to someone irresponsible, if he believes the person will be able to pay back the money, he’ll sign the papers to lend him the money, if not, he doesn’t sign. Are we clear in how we will sign our life at the end of our life, just as a person lending money who is confident that it will be paid back so he signs?

The Rosh says to “always place the day of death before you”. What does this mean – to always live your life with fears and anxiety that maybe you will die? No, that’s not what it means. It means to know where you want to get to in life, how you want to look like at the end of life when you die. The question is very clear: Does a person know how we wants to end his life and does he believe he can actualize his aspirations?

To illustrate: Does anyone think he has no desires? We all have desires. A child has desires, and when we get older, we still have desires, just the desires change. A child likes toys, and an adult is on to bigger and better things, but we all have desires. Do we have any aspiration that evil desires should leave us? Will we just remain with all our desires throughout our whole life and die with them? Do we have any aspiration to leave desires?

We all know that desire is not a good thing, we don’t need it, but we come to feel, This is how I am, we are materialistic. If a person doesn’t believe he can come out of desires, it’s as if he’s dead right now, upon deeper reflection. Of course, he’s not actually dead, but with regards to desires, it’s as if he is dead, because he considers desires to be impossible to overcome, therefore there is no difference between his life and his death, with regards to desires.

So we need Hashem’s help. As Chazal say, without Hashem’s help, we cannot overcome the *yetzer hora*. It is impossible for us to accomplish anything on our own. The *yetzer hora* is an angel, and we are humans, so we have no chance against a powerful angel. A *baal gaavah* (arrogant person) or a *baal dimyon* (delusional person) thinks he can overcome the *yetzer hora*, but a realistic person knows that he can’t. “So if I can’t overcome the *yetzer hora*, what does Hashem want from me? Why does He want me to overcome the *yetzer hora*, if I can’t?”

The more realistic a person is, the more he can see that success is really impossible. There are many difficulties to deal with. So how indeed can we succeed? “*Hashem is close to anyone who calls out to Him in truth.*” If we call out to Him with *emes*, “in truth”, He hears us. If we call out to Him but not with *emes*, then we aren’t answered!

What does it mean to truly “call out” to Hashem? One kind of person calls out to Hashem because he has problems. But does such a person believe that only Hashem can help him? A person has to feel like a “*mes mitzvah*” (helpless corpse) towards Hashem, that he is basically dead unless Hashem helps him. A “*mes mitzvah*” is truly helpless.

A person must know that he cannot help himself, but even more so, he must know that no one can help him – no one except Hashem Himself. Hashem has no limits, and he can give us unlimited help.

## BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN CHANGE

Now we will return to the first point. How will we look on the day of death? None of us knows clearly what it will look like. But what we can know is, that if you know that Hashem can help you come out of any problem, you will be able to end your life and escape the problem.

Do we really believe we can change? Not just to change a little - but a lot. We can change a lot, not because we have the power to change on our own, but because Hashem can help us – that is, if we turn to Him for help.

## BELIEVING IN MOSHIACH

Here is another example.

One of our 13 beliefs is to believe in the coming of *Moshiach*. Do any of us believe he will come??

We are living in a world that is full of so many problems, so much evil and impurity. How will *Moshiach* come to such an evil world like today's world? It makes sense that *Moshiach* should have come to the generation of the desert, which was called the *dor de'ah* (generation of knowledge), they were on a high level, and they were really deserving of *Moshiach*. But today's generation, which is so lowly – how can he come?? This generation is so undeserving of *Moshiach*. It doesn't make sense that he should come in today's times. He should come to take away all the impurity – then it makes sense that he should come now!

The Chofetz Chaim once said, “Ribono shel olam, please bring *Moshiach*. If we would wait one more generation, nobody will want to bring him.”

In other words – logically speaking, it doesn't make sense that *Moshiach* should come in today's generation, which is very lowly. But we must await him every day. How can we await his arrival every day if it doesn't make sense he will come today?? One would have to be very naïve and disconnected from reality in order to await *Moshiach*. A person like this has a good eye. But if someone sees reality, it does not make sense that *Moshiach* can come in this generation. It would take a miracle.

But the depth is, we must await *Moshiach*, even though he tarries – because if we really want *Moshiach*, we believe, and then he will come. We must want that change he will bring about. But how much do we believe that there can be changes? Do we really want the change from exile to

redemption, in which there will be no more impurity, when the world will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem, and there will be no bad *middos*? Does anyone believe that such a change can happen to a world like today's times?

Most people want *Moshiach* so that their problems will go away, to solve shidduchim and *parnassah* and health problems. But for this we wouldn't need *Moshiach* – the Baal Shem Tov or Baba Sali could do that.

*Moshiach* will bring a change to the entire world – everything will change over, totally! Is there any president who can change over the entire America? We all know that this is impossible. No one person can change the world. Nobody can change a country with millions of people, and surely not the entire world.

Reb Yisrael Salanter said, “When I was young, I wanted to change the world. When I got a little older, I wanted to change my country. When I got older I wanted to change my city, then I realized I could only change my neighbors, and then I realized that I can only change my family. Then I realized that the only one I can change is myself – and even that is hard to do.”

So nobody can change the world. How then will *Moshiach* change the world, every person? How can it be that in one moment everyone will change, without exception? Does anyone believe in such a thing? If you think about it deeply, it does not make any logical sense.

## ROSH HASHANAH AND CHANGING

“Rosh HaShanah” means “*Rosh L'Shinuyim*” – the “beginning of changes”, because change is “*shinuy*”, from the word “*shanah*”, year. What kind of change do we believe we can have? The true answer is that we can change over totally!

It doesn't mean that we have power on our own to change. It means that if we turn to Hashem, truly, then we can change totally. But first we must aspire that we can change in the first place.

We all *daven* on Rosh HaShanah for a good year. We daven for *parnassah*. Does everyone here have good *parnassah*...? What changed since last year? We all *davened* for a good year. We are *davening* every year. Did anything change? Did our situations get better? Did troubles go away? No - most of the troubles are still here. But we can still believe that things can change. We can also believe that a day can come in which everything will change. If we don't believe in change, if we don't aspire for changes in our life, we surely can't believe in *Moshiach* who will change the world – and then we won't merit to see *Moshiach*.

We can believe that we can totally change – not because we are powerful, but only because we can be helped by Hashem, if we truly turn to Him.

“*A pure heart Hashem created me with.*” We ask Hashem for a *lev tahor*, for a pure heart, for a new heart. We also day, “*And purify our hearts to serve You in truth*” – that we understand. But to create



us with a entirely new “pure heart”?? Do we believe we can receive a whole new heart from Hashem? If we believe, we can get it. If we don’t believe, we won’t get it.

Rosh HaShanah is about *shinuy*, changes. The 10 Days of Teshuvah are days to do *teshuvah* – and what is *teshuvah*? To change. How do we have the power to change? There is a special opportunity of these 10 days, which help us change. These days are days of change, but the question is - how much we believe we can change.

Changing over, totally, is the root of the entire year. Only with Hashem’s help can we change totally, but how do get to that? We have to use our abilities and try as hard as we can, and along with this, we must cry to Hashem for help. You can’t do one without the other – trying is not enough, and crying is not enough. You have to try *and* cry. And then you will arouse Hashem’s compassion.

So we cannot escape our faults from our own abilities. But we can still escape them, if we believe that we can. Will we merit it? It depends. If you try your best, and you cry to Hashem as well - “in truth” - then Hashem hears you, because He hears all those who call out to Him in truth.

To prepare for the next year, one must want to change totally. “*A pure heart Hashem created me with.*” All evil in the heart must be uprooted – all of it. How can we work on all of that? We can only work on one area at a time. But when we cry to Hashem, we must cry to Him to give us an entirely new heart - to purify our entire heart, to escape all the evil that resides in it; not just to leave one bad *middah*, but to wish to leave all of the evil in it.

Is that how we are coming in to Rosh HaShanah? Do we believe that Hashem can purify us totally, or do we not believe in such a request?

We have free choice to decide what our aspirations are this year. If we believe we can change, that’s Rosh HaShanah. If not, the day of Rosh HaShanah is a lost opportunity.

## ASPIRING

There are different kinds of “*katnus*” (immaturity). One kind of *katnus* is how a child behaves; he behaves with immaturity. Another kind of *katnus* is when a person has *katnus* in his aspirations. If a person knows he has *katnus*, that is a quality; it is humility, because he is self-aware. But if a person has *katnus* in his aspirations, there is nothing worse than this. If a person thinks he is great, he is delusional. A person can be aware that he has *katnus* but he still has aspirations for greatness; that is the proper perspective to have.

A person usually doesn’t believe that he can reach greatness. We are children of the Avos, and Chazal say that one must aspire to reach the actions of Avos. Do we believe we can be on the level of Avos? We don’t. But Chazal say that we should aspire for it! How? If we cry to Hashem for help, we can get there. Not because of our own power, but because Hashem can help us.

## LEAVING WORK IN AMERICA TO GO LEARN IN ERETZ YISRAEL

I will give a simple example.

*Baruch Hashem*, people here are learning Torah and doing mitzvos, each to his own. Is anyone here prepared to leave everything behind and go to *Eretz Yisrael* and learn Torah from morning until night? Most people would say “Yes, I want to”. But do you believe you can actually do it?

The answers will be something like, “Maybe in a few years, and even then, I don’t know. To move to *Eretz Yisrael*? To learn the whole day?? Impossible. It’s not realistic.” Logically speaking, this makes sense. Plus, where will *parnassah* come from? These are all good issues.

There are no answers to these issues. From a logical perspective, it doesn’t make sense to move to *Eretz Yisrael* and learn Torah.

We *daven* every day in Shemoneh Esrei that we should return to *Eretz Yisrael*. Maybe that’s why the request for *parnassah* comes before that blessing, so that first one can have *parnassah*, and then he’ll go...!

We *daven* every day that we should return to *Eretz Yisrael*. Imagine if you would be offered a free ticket to *Eretz Yisrael*. Would you be prepared to leave everything behind? This is what you *daven* for every day. Do you really want it? Or do you just *daven* these words every day because Chazal established that we *daven* for it...?

Of course, logically speaking, it doesn’t make sense for you to leave this country and move to *Eretz Yisrael*, and to stop working and learn a whole day. It would also cause you to be very irresponsible. If you don’t have *emunah*, you won’t be able to do it. If you have *emunah*, though - you can do it.

## WITH EMUNAH, YOU CAN DO THE IMPOSSIBLE

The question is: if we believe that we can change over.

Once I gave a shiur in Cholon, which is not such a *Chareidi* area. Someone there decided that he will move to a place in which there is Torah, so he moved to Yerushalayim. But in Cholon he had a *Kolel*, which gave him *parnassah*, and he left it all behind, so that he could be in Yerushalayim, where there is Torah. He decided that he will leave it all so he can move to Yerushalayim, without any plan, not knowing what will be.

After he moved, he asked me, “How did I have the power to do things that are not logical? I needed to make effort to make a living.” He could have asked this question earlier, before he moved.

I asked him, “Why did you move? It didn’t make sense. You first should have found a source of *parnassah* in Yerushalayim, and then you should have moved.”

But the answer is, when a person has the light of *emunah* with him, he can do things that other people aren't capable of, and that is why this person is able to move.

## IN CONCLUSION

*Emunah* means to believe that you really can change. It is not enough to wish to change – you have to really *believe* that there *can* be a change.

The first clarification one needs to make is: How much do you believe you can change? Again, to emphasize, you can't change on your own, and you need Hashem's help. But how much do you believe that you can totally change over with Hashem's help? If you truly believe, you will get helped.

With the help of Hashem, in the next class we will speak about *how* we can go about changing, but first, we must have this ingrained: *believe that you can change*.

This is the gift of Rosh HaShanah – the beginning of a new year of changes. May we receive help from Hashem to believe in this.

17 | Changing Your Will (Part 2 of 3) <sup>42</sup>CHANGING OUR HEART

We will briefly review the previous lesson and then continue. Previously, it was explained that if we want to change, we first need to firmly believe that we can change. Hashem provided a power in His creations with the possibility to change.

When a Jew wants to change, however, it is not simply a desire to change, but it is a deeper kind of change – it is a desire to gain a *lev tahor* (a pure heart), to gain a whole new kind of heart. On Rosh HaShanah we can change through renewing ourselves entirely, for Rosh HaShanah is the “head” of all the months of the year, and the moon symbolizes renewal.

To be general, man is comprised of three layers – the actions, the heart, and the mind. Changing our actions are one part of us, changing our heart is another factor, and changing our mind is a third factor. In the previous chapter we were really speaking about how to change our actions. In this chapter we will discuss how to change our heart, and in the next chapter with the help of Hashem, we will discuss how to change our mind.

The first part in changing our heart is to change our *ratzon* (will). Elul is called “*Days of Ratzon*”, days of will. Rosh HaShanah is the head of all changes, thus, the root of change is to change one’s will. There are many factors involved in changing, but the root of change is to change the will.

This is a two-fold job. One part of it is to give up bad things that we want. But the root of the matter is to reveal our deeper *ratzon*.

The “*Days of Ratzon*” are called so because Hashem desires us in these days. Does that mean that during the rest of the year that Hashem doesn’t want us? Do the “*Days of Ratzon*” end on the 29<sup>th</sup> of Elul, and not during the 10 Days of Repentance? The meaning is that the *ratzon* during the 10 Days of *Teshuvah* is a deeper kind of *ratzon*, a whole new depth to our *ratzon*. During the 10 Days of *Teshuvah*, we can get to the depth of our *ratzon*.

It is not about giving ourselves a *ratzon* that we don’t have previously. Rather, it is about revealing new depth to our *ratzon*. During Elul we can gain a *ratzon*, and during the 10 Days of *Teshuvah*, we can reveal more depth to our *ratzon*.

Acquiring A Strong Will For Holiness

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<sup>42</sup> <http://bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-024-motivating-yourself-holiness>

To say this practically - there are things we want, and there are things we want badly. Why are people not succeeding in their Avodas Hashem and having failures? The failures are only the result. What is the root of all the failures? It is because a person is missing a *ratzon*.

“Nothing stands in the way of the will”. If so, why do people fail? It is because they are missing a *ratzon*. So if a person failed any spiritual test, although it’s true that he failed because it was beyond his capabilities, but if his *ratzon* would have been stronger, though, he would have been able to overcome even something that is beyond his natural capabilities to overcome.

The root of all problems in Avodas Hashem is because people lose their *ratzon*. It has to be a kind of *ratzon* which nothing gets in the way of; such as the will to live. In order to have a real *ratzon* for Avodas Hashem, we need to have a strong amount of willpower to improve, no less than the will to live. A powerful *ratzon* like that will be unstoppable. Hashem is unlimited, and our soul is able to aspire for the unlimited.

The root of the heart is the desires present in the heart. The *middos* and emotions are rooted in *ratzon*. For example, a person wants to love, he wants to hate. There is only one internal war that goes on inside us: we wage war with what we want.

The root of changes is to change the will in the heart, to renew our will. It is not to reveal in ourselves a will for holiness, but to renew the will completely and thus gain a whole new *ratzon*.

The world survives because Hashem wants it to. He renews His will every day, in the present moment. This shows us what the root of change is. Change is about giving a new will to ourselves. We are a new creation every second, not a continuation of the previous moment. Therefore we have a power in our soul to renew our will completely.

It is hard to change something; it is easier to create something anew. If change would mean that we need to change ourselves as we are previously, it would be too difficult. It’s much easier to change when we have the power to give ourselves a new will entirely.

One has the power to have a strong will for something, and this can extend into other desires for holiness. All of Torah learning and all of our avodah are all the ‘garments’ of what we want. We can want Torah, the mitzvos, to fix our *middos* – but it’s all based on what we want. If our learning, mitzvos and *middos* are attempted without first building our willpower, we will have many branches with no root to them. So what is the aspiration we need to have on Rosh HaShanah? We mainly need to acquire a strong will for holiness, and after that, we can direct our will, which will be another part of our avodah. But the very step is to first form a strong will for holiness. This is what it means to gain a lev tahor – to first have a heart that is pure and wants holiness. When we have that, we can further develop.

The will for holiness is the root of all spiritual success, and the lack of will for holiness is the root of all spiritual failures.

## WHAT TO DAVEN FOR ON ROSH HASHANAH

When Rosh Hashanah comes and a person is davening for what he wants, what must he daven for? He must daven that Hashem help him gain a will for holiness, that he should have a *ratzon* in the first place. Hashem created our body, and He also created our desires. We have free will of course to choose what we will desire, but Hashem still created our very desires. So we can ask Hashem to give us a desire for holiness, just as He gave us hands and feet.

The will for holiness is the strongest tool in our possession, once we gain it. Through it, anything can be done.

On Rosh Hashanah, we daven for so many things; we indeed have many aspirations for holiness. I am not speaking of material wants; I am speaking of even spiritual requests. The main spiritual request we need to ask Hashem for on Rosh Hashanah is to ask that we should receive a will for holiness. If we daven for the root and for the branches, this is excellent. But if someone only davens for the branches and not for the root, he is missing the point.

## EXAMPLES OF MOTIVATING YOURSELF

There is a rule that “The heart is pulled after the actions.”<sup>43</sup> When a person does a good deed, what happens to his *ratzon*? Let’s say a person is helping his spouse washing the dishes (In America maybe this is unheard of, but in Eretz Yisrael, it is more normal). After washing the dishes for four days, he’ll already grow tired from washing the dishes, and he feels fatigued at this. When did he have more strength? On the first day he had more strength to wash the dishes. Why didn’t his heart get pulled after his actions? It is because he doesn’t really want to wash the dishes. He’s always against his will in order to wash the dishes.

So how does he gain a *ratzon* to wash the dishes? He feels forced into it, and every day he’s doing something he’d rather not do it, so of course, he hates it more and more as the days goes on. But if he would say to himself that he really has a *ratzon* to wash the dishes, just that it’s hard for him, then he would wash the dishes with the awareness that he is trying to affect his will. If he does that, his heart will eventually make peace with it, and he will indeed gain a *ratzon* to wash the dishes!

We only gave one example of the concept, but the point is always the same. Although “the heart is pulled after the actions”, we see that although we do many mitzvos every day, our heart is not pulled after what we do. We don’t find ourselves gaining a *ratzon* for holiness. It is because we do the mitzvos, but we are not doing it with the awareness of trying to affect our *ratzon*.

The true barometer is: to know what you want, and to know what your deepest will is. One person wants materialistic things, and another person wants spirituality. If two people want

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<sup>43</sup> *Sefer HaChinuch: 15 and Mesilas Yeshtarim Chapter 3*

spirituality, what is their deepest will? A person enjoys something he wants to do. He has more joy in something with the more he wants to do it. So the question is if we are just doing all that we have to do, or if we are increasing our *ratzon* as we do our actions.

## HAPPINESS: EXPERIENCING OUR WILL

This awareness needs to be applied during the rest of the year as well. When we do what we have to do, they must be done with awareness, with paying attention to what we are doing – to do every action with the motivation to increase our *ratzon*, as we do what we have to.

There are many examples throughout the day as well where we can apply this to. Let's say a person really wants to get up in time in the morning so he can daven on time. But if he goes to sleep late, he will get up late and miss the *minyan*. Let's say he gets up on time one day. What does he do? He runs to shul. But is he happy that he got up in time? If he never thought about that, he never became aware that he is in the process of changing his will, and then his action of getting up on time and running to *minyan* will not assist him in changing his will. He has to give himself a second to feel happy that he got up in time, and then his *ratzon* to get up on time will be improved. Without a second to pause and feel happy about his accomplishment, his *ratzon* will never get strengthened. He will run to shul, but he has no time to build his heart.

Let's say a person is shaking the Four Species, and he wants to feel the *simcha* of this. Here he doesn't have to go against his will, because Baruch Hashem, all of us want to do the mitzvah. But does he pause a bit to think about how happy it is to shake the Four Species? If he does, he strengthens his *ratzon* in doing a mitzvah. It's not that he didn't have a *ratzon* at all before; Baruch Hashem, he had a *ratzon*. But the depth of his *ratzon* is what he can change, when he pauses a bit to think about his joy in fulfilling the mitzvah.

A person learned Torah for an hour, or he did an act of *chessed*. Does he ever pause to think about this and breathe it in, and feel happy that he did these actions? If he gives himself this moment to pause and think and feel happy about what he did, firstly, he will feel more alive and happy, and secondly, he increases his *ratzon*. His happiness will increase his *ratzon*, because that is human nature, that when a person is happy about something, he increases his will towards it.

When a person does a good deed but he never pauses to look back at this and feel happy about it, he never accesses his *ratzon*, and his *ratzon* will still feel rebellious inside. A person wants something and buys it and puts it back on the shelf. Does he ever stop to think about how happy he was in buying this item? If a person does something but he doesn't breathe it and experience it, his *ratzon* will never become revealed.

There are many more examples we can give but the point is clear. The question is if we are experiencing what we do with the motivation of increasing our *ratzon*. We need to do actions that increase our *ratzon*, with awareness that we are trying to let our *ratzon* become revealed.

*Simcha* (happiness) is essentially experienced when one's *ratzon* became actualized. A person who drinks a cup of water and never felt thirsty, does he feel happy at this? No - because he never felt a strong *ratzon* for the water. But if a person has come back from the desert and his mouth feels parched, and he finally finds water, he is very happy when he gets the cup of water. Why? Because he had a *ratzon* for the water.

Thus, the more there is a *ratzon*, the more happiness there is when a person actualizes his *ratzon*. When we are happy with something, it is a result of *ratzon*.

Another example: on Purim, when we get *Mishloach Manos*, do we feel happiness at this, or do we just eat the nosh from it? You can experience happiness when you receive it. Every mitzvah can be felt by your soul, where you can then feel happy when you do it and thus you reveal your *ratzon* in doing the mitzvah.

That is the first part: doing actions with awareness to strengthen our *ratzon*.

## DAVENING TO HASHEM FOR HELP

The second part needed in increasing our *ratzon* is to *daven* to Hashem that He help strengthen our *ratzon*. We really cannot do it on our own, for "The task is not upon you to complete". When we try to change our heart, especially our *ratzon*, it can only come as a gift from Hashem.

Often we can see two children who grow up in the same home, yet they are so different from each other, and they end up going up their own separate ways in life, and it's impossible to believe that they are siblings. True, they each used their power of free will, but there is a deeper reason why they go different ways: one of them was born with a strong will for holiness, while the other was born with a weaker will for holiness.

The most difficult obstacle in a person's path is when one doesn't have a *ratzon*. If someone has a *ratzon* but he has difficulties, we can deal with him and help him. But if he has no *ratzon* at all, we cannot deal with him, because there is nothing to work with. The hardest thing is to get someone to believe that you're giving him something good. If he has no will for something, you can't get him to want.

Some people are born with a strong will for holiness, and some are born with a weaker will. But even a person born with a weaker will can cry to Hashem to get a new will.

The deepest *ratzon* of the soul comes to a person only as a gift from Hashem. *Ratzon* is essentially an inner gift [and it can only come to a person when he merits from Hashem, through beseeching Him for it].

A person running from a fire is not just choosing to run; his *ratzon* makes him run. There is a very strong will to live, and we don't have to choose it. Thus, our power of *ratzon* is higher than our power of *bechira* (free will). Therefore, when we want to change our heart, it is not so much about



“choosing” what the right thing is – it is really about changing what our deepest will is. (We are speaking here about changing the heart, not the mind). This is the root of all change.

So the awareness that we need - not just on Rosh HaShanah but throughout the rest of the year - is to get to the depth of our *ratzon*.

## DAVENING TO HASHEM TO WANT HOLINESS

We have many good desires for holiness that we haven't actualized; what do we do about them? For example, if a person wanted to get up in the morning but he isn't succeeding, or he wishes he could stop talking *lashon hora* so he keeps taking on resolutions not to talk *lashon hora*, but he keeps failing. What does he do? He *davens* to Hashem for help - but that still doesn't get to the root of all the problems. Instead, a person has to *daven* to Hashem that he should be given a strong will for *kedushah* (holiness) in general.

## NULLIFYING THE NEGATIVE DESIRES

There are two parts to our *ratzon*. There is our general good *ratzon* for *kedushah* \holiness, and there are various other holy desires we want. The various desires are from our heart; some of them are holy and some are not holy.

Until now, we addressed how to increase our *ratzon* for holiness. But we also have a will for things that are not holy. Every person has a certain line he doesn't cross when it comes to material matters. One kind of person needs to eat a certain amount of food, and beyond that, he doesn't eat, because he considers it gluttonous for him. Another person needs to eat a little more than this in order to feel satisfied. In either case, we all have a certain limit, though, to what we desire. (Unless a person doesn't keep Torah and mitzvos, *chas v'shalom*, he has limits).

We can't fulfill all that we want, as we know. A person who wants a certain amount of money knows he might not get it. But if we see something we want, we can tell ourselves, “Enough.” We don't have to get everything we want. For example, when you see something in the store you want, you can tell yourself, “No.” You make limits for yourself. But does that change your heart? It usually does not change the heart, because the heart will continue to desire it; it is just that you are able to be in control of your desires and not give in. But if we want to change the heart and get rid of our negative desires, for example, if we want to eat more food that we don't need to eat, we can tell ourselves, “Enough.”

What should you think, though, as you hold back from eating more food? Don't tell yourself “I will not eat it.” Instead, tell yourself, “I want to nullify my will to eat it.” Just like we can increase our *ratzon* through our actions, so can we do an action for the sake of nullifying a *ratzon*. When you

hold back from eating the food, do it for the sake of nullifying your *ratzon* to eat the good. Without this awareness, holding back from eating the food will not weaken your *ratzon* to eat the food.

## SUMMARY OF OUR AVODAH

We all know that there are things we want which are not good, like when we look at improper places or when we eat things we don't need. How do we improve? We will summarize the three steps.

1) We need to first firmly believe we can change. 2) We need to pull back from the negative action with the specific [conscious] intention to nullify the evil *ratzon*. 3) We need to daven to Hashem and cry to Him for help. As you hold back from the desire or from the negative emotion, cry to Hashem for help, because ultimately, we cannot do anything on our own, and we need Hashem's help. As a rule, in all that we do, we always need three tools: ***emunah*** (faith) ***avodah*** (work), and ***tefillah*** (prayer). The "*emunah*" aspect here is to believe we can change. The "*avodah*" part is to hold yourself back from the negative action\desire\emotion with conscious awareness that you are trying to nullify your evil *ratzon*. The "*tefillah*" part here is to cry to Hashem for help with this.

## THE ROOT OF ALL OUR AVODAH: WORKING WITH OUR RATZON

The root of all our *avodah* is to work with the *ratzon* of our soul. We all have good and evil desires; the root of evil desires needs to be broken through nullifying them, and the way to build our holy desires is through deepening our awareness to our actions. Our *avodah* is always to "remove ourselves from evil" and then "do good". We "remove ourselves from evil" by nullifying our evil desires, and we "do good" by deepening our good desires.

When a person commits an evil deed, even if it was by "accident", it's really because deep down, he wanted to do it. If he wouldn't want to do evil, he wouldn't do it (unless he is forced). The "days of *Ratzon*" of Elul are here to help us change both our holy *ratzon* and our evil *ratzon*. Thus, it is not enough to hold back from sin – one has to nullify his *ratzon* for the sin.

So we need to get to the root of the evil behind the action and uproot it, and not just to avoid the evil actions.

## IN CONCLUSION

To summarize, before Rosh Hashanah, we must strengthen our *ratzon* for holiness, and believe that we can have a new *ratzon* entirely, and that Hashem can uproot the evil as well from within us.

Although this is indeed a difficult *avodah*, if we feel these words here and we don't forget them, we will be able to cry to Hashem and pour out our heart to Hashem that He help us change our *ratzon*, to strengthen our *ratzon* for holiness and to uproot our evil *retzonos*; and then our obstacles will be removed, so that we can get to our desired *shleimus* (perfection).

18 | Changing Your Mind (Part 3 of 3) <sup>44</sup>DEVELOPING OUR MINDS

When a child is born and is still immature, he only knows of his emotions, and he isn't yet developed in his mind. As he gets older, he knows what it means to feel jealous of a toy that his friend has, and he has all kinds of emotions as well that he experiences. But his mind, for the most part, remains largely undeveloped.

When a child makes the transition from child to adult, he grows out of his childish antics, but as an adult, he is merely onto bigger and better things than when he as a child. He's not a little kid anymore, but that doesn't necessarily mean that he has developed his actual **mind**. Although his emotions have undergone changes since being a child, he might still have the same mind that he had when he was a child, because he has never actually developed the true power of his mind.

Of course, there is no adult who does not have *seichel* (intellect). All adults have some *seichel* to a certain extent. But that doesn't mean that there is no work left to be done with the *seichel*. The mind must be further developed, even as we are adults; there are only a few people who have a highly developed mind. Most people need to continuously work on improving their *seichel* (mind, or intellect). Our *seichel* (mind\intellect) must become further developed as we get older and we mature.

A DEVELOPED MIND DEEPENS OUR EMOTIONS AS WELL

When it comes to improving in our *Avodas Hashem*, we are more familiar with the concept of developing our **heart** - and we usually don't identify that much with developing our **mind**.

We understand, for example, that we need to cultivate our emotions of love, happiness, of closeness to Hashem. That part we know of quite well. But when it comes to working with our mind and developing it, we often think of this as "to know *hashkafah*" (Jewish ideology), or to hear *mussar*, and we tend to be skeptical towards the concept of developing the mind, as if we have never heard of such a thing.

But there is really an *avodah* to develop our *seichel*\mind [just as much as there an *avodah* to access our heart]. The truth is that we cannot even develop our heart's emotions unless we develop our mind.

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-025-developing-our-intellect>

To illustrate, when a person wants to get himself to feel the holiness of Shabbos, what does he do? He might try learning various *sefarim* to awaken himself about Shabbos, such as sefer “*Nesivos Shalom*” on Shabbos Kodesh, and other *sefarim*; but what is he like after Shabbos ends? The feelings of elation go away. Any person who is a bit spiritually attuned surely wants to feel the holiness of Shabbos, which is wonderful, of course; but, for some reason, the feelings of inspiration don’t stay with him.

## ARE OUR FEELINGS JUST EMOTIONS - OR ARE THEY A KIND OF WISDOM?

We make the blessing, “*Asher yotzar es ha’adam b’chochmah*” - Hashem created us all with ***chochmah***, wisdom, and since there is wisdom in all of Creation, we must learn the *chochmah*, the wisdom, that is behind everything.

For example, is the emotion of happiness just an emotion that we experience, or is there really a *chochmah* to it? Most people would respond that happiness is just a “feeling” of happiness, and that it has nothing to do with *chochmah*. But it is really rooted in *chochmah*, for the rule is that everything was created by Hashem with *chochmah*. So a person cannot have real happiness unless he knows the *chochmah* behind happiness!

Another example: When a person wants to feel the joy or holiness of Shabbos, does he have the *chochmah* behind this as well, or does he only have the feelings of elation? If he has the *chochmah* behind feeling the holiness of Shabbos, he will have the root; but if not, it is as if he has a branch without the root.

## WHY ENTHUSIASM CANNOT BUILD US

There are many people who have enthusiasm, but it’s superficial; they have ups and downs in their inspiration, and their inspiration never lasts. Others are deeper than this and they have real inspiration in their spirituality, but even still, they aren’t able to hold onto their inspiration for that long.<sup>45</sup> Why? It is because they are not seeing inspiration as a *chochmah* to them. It is merely a feeling, and feelings do not last.<sup>46</sup>

If a person wants happiness and there is no *chochmah* to it, his happiness will only be temporary. But if there is *chochmah* to his happiness, one’s emotions become properly built, and then they will last. When *chochmah* is the basis of our emotions, there is a firm foundation to our soul, and then our emotions will be lasting.

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<sup>45</sup> Refer to *Fixing Your Fire\_06\_Handling Inspiration*

<sup>46</sup> Refer to the Rav’s *Getting To Know Your Feelings*

If a person bases his *Avodas Hashem* on just trial and error, it doesn't work. A person cannot live based on trial and error; he must properly build his soul and learn the *chochmah* of his inner workings in order to be able to properly save Hashem in a stable way.

Chazal say that “an ignoramus cannot be pious person”. Why can't he be righteous? Why doesn't he just ask his Rav and his Rav will tell him what to do? Okay, so he'll stay an ignoramus, but won't he still know what to do and how to act piously? So why can't an ignoramus be a pious person? It is because Chazal are telling us the fundamental issue that an ignoramus has. The *Mesillas Yescharim* tells us what *chassidus*<sup>47</sup> (piety) is and what it isn't, and he writes that if someone has no *chochmah*, if he can't reflect deeply into matters, then he will never reach *chassidus*.

Many times, people become idealistic and enthusiastic about learning Torah, so they decide that they will dedicate themselves to learning Torah in-depth. They go to a certain *beis midrash* to learn Torah there, but they are met with disappointment from that they feel there. They feel, “This is such a *cold* place!” They don't feel like they are connecting to the place that they come to. Then they come to a place in which they feel warm and enthusiastic towards, because the people there are jumpy and enthusiastic in their spirituality, which draws them in.

Either place, though, is an incorrect place to be in for this person. A place where people are jumpy and overly excited in their spiritual elation is not a place that can **solidly build** one's *Avodas Hashem*. Enthusiasm is temporary; it never lasts. Even if a person tries to keep the extreme enthusiasm to last and he can hold onto it, it is still a childish perspective towards *Avodas Hashem*. This is because enthusiasm cannot build you.

I met someone who told me that he got a lot of *chizuk* (inspiration) from a new *sefer* that came out last week. I asked him, “What did you see in the *sefer*?” He said to me, “No, it's not from anything I saw in the *sefer*. It's just that I was so inspired that I was learning from a new *sefer*. Ah! A new *sefer*!!”

I said to him, “According to your way of your thinking, you should buy a new *sefer* every week!”

Enthusiasm is not what builds us. *Chochmah* is the power that helps us build our emotions properly. Our heart is warm with feelings, and it warms up too much when we lack intellect<sup>48</sup>, thus our heart alone cannot be the basis of our *Avodas Hashem*. We build ourselves when we use our power of *Chochmah*, which builds us in an orderly way.

## KNOWING OUR SOUL

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<sup>47</sup> Editor's Note: “Chassidus” here does not refer to the Chassidic movement, but to religious piety that is unanimous to all Jews, as discussed in *Mesillas Yescharim* Chapters 18-21 (especially in the chapter of “Mishkal HaChassidus.”

<sup>48</sup> See *Tefillah* #0107 – *Balance In Your Avodas Hashem*

The power to build ourselves properly is only accomplished through *Chochmah*. Let's explain this more.

We have a soul. Is the soul a simple thing, or is it complicated? We know that it's not simple. The Vilna Gaon lists 70 forces of the soul<sup>49</sup>, and those are just the roots. There is even more to the soul, a lot more than 70 forces in the soul. If a person does not have *chochmah*, can he use any of the 70 forces of his soul? Can he use even 30 of them, or even 20 of them? He may have yearnings, and joy and elation – all kinds of feelings – but all of these feelings stem from the heart, which he does not know, because he doesn't know the *chochmah* about the heart.

How can a person serve Hashem with his heart, when he doesn't even know what his "heart" even is? A person might try to serve Hashem his whole life and bear in mind the statement of Chazal that "Hashem wants the heart", but he doesn't recognize what his heart is.

You can't recognize what the heart is if you don't have a properly developed *seichel* intellect. Only the *seichel* intellect gives you the power of subtle analysis to try to understand the *avodah* of your heart. Of course, every person has feelings, yearnings, elation and joy in his *Avodas Hashem*; maybe he even jumps sometimes. But in order to build one's *Avodas Hashem* through the heart, there must be a power to analyze the soul and understand it. Without understanding our soul, we can't serve Hashem properly. All of the great people who ever served Hashem properly were people who understood how to work with their souls; they understood the depth of the soul.

In order to understand the soul, we need to develop the power of "subtle understanding". This power only comes to us if we learn Torah with *iyun* (in-depth).

## ENTHUSIASM VS. STABILITY

What is the difference between a real "*oived Hashem*" (a person who truly serves Hashem), and someone who is not a real *oived Hashem*?

One person will hear a *mussar shmues* from a speaker and feels inspired, but the next day, he's back to routine. Maybe the speaker got everyone to be inspired, but the inspiration is gone soon after. There is another kind of speaker who comes that isn't that inspiring and doesn't cause that much excitement, but the people who listen to him well deeply absorb the thoughts he is conveying, and they are affected forever, even though they don't look that excited. The first kind of speaker gave excitement to everyone, but the excitement didn't last. The second kind of speaker didn't give the most exciting shiur, but the words he said were of higher quality, thus, he is the true *Oived Hashem*.

Enthusiasm just doesn't last. Here is another example. A person has a baby, and he's full of excitement and joy. After some time, his excitement goes away. If he gets so excited when he's feeding his baby and keeps stuffing the baby's mouth with food out of his excitement, his child can

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<sup>49</sup> Refer to the Rav's series *Getting To Know Your 70 Forces of the Soul*

choke on the food, Heaven forbid! A person cannot raise a child with enthusiasm. Nothing can be built through enthusiasm.

## LEARNING TORAH IN-DEPTH

Only the *chochmah* of knowing our soul's abilities is what builds us; the power to recognize ourselves. How do we recognize ourselves? Through *seichel yashar* (a straight mind), which is developed through gaining the ability of subtle intellect (which we gain when learning the Torah in-depth).

Thus, an ignoramus who doesn't learn Torah does not have *seichel yashar*. If we ask him if he has *seichel yashar*, he will respond, "Yes, of course I have *seichel yoshor*." But Chazal say that *Daas Torah* is always the opposite of *Daas* of ignoramuses. Why? It is because real *daas* is only gained by one who learns Torah in-depth. A person doesn't have a properly developed mind if he doesn't have deep understanding of Torah.

*Baruch Hashem*, everyone sitting here learns Torah, each according to his own ability; some at day, at night, in middle of the day. This is all wonderful. Let's say a person makes a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul-accounting) and he realizes that he is able to learn for 2 hours a day, and he works for 8 hours a day. He knows that just as he has 8 hours a day to work, so does he need 2 hours a day to learn. With this perspective, there's no difference to how he is approaching his learning. They are both forms of "work" to him...

Of course, *Baruch Hashem* he is using his other time to learn Torah. But he is approaching his learning in the same way he views work! The intention here is not *chas v'shalom* to make fun of anyone who learns Torah. But the point is: A person can still be very far from learning Torah, even though he makes time to learn every day (besides for the fact that he's only learning it for 2 hours a day; that's another problem).

For example, a person is learning *Daf HaYomi*, and he learns it whether it's hard or easy; he has to make sure that he "completes the *daf*." But is this a way to really connect to the holy Torah?

When a person studies any other subject, such as math, and he doesn't know what it says in the book, will he know it? There's no such thing. If you study something, you have to know what you are reading, or else you will not know the information at all.

Of course, learning Torah even when one doesn't understand what he's saying still has spiritual effects on him, because the Torah is called *Torah Ohr*, a Torah of light; it contains spiritual light. There's no doubt about that. But this is not real Torah learning! A *daf Gemara* is a "*daf Gemara*" – one cannot just read it and not understand it.

**Let us emphasize at this point that the aim here is not to be negative towards ourselves.** The point is to realize how we can grow in our learning.



The Maharal Diskin said that a person should know how to learn 40 pages of *Gemara* every day, and also be able to learn 1 page of *Gemara* over 40 days. How does one spend 40 days on 1 page of *Gemara*? How much time can one spend on it already...? However, only a person who never learns Torah in-depth has such a question. When one learns Torah in-depth, he never has such a question, because he actually wishes he could spend even more than 40 days on 1 page of *Gemara*! There is so much more to know in even 1 page of *Gemara*!

## DEVELOPING YOUR POWER OF IYUN\IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING

Learning Torah is not just about coming to the *beis midrash*, hearing a *shiur*, and always coming on time. Learning the Torah is very, very deep.

When a person wants to connect himself to Torah, the superficial part of the issue is how we find time to learn Torah. One needs Heavenly assistance indeed to find time to learn more Torah. But there is more to learning Torah than finding time to learn it. The question one has to ask himself is: “How much quality is there to my learning? Am I clearly understanding what I learn?”

I’ll tell you a story. I know someone who works for most of the day, and he has an hour or two a day in which he learns. I told him that when he closes his *sefer*, he should think about what he just learned throughout the day. After a week, he told me, “I just noticed something. Until now I realized that I was never really reading the *Gemara*!” He began to pay attention to what he was reading in the *Gemara*; he began to notice details, and he began to notice things in his learning that never even realized was written there.

If a person takes the same page of *Gemara* and keeps analyzing it, “What does it say here?”, and he keeps reviewing Rashi again – not just to remember it, but simply for the sake of analyzing it so that one can have his first reading of it! – he will begin to really learn the Torah in-depth.<sup>50</sup>

There are two mental powers we have: *chochmah* (Wisdom) and *binah* (Understanding). *Chochmah* is what we hear from our teachers, and *binah* is the power to understand on your own using the information of the *chochmah*. When one combines *chochmah* and *binah*, he gains *Daas*, the power to “produce” – he can produce *chiddushim* from what he learns and infers.<sup>51</sup>

When a person just goes to a *Daf HaYomi* shiur, he is gaining *chochmah*, but he is not accessing any *binah*. As for *da’as*, he will have no connection whatsoever to *da’as*! He won’t be able to produce any new thoughts. Sometimes he quickly thinks of an answer to the question that the *maggid shiur* said, but he never thought deeply about it; it doesn’t build his mind.

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<sup>50</sup> See 48 Ways of Torah\_05\_Binas HaLev - Building Our Understanding

<sup>51</sup> For more on developing our thoughts through Torah, refer to the Rav’s Getting To Know Your Thoughts

## IYUN IN BOTH LEARNING TORAH AND IN AVODAS HASHEM

In our brain, we have our *seichel*, the intellect. In order to utilize our *seichel*, we need to learn the Torah in-depth. If a person only learns the *Gemara* superficially, it is wonderful that he is learning, but he will never get to the depth of *Avodas Hashem* in this way.

There must be subtle understanding in both our Torah learning and our *Avodas Hashem*, which each require the power of *iyun*, to have in-depth analysis.

There are people who think very superficially and think that people who are “*Oivdei Hashem*” are people who don’t enjoy learning *Gemara*, so all they do is listen to and learn the *mussar* of their Mashgiach, or these people will only learn *Agadta* matters in the *Gemara*, because *Agadta* pulls the heart.

This is all a misconception, because *Avodas Hashem* and *Agadta* also require *iyun*, and *iyun* can only be acquired through learning *Gemara*. Of course, there are some people who turn to *Avodas Hashem* and to learning *Agadta* because they have a hard time with learning *Gemara*. But the truth is that just as Torah requires *iyun*, so does *Avodas Hashem* and using our heart to serve Him require the power of *iyun*. One must acquire deep and subtle understanding of matters in *Avodas Hashem* just as he has to understand *Gemara*.

## HOW TO THINK IN LEARNING THROUGHOUT THE DAY

The Torah contains a subtle kind of understanding, and this is only gained by learning it in-depth. The power to learn in-depth must be accessed constantly.

For example, a person is learning *Gemara* (let’s say we are speaking of someone who only learns for an hour a day). What happens when he closes the *Gemara*? Does he think about what he learned? Or does he wait for the next day to open up his *Gemara* and then he gets back into it? Just because a person closed the *Gemara* doesn’t mean he has to close the sugya he’s learning. One can continue to think into the *Gemara* even after he closes the *Gemara*.

This is the question of all questions one has to ask himself if he wants to utilize his *seichel* and learn the Torah in-depth. Our main power is the power to mentally reflect, not the power to read. Chazal say that there when one learns Torah, first there is “*ligmar*” and then there is “*lisbar*” - first you need to read it and learn it, but then you need to think about it. When are you supposed to mainly think about your learning? It is when the sefer is not in front of you to read. *That* is when you can really think into it.

Recently a Torah-tape organization opened up, so that people can be able to listen to shiurim even when they are traveling. There was a great person who heard about this and reacted, “It is a shame that people won’t think anymore.”

The truth is that it's hard to think about your learning when you are going for 11 hours straight when you're traveling. It's a high level. But if someone is only taking a 4 or 5 hour trip let's say, to a wedding, why does he need a Torah tape in order to learn? Why can't he think by himself into what he's learning? It's easier to think when it's dark.

When a person has to be in a car for so many hours, it's an opportunity for him to develop his power of thought! Instead, a person uses this time to gain more and more knowledge, but he's missing the opportunity of being able to think. Of course, it is wonderful that he is using his time to learn Torah, but he's losing his opportunity to think into his learning! He's losing his power to have deep reflection on his own.

*Avodas Hashem* is built on the power to have deep concentration. It uses our power of thought. Enthusiasm is not the basis of *Avodas Hashem*; that is just imagination. *Avodas Hashem* is based on developing our mind, through using our power to think deeply, and this in turn builds our heart. But the basis of *Avodas Hashem* is to use our power of thought! In order to develop the power of thought, one needs to have areas of Torah which he can think about when he's not in front of a *sefer*.<sup>52</sup>

If someone is learning Torah and he never has *chiddushim*, it shows that something is missing from his learning. If someone doesn't have *chiddushim*, it is an indicator that he isn't thinking enough into his learning. If someone thinks well, he will have *chiddushim* as a direct result.

When learning *Halacha*, if someone learns *Shulchan Aruch* and then he learns the *Mishnah Berurah* (and maybe he first sees the words of the *Magen Avraham* a little, and a little of the words of the *Taz* and the *Machtzis HaShekel*), and he thinks into the words, he will have *chiddushim*. But it doesn't begin with the words of the *Magen Avraham*, the *Taz*, and the *Machtzis HaShekel*. It starts from learning the *Gemara*, then Rashi and Tosafos, and then the words of the Rishonim and Acharonim.

Understandably, this takes a lot of time. But of what other purpose are we supposed to do with our time? What is the purpose of all the time we have in life? This is what we are supposed to do with all our time!

## WHY AVODAS HASHEM IS MISUNDERSTOOD

I hope that the words here are clearly understood.

People are searching for what they call “*Avodas Hashem*”, and for more and more “*Avodas Hashem*.” But we must know the words of the Ramchal, who writes in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim* that *Avodas Hashem* is far from both wise people and from unwise people. It is far from the

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<sup>52</sup> For more advice on this topic, see *Getting To Know Your Thoughts, Chapter 04*, and for more down-to-earth advice, see *Rosh HaShanah\_032\_Preparing For Rosh HaShanah – Questions and Answers With The Rav*.

wise because they don't learn about *Avodas Hashem*, since they view *Avodas Hashem* as just enthusiasm, and they prefer wisdom over enthusiasm. And those who are unwise are also far from *Avodas Hashem* because they don't know that *Avodas Hashem* is a *chochmah*. If you tell such a person that *Avodas Hashem* is a *chochmah*, he will likely respond, "This sounds like a cold attitude towards Yiddishkeit..." But the truth is that *Avodas Hashem* is a *chochmah*! It is not enthusiasm! Enthusiasm can perhaps help a person get started in his *Avodas Hashem*, but it cannot be everything.

Thus, the *Mesillas Yescharim* wrote that *Avodas Hashem* is far from most people, because most people do not know the *chochmah* of *Avodas Hashem*. There are in fact only a few people who know the *chochmah* of *Avodas Hashem*.

It's very difficult to speak like this in any place; let me explain why.

Imagine a *beis midrash* where people are learning *Maseches Bava Kamma*, and someone comes to there to say a *shiur* about a subtle point that has to do with *Maseches Yevamos*. It's highly unlikely that anyone will understand, because since they are learning *Bava Kamma* and not *Yevamos*, it is hard for them to grasp a concept in *Yevamos*. They're not immersed in *Yevamos* then. So too, when people want to hear a *mussar shmuess* before Rosh HaShanah – what does that mean? Does a *mussar shmuess* before Rosh HaShanah automatically purify a person like a *mikveh*? There is no such thing. It's like the convert who came to Shamai and Hilel and asked him to teach him the entire Torah on one foot. There's no such thing.

So why do people want to hear a "mussar shmuess" before Rosh HaShanah? It's because people erroneously think that *Avodas Hashem* is about "becoming enthusiastic", and they think that Rosh HaShanah and *Aseres Ymei Teshuvah* is about "becoming enthusiastic", so they want to hear a speaker.

The purpose of hearing speakers during Elul is not about enthusiasm! What will happen on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei when the enthusiasm wanes? Bring in another speaker?

There is a great lack of understanding about what *Avodas Hashem* is. We must come out of the superficial perspective that *Avodas Hashem* is all about enthusiasm. Of course, there is definitely some purpose to enthusiasm; it is not a bad thing. But *Avodas Hashem* is not defined as "enthusiasm." *Avodas Hashem* is: to understand our soul. The external part of this is enthusiasm, but the essence of *Avodas Hashem* is to know how to use our soul.

#### How To Get Real "Chiyus" (Vitality)

People want to feel alive. Often a person will express, "I felt *chiyus* (vitality) from something." When people felt enthused by something, they feel alive, and if they didn't get a feeling of enthusiasm from something, they don't feel alive. But this is an incorrect attitude. *Chiyus* means to be connected to something because you recognize it well.

Now we can understand what we began to speak about earlier (in Part 1), that we can change on Rosh HaShanah - in both our mind and heart. In order to change ourselves, it's not about gaining more knowledge. It is about utilizing the power of thought, and that is what builds our heart.

Without utilizing the potential of our intellect, we won't be able to do any *avodah* that comes from our heart.

This is the normal routine that we need: First a person needs to learn a *sugya* of *Gemara* in-depth. Then he should learn a *mussar sefer* (such as *Mesilas Yesharim* or *Shaarei Teshuvah*, or other classics). In addition to this, we need to learn *mussar* passionately, as Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote, that one should learn *mussar* in a voice that awakens his emotions. But the emotional aspect is just a part of our *avodah* – it must not be made into everything.

When it comes Shabbos and a person wants to feel the holiness of Shabbos, he might look for a nice *vort*, and he might have some feeling of elation from this, but it won't last. It won't give him the actual feeling of *chiyus* of Shabbos itself.

The basis of all true and inner *Avodas Hashem* is: through learning Torah in-depth. This point must be understood very well. If one really wants to enter *Avodas Hashem*, he must always think about what he learned that day, and throughout the day.

## HOW TO LEARN IN-DEPTH

For example, a person learns *Gemara*, and he comes across a question of the *Gemara*. Does he immediately jump to the answer, or does he try to think of the answer? Or, let's say he's reading Tosafos, and he reads a question. Does he quickly go the answer, or does he first try to think of the answer it? If one always learns in "Question, Answer, Question, Answer" style, without ever pausing to think of the answer, this will never develop his mind. He is simply gaining knowledge, but he will never build his mind.

So before you see the answer to a question of the *Gemara* or Rashi or Tosafos or the Ramban, first think on your own of what the answer might be. Hashem gave you a brain! Use it to think. Even if you don't come up with the answer, you are still gaining tremendously, because you are using your brain. One who does this constantly will be able to arrive at the answers.

In addition to this exercise, try the following. Start a Tosafos and see a question, and don't look at the answer. You go home and before you go to sleep and you're lying on your pillow, think into the question. When one gets up in the morning and he goes to work, he can take the question of Tosafos with him when he goes to work the next morning, on the train or on the bus, and he keeps thinking into the question of Tosafos. If one question of Tosafos isn't enough for you, take with you two or three questions with you that you can think about.

The point is: get yourself used to thinking into what you learn. When you get used to this, you will start arriving at the answers on your own!

It's not so hard to guess the answer of Tosafos or the Rishonim. But there's a very big difference between someone who sees the question and then jumps to the answer, to someone who thought

about the question and that's how he got to the answer. It's a whole different answer, even though it's the same words. It utilizes the power of the intellect and makes your intellect become alive.

An 'alive' person is someone who is utilizing his potential. The Torah is called "*Toras Chaim*", a life-giving Torah, because thinking into it gives a person *chiyus*. This is not acquired by 'knowing' Torah. It is acquired through refining our understanding of our learning.

We can give more examples, but my hope here is that the point of all this is clear.

(The enjoyment that one can feel while he is learning is a result of happiness in learning, and happiness in learning can only come as a result of understanding your learning. However, if one learned and understood Tosafos but he doesn't feel a happiness, he's not getting *chiyus* from his learning, and that shows that his learning wasn't a part of him. If it would be a part of him, it would make him happy. So if he doesn't feel happiness when he finishes a Tosafos, it shows that he didn't reflect deeply into it enough.)

If someone after this shiur goes and accepts upon himself that he will learn *Gemara* in-depth with enthusiasm, then he did not understand any of the words here. A certain way of life was described here, a way to build ourselves – to utilize our intellect through learning Torah in-depth, which leads to recognizing our soul and working with it, and from that, we will come to have real and lasting *chiyus*.

(Learning Torah in-depth will not make you automatically understand your soul and become perfect. Rather, it will help you gain the power of subtle understanding, and then you will have the tools to understanding your soul and knowing how to work with it.)

## THE JOY OF SIMCHAS TORAH

On *Simchas Torah*, there is *simcha* over the completion of the Torah. But does everyone have the same happiness? If a person only has enthusiasm in his learning, but he doesn't use his brain much to think in-depth as he learns, he is not truly connected to his learning.

Compare this to someone who spent a year learning Torah in-depth, and now it comes *Simchas Torah*. Is his happiness a feeling of enthusiasm? It's much more profound; he is enjoying now the fruits of his efforts, a year well spent on learning Torah.

When someone knows how to dance and jump up and down by *Hakafos*, he can do the same each thing each year; it doesn't show that anything in his learning changed since a year ago. If he was so enthused from the Torah, why doesn't he continue to learn Torah as soon as they close the Aron? Why does he keep jumping...? If someone keeps jumping, it shows that his entire learning comes from enthusiasm, and not because he is so connected to his learning...

But a person who dances on *Simchas Torah* after a full year's worth of learning in-depth has a much more profound kind of happiness. He doesn't have to feel enthused, because he has a more

inner kind of happiness. He's connected to his learning - so he's automatically happy towards his learning.

People want *simcha* (joy) and *chiyus* (vitality) in their *Avodas Hashem*. But often this is a desire for superficial *chiyus*. It is not being truthful.

Compare this to the difference between a baby versus someone getting married; or someone dancing on *Simchas Torah* who learned Torah during the year, versus someone who didn't learn Torah during the year. The difference between them is vast.

## IN CONCLUSION

May we merit from Hashem to understand that *Avodas Hashem* become properly built, and that our feelings of enthusiasm, joy, and our other feelings are only built through the power of utilizing our intellect. Using our intellect is what gives us the power of subtle understanding, which helps us understand and develop profound feelings that last – as opposed to feelings that are temporary feelings of elation and excitement.<sup>53</sup>

This is the true *simcha* we can have in our *Avodas Hashem*.

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<sup>53</sup> To further develop this concept, see *Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part 2, Chapters 1-9*.

19 | Why Be Jewish? <sup>54</sup>DO YOU WANT TO BE JEWISH?

When we all stood at *Har Sinai*, Hashem forced us to accept the Torah. The *Midrash* says that Hashem lifted up the mountain above us and said, “If you will not accept the Torah, I will bury you under this mountain.” All of us were forced into the Jewish religion and to accept the Torah. So, we keep the Torah and do everything a Jew is supposed to do. We were forced into this. But do we also want to be Jewish? That is the question.

THE YESHIVA *BOCHUR* WHO FOUND OUT HE'S NOT A JEW!

Rav Ezriel Tauber *shlit"á* tells of a story that one time a *yeshiva bochur*, who was also a big *masmid*, in a top yeshiva -- found out that his grandparents had not converted properly according to Jewish law. That meant that he had just found out that he isn't Jewish.

His friends told him, “Quick – go convert!” He could have converted and become a *ger*. But shockingly, he decided not to convert. He was ecstatic that he had found out that he wasn't Jewish. He said, “Why should I remain Jewish?” Now, imagine if any of us would find out that we are not Jewish. What would we do? Would we go run to convert?

Imagine you find out that you are not Jewish. What would you do? Would you quickly take the next plane to Florida to relax at a non-Jewish beach? Would you go run to convert – or would you engage in some non-Jewish activities? If Hashem would give us the choice not to be Jewish, what would we decide?

DO WE WANT THE MITZVOS?

Another question: If Hashem would let us decide which *mitzvos* to keep and which *mitzvos* we don't want to keep, what would we decide? If we had the ability to cut back some *mitzvos* and keep the ones that aren't hard, would we do it? Do we want to be Jewish? That is the *ultimate* question.

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/womans-world-01-thinking-about-life>



## ELUL -- DAYS OF WILL

Do we really want Yiddishkeit? *Elul* is called *Y'mei Ratzon*, Days of Will. Do we have the will to be Jewish? Non-Jews are also judged on Rosh Hashanah. What is the difference between our Rosh Hashanah and their Rosh Hashanah? There are non-Jews who also prepare for Rosh Hashanah. What is the difference between us and them when it comes to Rosh Hashanah?

Do we really want Rosh Hashanah, or would we rather be spared the pain of being judged? Do we feel forced into this day and rather do without it? Yes, life is so hard – we don't like our job, or what we have to do in the house, and in general, our whole life doesn't go the way we want. But what do we really **want** in life anyway? Another question (this is for men): When we learn Torah – are we learning because someone put pressure on us to learn, or because we really want this?

We need to do some thinking.

## WHAT ROSH HASHANAH MEANS TO A JEW

There is an essential difference between a Jew and a non-Jew. A non-Jew might be very religious and take Rosh Hashanah seriously, but he'd rather do without it. We, the Jewish people – when we act in the true way we are supposed to be – we look forward to Rosh Hashanah. We want this.

Is Rosh Hashanah just falling upon us – like someone who falls into the ocean and is struggling to save himself? Or do we want it? Rosh Hashanah is a day to declare Hashem's kingship over us. That means that we are declaring that Hashem rules our lives – every last detail. **Do we want that?**

Rosh Hashanah is essentially a day of happiness. It can be a day where we happily accept Hashem into our life if we choose and want to. You don't need me to tell you this I did not come here to say a *drasha* for Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah will come upon us whether I speak or not. Even if we would not accept Hashem's kingship over us, He is still the king who rules over us. I am just asking you a question: Do we want that Hashem should rule over us, over all our life – every aspect of our life? This is the ultimate question before Rosh Hashanah.

Have you ever thought one day in your life what the purpose of life is? A person can learn Chumash and even the whole Tanach. That is a wonderful thing, but it can be just "history" to a person, because he has never thought about what the purpose of life is. The question we must ask ourselves is: Why are we living? I didn't come here to give a *drasha*. I think that eventually all of you will forget that I ever came here to speak, and you will forget me. Maybe you are a little inspired right now, but eventually you will forget this whole *drasha*. The year will come and go, and next year will be Rosh Hashanah again, and this year's *drasha* will be forgotten. I didn't just come here to speak and say a *drasha*. So what will remain of this *drasha*? Am I just wasting your time?

What you can take out of these words. For two minutes a day, just two minutes, think: Why am I living? What is my life about? If that is what results from this whole *drasha*, then that is enough.

I hope that what I have said are not merely nice “ideas”, but that it will be practical for life.

Every day, think for a few moments: Who am I? Why did I come onto this world? What is the purpose of my life? (Before I know what Hashem wants from me – what do I want from myself...?)

## 20 | When The Yetzer Hora Attacks<sup>55</sup>

### “AND YOUR HOLY SPIRIT, DO NOT TAKE FROM ME”

In the *Selichos*, we ask Hashem, **אל תשליכני מלפניך, ורוח קדשך אל תקח ממני**, “*Do not cast me away from before You, and Your holy spirit, do not take from me.*” We are asking Hashem not to take away His holy spirit (*ruach hakodesh*) from us.

What kind of *ruach hakodesh* is this referring to? Is it referring to the high level of *ruach hakodesh* that comes all the way at the end of the ladder of growth which the Sage Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair describes, as brought in *Mesillas Yesharim*?

Simply speaking, we can answer that the *tefillah* here is applicable to those rare individuals who do reach *ruach hakodesh*. If we go with that answer, then *Klal Yisrael* is *davening* to Hashem that He should not take away the *ruach hakodesh* from those individuals.

According to this approach, though, it is not a personal request, and it is rather a request for the whole of *Klal Yisrael*. If so, though, why do we say “do not take from *me*”, which implies that it is something that applies to us as individuals?

### OUR RUACH/BECHIRAH

It is written, “*A pure heart You created me with, and a proper spirit You prepared within me.*” Every person has in himself a “*ruach*”, a life spirit, which Hashem has breathed into him. When a person dies, his *ruach* returns to its Source. But as we live, the *ruach* of Hashem lives within our body and keeps us alive.

The Vilna Gaon explains that it is essentially our power of *bechirah*, our power to choose. Whenever we choose, we are choosing from the power of our *ruach* that is found within us. But the *Gemara* says that every day, the *yetzer hora* gets stronger, and it wants to destroy a person; and if not for Hashem helping the person, the person cannot overcome it.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> <http://bilvavi.net/english/Elul-014-when-yetzer-hora-attacks>

<sup>56</sup> *Sukkah* 52a

A person has *bechirah*, he has a *ruach*, but the *yetzer hora* is stronger than one's *bechirah*. A person really cannot defeat the *yetzer hora*. The only way to defeat it is when Hashem is helping the person. Hashem helps the person fight the *yetzer hora*. How does Hashem help a person? Through His "*ruach hakodesh*" that He instilled in each person.

Our own *ruach/bechirah* is not strong enough to defeat the *yetzer hora*. The help that Hashem gives us to fight evil passions can only be through His *ruach hakodesh* that He placed within us. When it is accessed, the light of Hashem is shined upon the person, and then the *yetzer hora* can be defeated.

Choosing between good and evil will not help, because the *yetzer hora* is stronger. But Hashem helps the person through giving Him his own *ruach*, His "*ruach Elokim*". When a person is trying to choose to do the right thing, Hashem helps him and gives the person of His own *ruach* to fight the *yetzer hora*. When a person really wants to do good and choose good, Hashem then steps into the picture and gives Him a *ruach* that is far stronger than the person's natural *ruach* he is born with.

The person is the one choosing to do good, but the *ruach* within him is still not strong enough to fight the *yetzer hora*. Only when Hashem gives the person His *ruach* does the person become enabled to actually defeat the *yetzer hora*.

So we are not dealing with the high level of *ruach hakodesh* that Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair describes. We are referring to a far more basic level of *ruach hakodesh*, which Hashem places in each Jew - as long as the person chooses to do good.

We must absorb this idea and internalize it. First we need to understand it and then we need to actually feel it (it should be turned from *daas* of our brain into *daas* of the heart).

## CHOOSING GOOD OVER EVIL: WE CANNOT DO IT ON OUR OWN

Every time a person chooses, sometimes he chooses good, and sometimes, he chooses evil, *rachamana litzlan*. But the main issue lies in what we are thinking as we are about to choose what to do. Even when one chooses good over evil, if he thinks that it's coming from our own power, this is the root of why we fall.

Man should never think that his own *ruach* is strong enough to defeat the *yetzer hora*. If he does, he's already setting himself up for failure. He might be full of conceit and tell himself that "I can do anything!" but the truth is, *Chazal* say that the *yetzer hora* is stronger<sup>57</sup>. Our *bechirah* is essentially to realize that we need the *ruach elokim* of Hashem to help us.

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<sup>57</sup> *Sukkah* 52a

When we ask of Hashem for forgiveness, from our sins – each to his own - it appears to simply be a request that we be forgiven for the *actions* of what we did which were improper. But the inner meaning of it is to ask Hashem for forgiveness over the *reason* that caused us to sin.

It is not mainly about what happened, what action of sin the person did; it's mainly about the reason that causes one to fall in the first place. This is because if one uproots the sin but he didn't uproot the reason that caused him to sin, he will just keep sinning again. But if he uproots the reason that brought him to sin, then he will have no reason to sin again.

What does it mean to do *teshuvah* over the reason that made one sin? We are not talking about someone who sins intentionally. We are speaking about a person who wants to do the right thing, but that his evil inclination overcame him, as it is with all of us, each to his own. What is the root of the matter?

From the prayer of “*Do not cast me away from before You*”, we can understand what the root of sin is. The root of why people succumb to evil, *Chazal* say, is because of the *yetzer hora*, and that the *yetzer hora* gets stronger every day, and if not for Hashem's help, a person cannot overcome it<sup>58</sup>. Why does a person fall as he's choosing between good and evil? It is because he didn't have Hashem's help with him.

## HASHEM'S POWER - WITHIN

One kind of fall is where a person never wanted to choose the right choice to begin with. He simply fulfills the evil desire without even trying to choose between good and evil. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that this is a kind of person who is living his life on the wrong path, thus his *teshuvah* is that he will have to uproot himself entirely from the way he's living. We are not talking about this kind of person.

We're talking about the kind of person who really wanted to do the right thing (such as most people who grow up in the *frum* Torah world), but he fell to his *yetzer hora*. After all, there are *nisyonos* (trials) that a person faces. What was the reason a person fell to the sin? It was because Hashem wasn't in the picture.

Had he enlisted Hashem's help, he would have been able to defeat the *yetzer hora* when it attacked. Without Hashem in the picture, a person is torn between his *bechirah*: “Should I do it? Should I not do it? Should I do it? Should I not do it...” He can't take the pressure anymore of having to decide, and at some point, he falls to the *yetzer hora's* voice.

Had he put Hashem into the picture, he wouldn't have fallen. If he did fall, it must be because he didn't reveal Hashem's Presence in his situation.

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid*

But why wasn't Hashem in the picture? Don't *Chazal* say that Hashem helps a person overcome the *yetzer hora*? It is because Hashem doesn't always help the person when he's facing his *yetzer hora*. One has to enlist Hashem's help by turning to Him from beforehand. It is when one recognizes the *ruach Elokim* that is really within him. Hashem's holy Spirit is placed within man, and it only needs to be accessed. It is found in the depths of one's soul.

When one is choosing between good and evil, and he turns to Hashem for help, he must not think that he can overcome the *yetzer hora* from his own strength. He must recognize that it is only Hashem who can fight his war for him.

If a person wants to choose the right thing and he attempts to wage war with the *yetzer hora* on his own, he will surely fail. But when one deeply believes and realizes that he really cannot do it on his own - as our Sages say that it's impossible to win the *yetzer hora* without Hashem's help - and along with this, he also realizes that the *ruach Elokim* of Hashem is found within him and that it can help him, and that only Hashem's power can help him - only with this perspective can a person overcome the *yetzer hora*.

On the same note, if someone did overcome his *yetzer hora*, he must not think that it was his own power of *bechirah* that enabled him to win. It didn't happen simply because he chose to listen to the right thing. He must feel that it was only because of Hashem's help that he was able to win. Hashem must have given him the strength of heart to be able to succeed over the *yetzer hora*.

In all of the *nisyonos* (trials) that a person faces with his *yetzer hora*, it is not enough to simply intellectually realize that we need Hashem's help to win. It must be a recognition of our heart, that any time we succeed over the *yetzer hora*'s arguments, we must feel that it is only because Hashem helped us.

## IN SUMMARY

So it looks like this. As one is facing a particular *nisayon* with his *yetzer hora*, he must turn to Hashem and request His help. And after he has succeeded, he must feel and recognize that it was only Hashem who gave him strength to win.

Thus, the main aspect of falling to a sin, which we ask forgiveness from Hashem for, is when we don't enlist Hashem's help, and we think that we do it all alone, as if we are mighty and strong and that we can do it on our own. But that is the root reason of why we fall to a sin. When we think we are alone, we fall. We must remember that Hashem is with us, and then we can withstand.

"Do not cast me away from before You." When a person has a *nisayon* with his *yetzer hora*, if Hashem casts him away, he has no chance in defeating the *yetzer hora*, because he cannot do it on his own. Thus we ask Hashem not to be cast away. It is a prayer that encompasses all of our life, but it is especially applicable to our *nisyonos* with the *yetzer hora*. When we find ourselves in a *nisayon* with the *yetzer hora*, we need to have Hashem's help.

And then we ask Hashem, “*And Your holy spirit, do not take from me*” – because if we don’t reveal Hashem’s holy spirit that has been placed within us, we do not have the power to defeat the *yetzer hora*.

## PREPARING

Therefore, whenever we have a *nisayon* with the *yetzer hora* – and on a more subtle note, it is not only when we have the *nisayon*, but even **before** the actual *nisayon* comes – we must recognize and feel that Hashem is with us, and we must draw upon His Presence as He is with us in our *nisayon*. Then we can turn to Him for help.

In whatever *nisayon* we face, we must examine ourselves deeply and ask ourselves if we think we can do it on our own, or if we realize that it’s only Hashem who can help us succeed. If one feels that it is Hashem’s power within him that can help him, he wouldn’t fall to the sin. If he did fall to the sin, it must have been because he did not reveal the *ruach Elokim* within him.

## THE PLAN

We ask Hashem for forgiveness, and we must certainly feel remorse over the action of the sin. But the main thing we ask forgiveness for is for the reason that brought us to sin. The reason we sinned was because we didn’t bring Hashem into the picture, for had we enlisted Hashem’s help, we never would have fallen to the sin.

If a person just asks Hashem to be forgiven for his sins of the past year but he continues his life as usual, thinking that he’s alone in his struggles with his *yetzer hora*, there’s no doubt that he’ll continue to fall again and again. He is missing the point of why we ask Hashem for forgiveness.

He must learn to take a new route than what he is used to in his *nisyonos*. We ask Hashem not to take away His holy spirit from us, and this is an actual power we can feel as we find ourselves in a *nisayon* with the *yetzer hora*.

The more a person feels Hashem as a reality as he’s in a *nisayon*, and he feels that his own *ruach* cannot win, he can then turn to Hashem in prayer and ask Hashem that He not remove His holy spirit from him. From this recognition and from this prayer, one will be able to succeed over the *yetzer hora*.

The more a person thinks he is alone in his struggle with the *yetzer hora*, the more he is in danger of falling. But the more he realizes that he can only succeed in life with Hashem’s help, and especially when it comes to his *nisyonos* with his *yetzer hora*, he will be able to succeed, when a *nisayon* comes.

Thus, when we come to ask Hashem for forgiveness over our sins, we must build for ourselves a way for the rest of the year in which we can succeed.

## IN CONCLUSION

These words are not here to be mere inspiration; it is a way of life. If it is inspiration, then it will only last for some time, and then you will need new inspiration when it comes next Rosh HaShanah.

But if we turn this into a way of life – when we recognize that we need to always include Hashem in all the parts of our life, including our darkest struggles, and that Hashem is near us and with us – as real and as palpable as can be – we will then receive the strength from Hashem to overcome.

May we merit from Hashem, all of us together with the rest of *Klal Yisrael*, that we should not ever feel that we are alone when the *yetzer hora* attacks. Rather, Hashem is near you, and with you. When we draw upon His Presence, we can then merit Hashem's help to overcome the *yetzer hora*'s temptations. May all sin be removed from the world, whereupon Hashem's Presence and Glory will be fully revealed upon the world.<sup>59</sup>

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*59 Editor's Note: In relation to this derasha, see Tefillah #0149 (Source of Your Strength) and Tefillah #0155 (Seeing The Daily Miracles), and Getting To Know Your Thoughts #017 (Using Imagination For Holiness).*

21 | The Cure To Loneliness <sup>60</sup>HASHEM ALWAYS HEARS

אלוקינו (אב הרחמן) שמע קולינו ה' אלוקינו "Hear our voice, Hashem our G-d." We ask Hashem in this blessing of Shemoneh Esrei that our voice "be heard" when we pray.

It is understandable that we ask Hashem to have mercy on us, as we describe later in this blessing. But why do we daven that our prayers should be heard? Hashem knows everything – nothing is hidden from Him. So He is obviously hearing us as we pray. Why then must we daven that our voice be heard? Does He not hear us?

Our Sages state that if a person doesn't have merits, his prayers aren't heard. For example, the wicked king Menashe, when he realized he was about to die, began to scream out to Hashem in prayer to be saved. The angels in Heaven argued with Hashem that because he has no merits, he does not deserve to be answered. So it seems that Hashem doesn't always "hear" a prayer, because it depends on the accrual of merits.

However, the issue is not whether Hashem 'hears' the prayer or not. He hears every person praying. The entire issue is: Is a person talking to Hashem as if he would talk to a friend? The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that when a person prays to Hashem, he should talk to Him as when he talks to a friend.

Our original state, before the sin, was to talk to Hashem directly with no other calculations, and it was only after the sin that man become deviating and he lost the direct connection with Hashem. Man was created *yoshor*, upright, and after the sin, mankind fell into *cheshbonos rabim*, "many calculations" – we deviated from our original pure state. Our *avodah* is to return to *seichel hayoshor* (our original straight-mindedness) and leave the *cheshbonos rabim* ("many calculations") we are in.

SENSING THE EXISTENCE OF HASHEM

A person might know, intellectually, that Hashem is everywhere and that He can be reached anywhere through prayer, but it might be entirely intellectual knowledge, and it is not yet a feeling by him that can be sensed.

To illustrate, when two friends are near each other, they can whisper; when they are far away, they have to call out to each other. When there is closeness, they talk together in a soft tone, even in

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-131-cure-loneliness>



a whisper, because they can hear each other. When a person is *davening* to Hashem, he doesn't always realize that he's in front of Hashem. He might know that he's *davening to* Hashem and be aware of it, but he doesn't know that Hashem is right in front of him. Therefore, he doesn't think that Hashem is hearing him very clearly. He might daven louder, because he thinks that *davening* louder will get Hashem to hear him...

The Kotzker Rebbe zt"l pointed out that the people of Ninveh, who were non-Jews, screamed out to Hashem in order to be saved - whereas a Jew *davens* silently to Hashem. A Jew is close to Hashem, therefore, he can whisper to Hashem and be heard, whereas a non-Jew, who is not close to Hashem, has to scream out to Hashem in order to be heard. Only a Jew possesses the ability of a silent cry in his prayers to Hashem. Therefore, a Jew who needs to daven loudly to Hashem and doesn't understand that Hashem can always hear him is missing a basic understanding about the essence of a Jew.

Thus, when we ask Hashem that He should hear our prayers, it is not because He doesn't hear and we want to get Him to hear. It is so that we should realize that we are in front of Hashem and feel that Hashem is listening to us. The prayer "Hear our voice" in Shemoneh Esrei is thus meant for *us* to realize that indeed, Hashem is hearing us. When the light of our soul shines, we can feel Hashem's existence, and we can feel it all the time with more we reveal the light of our soul. This helps us feel that Hashem is hearing our voice.

This understanding is not achieved through intellectually reflecting about it; it is something you can palpably sense. You can reflect about *emunah* with your intellect and you can know what it is conceptually, but you can't feel a sense of Hashem just through your intellect. Rather, only when you feel and sense Hashem can you know what this experience is. In order to achieve this, we should know that although *tefillah* is called *avodah*, first, we have an *avodah* to begin to recognize Hashem, and upon that our *tefillos* gain greater meaning. Generally, if we purify our existence through Torah and *mitzvos*, we reveal the light of our soul upon ourselves, and then we can recognize Hashem as a reality. This is true in the general sense. But besides for this, we must know the following.

## TALKING TO HASHEM MORE OFTEN

One of the Sages said, "If only a person would pray the entire day."<sup>61</sup> What does this mean? It doesn't mean to daven 24|7. Even the entire day wouldn't be enough to sing all of Hashem's praise. Rather, it means that although we daven three times a day through the three prayers that our Sages established, that's not enough to recognize Hashem as a reality - even though we talk to Hashem for three times a day. If a person only talks to Hashem when he *davens* three times a day, what happens? The rest of the day takes away from that state of closeness, and he loses all his gains, just as a person who keeps interrupting his Torah learning, which causes him to lose his Torah learning.

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<sup>61</sup> *Berachos 31a*

Besides for the three times a day we daven, our life is supposed to be filled with talking to Hashem throughout the day. That is the inner kind of life. This is how the entire day becomes filled with *tefillah* – to keep talking to Hashem throughout the day.

When you live with people in the house, you talk to them. So too, we live with Hashem in our life. The more we realize that, the more we can realize that we need to talk to Him all the time, and not just when we daven three times a day. Living with Hashem will result in talking to Him all the time. If one gets used to talking to Hashem, in turn, he can feel Hashem's existence more and more.

This inner way to live life is hidden from most people. Talking to Hashem doesn't mean to only thank Him or ask Him for things. It means that because we live with Him in our life, that is why we talk to Him. That is how we include Him in all aspects of our life.

Rashi says that the Torah is called *aishes chayil* (woman of valor) because when one exerts himself in Torah, the Torah reveals its secrets, just like a wife tells her secrets to her husband. When a person lives a life of *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li* (I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me), he talks to Hashem all the time, because he realizes that he lives with Him in his life.

This entire idea might sound strange to people when they first hear it. But when a person understands the truth of these words, when he absorbs them and internalizes them, he transforms - entirely.

## OLD AGE AND LONELINESS

How painful it is to see the lonely people on this world. Many people on this world feel terribly lonely; even people who have family and friends still feel lonely inside. People seek more and more friends in the hope of trying to fill their loneliness, and it doesn't help.

In the younger years, most people are very busy in whatever they are involved in – whether it is family or livelihood or health. People are bogged down from all their various responsibilities. But when people get older and the responsibilities of life lessen, and the body grows weak, then people begin to take their minds off the physical troubles of life, and instead, they begin to become more internal, and naturally, they feel lonely.

Older people will often get renewed vitality from their grandchildren who come to visit their house sometimes, or from kind people who come to visit them to cheer them up, but for the most part, they feel lonely all the time. Why is it that so many old people feel lonely all the time? It is because they never lived life correctly until now.

Old age is the greatest testimony to what happens to a person who never developed a relationship with Hashem when he was younger and never regarded Hashem as the main companion to have in life. When they were younger they were busy, so they didn't feel lonely, but when they get older and they have a lot less to do, the loneliness hits them.

Life is not mainly about having friends. It is about making Hashem into your companion – and He is our only true companion. He is the companion who was with us all along, from beginning until end, and He is the companion that we take with us to the grave.

If a person would only realize this, he won't need friends so much. Of course, he will still need to 'schmooze' a little, because the lower part of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*/animalistic layer of the soul) has some need to socialize. But a person who spent his time talking to Hashem a lot will **mainly** feel fulfilled from his relationship with Hashem, and he won't suffer from loneliness that much. When old age comes, his mind will become more settled, as *Chazal* say, that "the minds of Torah scholars become more settled as they get older". His body will weaken of course, but his soul will feel serene inside, because he doesn't suffer from the natural loneliness of old age.

It is very painful to watch all the old people in this world, generation after generation, who get lonely. The old people get lonely, and their children have to come visit them so that they won't be lonely. Of course, it's a *mitzvah* for the children to visit them; it is the *mitzvah* of honoring parents, and it is a kindness for them. But we must not think that this is an ideal kind of life for us to want to follow. We need to develop our life in a way that we don't get lonely when we get older.

## BEGINNING TO TALK TO HASHEM MORE OFTEN

If a person gets used to talking to Hashem all the time, every day, every hour, at first it will be superficial lip service, but a person can keep doing it and he will find that he is more sincere each time. It is impossible to give exact guidance on how to talk to Hashem.<sup>62</sup> But the general lifestyle should be that a person keeps talking to Hashem throughout the day. When you finish *davening*, talk to Hashem - simply! You can do it mentally or verbally.

Throughout the day, keep talking to Hashem about your problems and your joys. Just like a person includes his closest friend in all his issues, happy or sad, so can a person include Hashem in all aspects of his life, all the time. This chips away at one's loneliness. Most people in the world are really lonely! Even people who have tons of friends can still be very lonely – deep down, they are lonely. Only someone who forms a deep connection with Hashem and realizes that Hashem is his true companion will be saved from the pain of loneliness. There are many things a person will gain from talking to Hashem more often throughout the day. It will help a person come out of himself, more and more, and it will help him sense more and more of the existence of Hashem.

Thus, when we *daven* in Shemoneh Esrei that Hashem should hear our voice, it is to send ourselves a message, that we must realize that Hashem is our companion - who hears our voice. It is something we must deeply realize.

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<sup>62</sup> It may be helpful to see *Bilvavi Part 5 – "Fundamentals In Avodah"*.

## IN CONCLUSION

*Elul* until Yom Kippur is 40 days of *tefillah*; Moshe davened for these 40 days consecutively. How can a person daven so much? It means to live a kind of life in which a person includes Hashem in all aspects of life, that he always talks to Him throughout the course of the day. That is how a person can reach forgiveness by the time it comes Yom Kippur, to be purified again and return to his original state, to leave the *cheshonos rabim* and return to the original, purified state of mankind: *yoshor*.

This is the true and inner kind of life – one who deeply connects to Torah, and to Hashem Himself, every day, all the time, in a true and inner way, forming the true bond with the Almighty G-d.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Refer also to the translation of the Rov's commentary on *Mesillas Yesharim* – "Your True Companion."

## 22 | The Essence of Hearing Shofar<sup>64</sup>

### VOICE AND PRAYER

שמע קולינו – “Hear our voice.” We ask Hashem to hear our “voice”. There is a big difference between a voice (*kol*) and a prayer (*tefillah*). A prayer is when we move our lips in prayer and we express ourselves through words. But a voice has no words to it.

The sound of the *shofar* is a sound that we hear, and it does not come wrapped in any words. When there are no words or letters, it is a voice, a *kol*.

In every word, there are the words as well as a sound/voice in it. During the rest of the year, we *daven* through *tefillah*; our voice is wrapped in the words we express through our power of speech. But during *Elul* and through Rosh HaShanah, there is not just *tefillah* – there is *shofar*, a sound/voice with no words to it. These days are about the inner essence of speech - which is the voice behind them.

### HEARING SHOFAR IN ELUL: THE SOUND OF PRAYER

During *Elul*, when we blow *shofar* after *davening*, it's not merely that we have a *mitzvah* to hear *shofar*, and that the rest of our prayers are as usual. Rather, *because* we hear the *shofar* during these days, our prayers as well are given greater meaning.

The essence of these days of *Yomim Noraim* is that our prayers during these days are not mainly verbal. Our prayers during these days are mainly about the voice behind them, which is the essence of prayer.

We will explain the difference between verbal prayer and non-verbal prayer.

Tefillah (Verbal Prayer) Stems From Da'as (Understanding)

There are three aspects to *tefillah*/prayer: 1) *Tefillah* is called “*avodah* of the heart”, because in *tefillah*, our desires of our heart are expressed. 2) The second aspect of *tefillah* is that our voice is heard when we pray. In Shemoneh Esrei, though, our voice cannot be heard, and it is only our lips which are heard. 3) The third aspect of *tefillah* is the words of prayer that we express; man is defined as a social creature.

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-132-essence-hearing-shofar>

*Tefillah* is normally stemming from our power of *daas* (mind/awareness). A child cannot express himself properly, and the reason behind this is, because he has no *daas* yet. “*Daas* is hidden in the lips” – when one has *daas*, he can express himself properly, through the words of his mouth. So our power of speech is affected to the degree that we utilize our power of *daas*. The words we speak are a combination of letters, and *daas* is known as the connecting force.

A child cannot speak properly, because he has no *daas*. Yet, he still has a voice which he can express himself with and cry. It is written, “*Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet.*” It is also written, “*Hear my voice, see the tears of my eyes.*” Even when a person has no *daas*, his voice can be heard. A child often cries, because all he has is his voice; he cannot express himself in any other way.

#### Shofar and Crying: A Sound of Prayer Without Words

During these days of *Elul*, in which we hear *shofar*, it is mainly a time to use our voice, the essence behind our prayers. It is to realize that our cries can be heard even if we cannot express ourselves properly, like a child who cries to his father because he has no other way to express himself.

Hearing the *shofar* is to hear a sound of a cry. The Rambam says that *shofar* is a hint to us that we need to be awakened. What is its message? The superficial understanding is that it means for us to “beautify our actions”, for *Shofar* is an allusion to the words “*Shapru maaseichem*”, “beautify [improve] your deeds”. This is true, but the inner aspect of hearing *shofar* is to hear the sound behind it – to realize that we need to use our voice and cry to Hashem.

Rosh HaShanah is the beginning of the year – it is like when we are a child, who is at the beginning of his life, who can only express himself through his voice and crying. During these days of *Elul*, we can be like a young child in how we relate to Hashem as our Father, and cry to Him, even if we don’t know how to express ourselves properly.

Our Rabbis wrote that if a person can’t get himself to cry easily during *Elul*, he should try to do things that get him to cry. The point of this is not to act mechanically. The point is to try to enter inward into ourselves, to the part in us that is like a child which calls innocently to Hashem as a child calls to its mother.

The sound of the *shofar* during *Elul* adds to our voice of crying. On Rosh HaShanah all voices are nullified to one sound, the sound of the shofar.

#### Using Your ‘Inner Child’ To Cry To Hashem

We all had a time in which we were a child. Our soul has gone through much since we were children, until today. Deep down there is a “child” still in us; it is just covered over. Each of us was once pure at the beginning, and we had the power to cry to our source. We may have forgotten that we can do that, but we still have that power.

## ‘DAY OF REMEMBRANCE’: REMEMBERING YOUR BEGINNING

Rosh HaShanah is called *Yom HaZikaron*, “Day of Remembrance”, and the simple meaning of this is because Hashem remembers the act of Creation on Rosh HaShanah. But the deeper meaning is because on Rosh HaShanah we can remember ourselves, all our actions, so that we can repent. We can remove all the concealment on us by remembering our beginning point.

Rosh HaShanah can make us remember who we truly are and thus cause us to do true *teshuvah*. But even more so, it is the day to remember our “first day” of Creation – the original state of our soul, when we a child, when we were pure and we could cry innocently.

That remembrance is not merely an intellectual awareness. It is a power in the soul to remember its beginning. When we remind ourselves of it, our soul is connected to what *shofar* is.

### Connecting To The Sound of the Shofar

Even without having this awareness, we are still obligated in *shofar* of course, but the essence of *shofar* will be lost. The essence of Rosh HaShanah is *Yom Teruah*, “Day of Sound”, that there is no other sound on that day except the sound of *shofar*, the sound of that beginning cry, which we remind ourselves of.

This is how our soul can connect to the *shofar* and hear it in an inner way. Without hearing *shofar* in this way, a person is being spiritually deaf.

## THE POWER OF CRYING

שמע קולינו, “Hear our voice” – we are asking that our voice not only be heard in prayer, but that the essence of our prayers should be “*avodah* of the heart”, from how we would cry as a child.

*Tefillah* is usually with *daas* – our awareness that can be expressed with our power of speech. But it begins with *avodah* of the heart, with the will of a person, the yearnings from the depths of the heart.

Our power to cry (*bechi*) is a deeper power that we have than the power of *daas*; whether it is to cry out of joy, or pain.

In the month of Av, when cried from sadness. In *Elul*, we do not cry from sadness, but because crying is a form of prayer. In a deeper sense, we cry in *Elul* because of the yearning for closeness with Hashem during these days.

During the rest of the year, there is also *tefillah*, but during these days of *Elul*, the *tefillah* is not just from our mouth; it is rather with the sound of the *shofar* – it is from the “*avodah* of the heart”. It begins in the heart, and it is not just from inspiration and emotion, but from crying - the innermost depths of the heart.

Sometimes we cry from missing something; that is also part of why we cry in *Elul*. We are indeed missing certain spiritual levels, and we need to be in pain from this and cry about it. But the deeper

aspect of why we cry in *Elul* in our prayers is because of the closeness with Hashem, “*Ani L’Dodi V’Dodi Li*”, (“I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”), like a child who cries for its mother – as it is written, “*Like an infant on its mother’s lap.*”

Perhaps that’s why Hashem made it that *yeshiva bochurim* return to yeshiva in *Elul* and they become homesick - to remind ourselves of how much we should miss our Father and cry for Him.

During these days of *Elul* we can cry in prayer just as the *yefas toar* (captive woman) is given 30 days to cry and mourn her father. Our soul came down onto this world and yearns to return to her Father in heaven.

The crying during these days is the yearning of the soul to return to our Father. The *tefillos* we *daven* these days are not just verbal and with *daas*. They are from our actual voice itself, from the deep crying of our heart, from our yearnings – not the crying of pain we cried last month in Av, and not to merely cry over what we are afraid about, but to cry out of yearning for Hashem.

#### Revealing The Soul’s Yearning For Hashem

The more we remove the layers from ourselves, the more we reveal our soul’s yearning for Hashem. It is written, “*My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living Almighty.*” That describes *Elul* very well - to cry tears of yearning, for Hashem.

This is the meaning if the possuk, “*Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet.*” The “sweetness” of our voice is when we cry out of yearning for Hashem.

This is the essence of our *avodah* during these days. The *tefillos* in *Elul* we express are the outer part of our *avodah*, and the inner layer of our *avodah* in *Elul* is to yearn, to truly yearn - for Him, the Blessed One.



23 | Allowing Hashem To Enter The Heart <sup>65</sup>MY BELOVED FRIEND AND MY FATHER

It is well-known from our earlier Rabbinic sources that *Elul* stands for *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*, “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me.” In these days of *Elul*, Hashem is called *Dodi*, our Beloved. When it comes Rosh HaShanah, we don’t call Hashem “*Dodi*” and we elevate the title instead to “*Avinu Malkeinu*”, “Our Father Our King.” On Rosh HaShanah, we view ourselves as sons to a father, or as servants to a master.

There is an obvious question. Why is Hashem only called *Dodi* during *Elul*? Why not on Rosh HaShanah too?

The explanation, though, is as follows. There are two kinds of relationships we have with Hashem – to relate to Him as a “Beloved Friend,” or to relate to Him as our “Father, our King.”

A friend is someone who visits sometimes, but we don’t spend all our time with a friend. But if we are a servant to a king, we are always in the palace, and if we are a prince, we are certainly always near the king in the palace.

In *Elul*, before it’s Rosh HaShanah, our relationship to Hashem is that of “*Dodi*”, our Beloved Friend. It is a closer relationship than during the rest of the year, but it’s still not the closest kind of relationship with Him. On Rosh HaShanah and then in the Ten Days of Repentance, though, we get closer. “*Seek Hashem where He is found, call out to Him where He is close*” is a possuk referring to the Ten Days of Teshuvah, where there is more closeness with Hashem – then we relate to Him as a Father, as a King.

*Elul* is the time to prepare for the Day of Judgment (Rosh HaShanah), and it is the time to begin the first level of closeness with Hashem – to relate to Him as a Beloved Friend, and to hopefully arrive at the level of “Our Father Our King.” If a person is still relating to Hashem as a Beloved Friend by the time it comes Rosh HaShanah and he doesn’t relate with Hashem as a Father or as a King, he is still at the lower stage, and he will be behind on Rosh HaShanah in his relationship with Hashem. The *avodah* of *Elul* is to begin with relating to Hashem as a Beloved Friend, but by the time it comes Rosh HaShanah, we have to have arrived as the level of Our Father Our King.

But how do we do it? How do we feel towards Hashem as *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*, and how do we progress after that to the level of *Avinu Malkeinu*?

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<sup>65</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/Elul-002-allowing-hashem-enter-heart>

## OPENING YOUR HEART SO THAT HASHEM CAN ENTER

It is written, “*The voice of my Beloved knocks.*”<sup>66</sup> Hashem is called the Beloved, Who knocks on the “door” of our heart.

When there is knocking on the door, does the door always get opened? Not always. Sometimes the person isn’t home, and even if he is home, sometimes he’s sleeping, so he doesn’t hear anyone knocking.

Hashem is knocking on the door in each person’s heart during *Elul!* The question is if a person hears that knocking.

If a person really wants to feel that Hashem is his *Dodi*, a Beloved Friend, then he has to make sure to open the door when he hears the voice of the Beloved Friend knocking. He needs to open up the closed doors of his heart, and then, so to speak, Hashem is enabled to enter there. It is written concerning the future, “*And I will tear their closed hearts.*” The heart of a person is usually closed, it’s sort of locked. A person’s *avodah* is to open his heart, to greet the voice of his Beloved Friend who is knocking on his inner doors.

How indeed do we open the doors of our heart so that Hashem can enter?

Compare this to the following illustration. If a big person has to get through the door, we need to make a large opening that will fit his size, so that he can get through the door. How big of an opening do we need to make in the entranceway so that *Hashem* can enter?

Hashem says: “My child, make me for a small opening of *teshuvah* (repentance), like the size of a needlepoint, and I will then open for you openings the size of wagons” (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 5:2). The opening we need to make for Hashem to enter our heart, so to speak, is only the size of a mere needle!

The Kotzker Rebbe zt”l explained: “But make sure that it’s a real opening. It can’t be an opening that you quickly close up after you make the opening, like when a collector comes to your door and you open the door just a little so that you can hand him some money and then you immediately close the door. In order to make an opening so that Hashem can enter the heart, it has to be a kind of opening which stays open and you don’t close it afterwards.

There is a kind of person who opens up his door to Hashem three times each day – by the three tefillos of Shacharis, Mincha and Maariv, but when it comes Aleinu, he’s already out the door of the shul. He opened up a door for Hashem to enter, but he immediately ran away and basically closed the door on Hashem!

In order for a person to be eligible that Hashem enter him, he needs to make a true opening in his heart. It can be a very small opening – the size of a needle – but it must be a true opening, which never closes after it is opened.

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<sup>66</sup> *Shir HaShirim* 5:2

A person is inspired in *Elul*, and he wants to really become close to Hashem. But after Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, what does he look like? Does he remain opened towards Hashem, or did he already close the door now that *Elul* is over? Was he just inspired temporarily, and now he's waiting for next year's *Elul*? Or does he allow his opening for Hashem to remain open during the rest of the year as well when it's not *Elul*?

If it's a real opening, Hashem enters. If it's only a temporary opening for Him, and a person plans on closing the door on Hashem after *Elul* ends, then such an opening was never really an opening.

Compare the difference between a guest and a family member who lives in your house. When a guest comes to your house, you clean a room for him, you make his bed, you think about his needs. But after a week he's out of here, at most, a month or two months, but eventually, he leaves the house. A family member though has his permanent room in the house. We don't plan on him leaving the house, so we give him a permanent room to stay in. He lives in the house; he's not just staying there.

When we open an opening in our heart for Hashem to enter there, do we treat Hashem like a guest in us, or like a permanent family member? If we view Hashem as a mere guest for *Elul*, Hashem is not looking to come into such a place. Hashem wants to dwell in our hearts, "*I will dwell amongst You*" – in each person's heart – that each person's heart should be a permanent dwelling for His Name to settle upon.

The Mishkan was temporary, while the *Beis HaMikdash* was planned as a permanent dwelling. We need to let our heart be a *Beis HaMikdash* for Hashem, not just a Mishkan; we need to build in ourselves a permanent dwelling for Hashem to settle in. The house we build for Hashem in our heart is really Hashem's house, because He is in charge of everything on this world; it's all His house. We can't really close the door on Him because He is the Owner.

But the question is – How do we do that and come to realize that, practically?

## CLEANING OUT THE HEART FROM THE MANY DESIRES

In order for one to merit that Hashem enters the heart, he has to first clean out his heart so he can make room for Hashem. When a guest comes, we clean the house for him. If a person really wants Hashem to come enter his heart, he must clean out his heart from all that has piled up in it, so that there can be room for Hashem to enter there.

If a guest stays in our house for a few days, we find it tolerable, but we find it impossible to leave with a permanent guest in the house. The only way to get out of this problem is to give him his own room, where he can stay there permanently, and then we stop viewing him as a guest. So too, if we want the Shechinah to dwell in our heart, if we want Hashem to enter our heart constantly, we must clean out a permanent space for Him. We have to give up ownership from the room, so to speak, and give it away to Hashem. Make your heart *hekdesb* (sacred property) for Him.

We have all *retzonos* (desires); we want all kinds of things. Some people want a new car, some want a bigger house, some want honor. If a person really wants Hashem to enter into him, directly, he needs to give Hashem one room in his heart to stay in, a room which is entirely designated for Hashem, where no other *retzonos* can come in.

Therefore, if a person really wants to reach closeness with Hashem during these days of *Elul*, **he should give up something for Hashem**. It is impossible to just go on with regular life as it is, pursuing all our desires, and to simultaneously desire that Hashem should be in our heart.

## GIVING UP ONE DESIRE

The heart of a person can either be a soft heart of flesh, a *lev basar*, or a heart of stone – a *lev even*. What do we do when we need to build a house on a rocky area? We bring a bulldozer that can smash open all the rocks. When the heart of a person has become hardened like a rock, it cannot be opened with a mere key. It needs to be shattered open, in order to clear space for Hashem to enter there.

When it comes *Elul* and a person wants to become closer to Hashem, he has to make a self-accounting with himself and write down what he is prepared to give up for Hashem. It will be very difficult to give up a desire, and it will be as hard as breaking into a mountain. In order to break a rock, you have to slice a path through it. So too, if we want to break open a stony heart, we need to dig into it and carve a path into it so that Hashem can enter it.

A person therefore needs to give up desires that are in his heart. What should he give up? Each person has free will in this. But one thing is clear: you have to give up at least one desire for Hashem, by the time the Day of Judgment is here. That will give a space in your heart for Hashem to enter.

It won't be enough to give up the desire for just *Aseres Ymei Teshuvah*, and even if you manage to break that desire all the way until Hoshanah Rabbah and even Chanukah (which is the actual end to the judgment, according to the *sefarim hakedoshim*), it's still not enough! You have to give up the desire totally! Give it up, forever!

Imagine if a person gives a wedding present to his friend when his friend gets married, and two weeks later he shows up knocking on his newlywed friend's door and he says, "I apologize. I need back the present I gave you." People don't do that. Once you give it, that's it. You can't get ask for it back. Are we really willing to give away something for Hashem, and never wish to get it back again? Or will we end up having regrets? If we make a resolution, will we regret it ten years later...?

If a person just gives up one desire totally, he has a space in his heart for Hashem to enter there, and he will merit the *Shechinah* settle inside himself.

## FROM FRIEND TO FATHER

That describes *Elul*, the time of *Ani L'Dodi, V'Dodi Li* – “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”. The step after that [which begins on Rosh HaShanah] is to progress to the level of *Avinu Malkeinu* – Our Father, Our King.

At first we need to make an opening for Hashem in ourselves, allowing Him to at least enter us and visit there. He is like a Beloved Friend during *Elul*. But as we know, a friend eventually takes leave from us, so too, in *Elul*, Hashem is like a friend who visits us, but after *Elul*, the visit ends. What will be after *Elul*, then? If a person remains toward Hashem as “*Dodi*” and he hasn’t yet gotten to a relationship of *Avinu Malkeinu* with Hashem – which begins on Rosh HaShanah – then when winter comes, everything will go back to routine, and a person is back to where he started before *Elul*.

So a person has to prepare for the day of judgment [Rosh HaShanah]. We have the whole month of *Elul*, which is 29 days, to first allow Hashem to enter us, in which we relate to Him as a Beloved Friend who is visiting us. After *Elul*, though, we must let Hashem become a permanent dweller in our home! *Elul* is the time in which we need to realize that Hashem is our Beloved Friend, our *Dodi*, and after *Elul*, the *avodah* is to let Him permanently dwell in our heart.

## INCLUDING HASHEM IN YOUR PROBLEMS

For this reason, there are many *tefillos* we *daven* for on Rosh HaShanah. There is great depth contained in this which is actually very simple.

Baruch Hashem, it’s commendable if a person allows Hashem into his heart, but that’s not enough. Imagine two people who live together in an apartment – are they quiet with each other or do they talk with each other? Of course they talk to each other!

When a guest comes to the house, do we talk to him, or do we act silent? We converse with the guest: “*Shalom Aleichem!* How are you? How do you feel? Where are you from?” Therefore, in *Elul* there are many *tefillos* we *daven*, because when a person opens his heart to allow Hashem to enter him, then Hashem and the person are together, so to speak, and when two are together with each other, they speak with each other. If one doesn’t allow Hashem into his heart, he won’t speak with Him either. But when one realizes that Hashem is the Friend who visits us in *Elul*, he can begin to talk to Him, just like we converse with a guest who is staying in the house. And when we realize that He is not just a guest, but a permanent dweller in our home, we tell Him more things, down to the tiniest detail.

When a guest comes, we clean up the house for him, and we sweep up any problems and hide them. We say to him, “*Baruch Hashem*, all is well” and we smile for him. But if he’s part of our family, we include him in all our problems.

During *Elul*, we are building a certain relationship with Hashem, and it continues into the Ten Days of Teshuvah. We must not think that it ends after 40 days! A person must not have the notion

that we get closer to Hashem from *Elul* until Yom Kippur, and then we say goodbye to Hashem, *chas v'shalom*. Rather, the mindset should be, that our Avodah begins in *Elul* – and it never ends.

As is well-known, Moshe went up to Heaven during these 40 days to receive the second set of Luchos, and he came back down the day after Yom Kippur. Was it the same Torah as the first set of Luchos? Or are we learning today only from the second set of Luchos? The second set of Luchos can be compared to a guest whom we make into a permanent member of our household. The Torah tells us what to do, and one has to subjugate himself to the Torah. Hashem's Torah owns us, and we are the guests that must abide by the rules of the Owner. The question is if a person really understands that, or if he feels that really *he* is the owner of himself...

When a person calls to Hashem and invites Him to enter his heart, what does he do when Hashem comes? Is he prepared to give up his private ownership of himself? Is he ready to give up some small thing for Hashem?

## AFTER ELUL

There are many inspirational speeches given during *Elul* about the Holy Days. The question is: After Yom Kippur, does a person feel that Hashem has more of a space in his heart? If not, he is like a person who gives a gift to his friend, and after two weeks he asks for the gift back. Hashem is giving us a gift. It is our choice to use it, or *chas v'shalom* - to give it back. Of course, we don't give it back to Hashem, but if we don't know how to keep the gift, the gift goes away on its own, along with the time of the year that brings it.

If one realizes the value of the gift we have in *Elul*, he knows how to use the gift of *Elul* properly and really acquire a closeness with Hashem in his heart. If one doesn't realize that there is a gift here, these days pass and go on, and the gift vanishes with it.

Imagine if a person would come here and tell the audience how to make lot of money, and he gives strategies on how to make it happen, and after the lecture, no one tries his ideas. Did anything happen from the lecture? He said nice ideas, but no one is practicing them and actualizing them.

We are in days that have an opportunity contained in them. Does anyone here have a clear path in how we will get closer to Hashem by the time these holy days are over? If someone does, that's wonderful; if not, one must realize that Hashem is giving us a gift - we need to know how to use it.

To illustrate, if someone gets a car for a present, but he doesn't know how to drive, he doesn't know how to use his gift. He has to learn how to drive and then he can know how to use the present he has. So too, Hashem gave us these forty days as a gift, but they are apt to just pass by like all the other days, if we don't know how to use them. We all know that these days will pass. If a person knows how to use these days to get closer to Hashem, he is doing very well, but if he doesn't know how to go about these days, then what will it help him to just know that *Elul* is a special time? What does he gain from this knowledge? Compare this to a person who knows that in order to get a job,

you need to make effort to land yourself a job – yet he doesn't make any active effort to get a job. Of what use is his knowledge? He has to take action, or else he won't get a job.

So if one knows that these days of *Elul* are a gift from Hashem, he has to also be very clear *how* he can get closer to Hashem during these days. But if someone remains satisfied with just hearing speeches and ideas, maybe he will feel inspired and enjoy the speech, but he goes on with life as usual and returns to routine. The next day he is back to before.

We must do something; it is not enough to know of inspiration. Compare this to visiting a mourner. When we visit a mourner, we can console him or her by joining in his pain, but we can't take away the troubling situation. We cannot bring the deceased back. But *Elul* is not like that. During *Elul*, Hashem give us something which we can actually use to take away the problems.

Inspiration doesn't last for that long. It stays for 2 or 3 days at best, but it goes away eventually.

When you buy a car, it's not inspiration; it's a lasting acquirement. When you get married, it's not just inspiration; you have gotten married. So too, when a person gives Hashem space to enter his heart, this is not inspiration – it is something that must be actively achieved, in the practical sense. *“For the matter is very close to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart to do so.”*

So we must seek to make closeness to Hashem into something we can actualize and practically acquire.

The problem is that people remain superficial each year. People hear lectures, enjoyable Divrei Torah about *Elul* which we have all heard of, such as the words *“Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li”* and *“Dirshu Hashem”*, but what do we gain from hearing all these *pesukim*? We have all heard of these *pesukim* even before all the speeches about them....

Reflect on the following. Do you feel that you have gotten closer to Hashem since last *Elul*? If “yes”, continue the good work. If “no”, you must clarify and research how you can get closer to Hashem, what practical path you need to take.

We are all used to hearing speeches at least once a week. There are good speakers who speak, and they have good intentions, and they all say words that are truthful which inspire us. But the question is if their words are truly building the life of the listeners, or if they are just nice speeches and nothing more.

We all have free choice when we hear a speech to either continue on as usual, or to take it to heart and try to see how to actualize it in our life in a practical way.

Hashem should merit that each person here should understand what these days are about, and to seek the way in how to become closer to Hashem, and to try to make it actual and practical; through doing that, one will surely merit to be written for a good year.

24 | Ascending Through Thought <sup>67</sup>

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.

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<sup>67</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/Elul-021-ascending-through-thought>



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.

25 | Finding Your Inner Sanctuary <sup>68</sup>TAKING SHELTER UNDER HASHEM'S WING

שמע קולינו ה' אלוקינו, חוס ורחם עלינו We ask Hashem to hear our voice and have “pity and compassion” on us – “*chus v'racheim aleinu*”.

What does it mean that we ask Hashem especially for "חוס", “pity”, and for רחמים, “compassion”?

It is not simply a prayer that Hashem should have compassion on us by answering our prayers, as it would seem to imply. Rather, חוס/pity means as it is written, "בצל כנפִיךָ, יִחְסִינִי" - “*In the shadow of Your wings, take shelter.*”<sup>69</sup> The word חוס (“*chus*”) means, to take shelter - under the One who is having compassion on us.

Compare this to the following scenario. If Reuven feels bad for Shimon, but Shimon lives in another city, he can feel sorry for him, but he can't take him under his wing and take care of his problems. But if Reuven takes Shimon into his house and takes care of him, that is the meaning of *chus*, to truly take pity on another – to take someone under your wing and let him be in your shelter.

So too, we are asking Hashem to have pity on us, to take us under His wing – as it is written, “*In the shadow of Your wings, take shelter.*” The fact that one has taken shelter is what can save him from his danger.

The word *racheim*, as the Maharal writes, comes from the word *rechem*, womb, hinting to the mercy of a mother upon her child. When a person needs compassion, he runs back to his source, to the *rechem* he came from – to his mother.

Thus, when we ask Hashem that He should have *chus*/pity and *rachamim*/compassion on us, we are asking Hashem that we be taken underneath His wing, and that we be taken pity upon, by Him – similar to how an infant turns to its mother when it senses danger.

The depth behind our prayer of חוס ורחם עלינו, ה' אלוקינו, שמע קולינו, - “*Hear our voice, Hashem our G-d, take pity and compassion on us*” - is thus that we are beseeching Hashem to return to our original state, back to the “womb” – to return to a relationship of closeness with Hashem, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* writes, that one can talk to Hashem in prayer, “as a man talks to his friend”.

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-133-finding-your-inner-sanctuary>

<sup>69</sup> *Tehillim* 36:8

The simple meaning of our request here is that we are asking Hashem to take pity on us and take us into His shelter, and as the possuk says, *“Hashem is close to all those who call out to Him in truth.”*<sup>70</sup> But the deeper meaning is, that we are asking Hashem to return to the inner meaning of life, to yearn for the real life - and that will be what saves us.

## THE CHILD WITHIN YOU

The metaphor given to describe our relationship with Hashem is that of a child yearning for its mother, כגמול עלי אמו, *“Like a child on its mother’s lap.”*

When a child is dependent on his mother, not only does he look to the mother to be fed and to be physically nourished, but the child as well turns to his mother for love, warmth and compassion. The child needs his mother for an emotional bond. In the ninth months of pregnancy, when the child is a fetus, the child forms a certain attachment to his mother, and gets used to the compassion of his mother.

After he is born, he is already attached to his mother, and he continues to turn to his mother for his needs, both physically and emotionally. A child naturally cries for his mother and misses her, and he wants to keep feeling her compassion on him, which he needs.

As a person gets older and more mature, he enters the outside world, and he goes to school, and then to *yeshiva*. What happens? He goes from the world of his childhood, which was a world of love and compassion, into the real world out there – a world that is cold, unfriendly, uncaring, and outright nasty.

The child begins to learn that this world is not such a nice place; he gets into fights, first with his siblings and then with peers, and he grows out of childish innocence, for he ‘gets used’ to the big tough world he has to deal with. He learns what it means to fight with others, and to be ignored and hurt by others - and what it means to ignore others in return.

A person, throughout life, often experiences how Yosef felt when his brothers hated him and then didn’t talk to him, out of their enmity towards him.<sup>71</sup>

But even after we go through times that we get hurt from people in the world, we still retain our nature of a child, longing for warmth and love from others. We learn to live with a gnawing contradiction in ourselves: on one hand, we get used to the fact that we live in a cold environment, but at the same time, we cannot ignore our need for closeness and love from others.

We get hurt from others, yet we still crave a relationship of closeness with others, and we yearn for a feeling of warmth from others.

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<sup>70</sup> Tehillim 145:8

<sup>71</sup> Beraishis 37:4 and 37:18

As time goes on, and we go through more rough times relating to other people in our life, we begin to lose touch with our inner child. As children, we would run to our mother as soon as there was a problem, but as we get older, we stop doing that. We get hurt from others and from surroundings, and we have no one to run to for relief. As adults, we may have with us an inner child that still longs for love and warmth, but at the same time, we get burned by others' cruelty and insensitivity.

There is always a part in us that acts like a child, always wishing to run back to our parents' love when we get hurt by others. At the same time, we get used to the fact that real life involves getting hurt by others. We all get used to the contradiction, more or less. But if a person is a bit more sensitive, he will feel bothered by this inner contradiction going on in our life.

Life is designed in this way for a purpose. We start out in life with a child's innocence, a part in us that wants love and warmth from others; as life goes on and we go through more and more experiences, we realize that the world out there is not that nice to us, and there is a lesson we are supposed to learn from this. It is because there are really two parts to us – there is a part in us that always wants love, and there is also a part in us that is ready to detach from others and be alone. We can have a healthy balance of these two parts - and then live life properly and correctly.

If a person has gotten hurt by other people many times in his life, as we all do, and he becomes too hardened from life as a result, he will come to feel that life on this world is nothing but darkness, a cold and uncaring place, telling himself, "That's life". His own emotions will become deadened as a result. This is the natural course that a person will take – he starts out life innocent and feeling loved, then he gets hurt, so many times, until he eventually gives up on ever getting his need for love and warmth.

But this is not how Hashem wants us to live life. Hashem doesn't want us to remain with the way we were born as children, nor does He want us to remain solely with our adult understanding towards life. Rather, the two parts in our life, the child aspect and the adult aspect, are meant to be fused together, as follows.

## THE MATURE OUTLOOK TOWARDS LIFE

Understandably, the bruises we suffer from other people in our life are a difficult test, because it is impossible for us to suffocate our need for love and warmth, and we are living in a world in which the people are not supplying it to us.

But we are supposed to go through that stage in life and come to the following realization: Our need for love and warmth will indeed never come from anyone on this world.

The bruises we go through in life are the true test to our free will, to test us if we will just remain sheltered in our parents' love alone and not go beyond that – or if we will channel that instead to taking shelter under Hashem - *"In the shadow of Your wings, take shelter."*

It is written in Tehillim, [and we say this after *Shacharis* during *Elul*, in the “*L’Dovid*” prayer], “*For my father and my mother have abandoned me.*”<sup>72</sup> The deeper implication of this is that at some point in one’s life, he has to come to feel, that his need for love and warmth will never be fully satisfied even by the fact that he had parents who loved him.

The entire love which our parents gave to us is meant to serve as a *moshol*, a parable, to a *nimshal*, the greater lesson – that just as a child longs for its mother’s compassion, so must we long for Hashem and take shelter in Him.

In order to grasp this, we need a certain maturity. Even the non-spiritual aspect in us, our *nefesh habehaimis* – the animalistic level of soul which contains our base emotions – can understand the concept we are describing, as long as one has matured a little about life.

We do not mean to imply here that one has to become a cold person, with no need for warmth from others. Rather, what is meant here is that we must realize that the love we received from our parents was all a *moshol* – a parable - and we should not remain with the parable and miss the *nimshal*, the lesson of the parable.

We must understand the *nimshal* of the *moshol*, which is, that all this love we experienced is meant to lead us on the direction of feeling a need to take shelter - in Hashem.

The deep and mature understanding about life is that the more you feel how this world is a cold environment, the more you can be lead to truly feel that the only way for you to get your yearning for connection is in a relationship with Hashem.

We live in a cold world, a selfish world, where most people care only for themselves, each person wrapped up in himself. It is a painful realization to the soul, to anyone who is a bit emotionally sensitive.

When one realizes this, he can conclude that there is no one who can really pity us - no one but Hashem.

## THE PURPOSE OF WHY WE GET HURT

We see this apparent from the fact that most people have strife in their lives with others. Ever since the first day of Creation, when Kayin fought with Hevel his brother and killed him, the world has been this way. There are fights going on in families, between siblings, between people who used to be friends with each other, and even within the Torah world, there are disputes going on.

This is especially true in the current generation, which precedes the arrival of *Moshiach*, in which *Chazal* prophesied that it will be a generation in which people fight against the Torah scholars. People who were together in *yeshivah* for years ever since they were in kindergarten, who had seemed

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<sup>72</sup> *Tehillim* 27:10

to be inseparable, are now in strife with each other. All of the disparity on this world is because we live in an *alma d'piruda*, a world of disparity [which began with the first sin].

This reality has both pros and cons to it. Strife in this world is a force of evil, but at the same time, we can use it constructively – when we use it to awaken in ourselves a need to look elsewhere from this world to find a place of true love and warmth. All the strife we see in the world can help us realize, that indeed, we cannot live on this cold world. We need to find a new world where we can escape to, a world of love and warmth, a world of “*In the shadow of Your wings, take shelter.*”

People are looking for love, warmth and closeness on this world, and sadly, they will not find it. There are a few people on this world who have a truly loving relationship with their parents and with their spouse. But most people do not have that, and therefore, most people on this world are very lonely.

A person who is lonely might think he has lots of “friends”, while in reality, none of these friends are real friends; they are not all like the friends of Iyov, and they are rather the opposite. No one can really know for sure who his real friends are; friends often talk about each other behind each other’s backs. There is very little real love on this world.

Most people are hardened from the setbacks with others in their life. The more a person is in touch with his soul, he is sensitive to the situation of this world, and he feels the painful reality we are describing – and his soul suffers from this. Most people have given up a long time ago on relationships, and their feelings have become deadened.

We must instead guard our inner child, the feeling of yearning for connection which we had when we were children, and yearn for “*In the shadow of your wings, take shelter.*” We must indeed yearn for connection, but for a true connection, and it doesn’t come from any person on This World.

## ELUL: YEARNING FOR HASHEM

The days of *Elul* are depicted as “*Ani L’Dodi V’Dodi Li*”, “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me.”<sup>73</sup> In *Elul* we also say the verse, “*For my father and mother have abandoned me.*” *Elul* is all about yearning for Hashem, to take shelter under His wing.

When we have this truthful yearning for connection and it is done in the right way, our soul will find its solace.

## THE PARABLE AND THE LESSON

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<sup>73</sup> *Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs) 6:4*

Without yearnings for Hashem, a person remains satisfied with the fact that he was loved by his parents, and he never goes beyond that. He remains in the *moshol* of life and he never gets to the *nimshal*.

There are people who are very family-oriented; their attitude is that “My family is my whole life.” Family is everything to them<sup>74</sup>. Others think that life is all about having close friends. Either of these mindsets in life lead a person away from the *nimshal* of life; he remains in the ‘*moshol*’ of life, never seeing the ‘*nimshal*’. (And when it comes to friendships, often, a person’s friendships are anyways worthless and devoid of meaning).

The true lifestyle of a Jew’s soul is to demand a **true** place to run away to in order where he can feel **truly** loved and pitied. The more a person matures through life, the more he should realize and feel the truth about life: that life on this world cannot supply us with the love and warmth we need.

Don’t realize this because you heard about it. Realize it because you have come to that understanding about life from within yourself.

We need to realize the deep meaning of life. Life on this world must cause to realize that we cannot survive on This World and feel fulfilled, and therefore we have no choice but to seek somewhere else to live – another world than This World.

There are some people who feel emotionally fulfilled from their home situation, because they have perfect *Shalom Bayis* (marital peace), and they feel completely loved by their spouse. This seems like a wonderful situation, as if nothing could be better than it. Such a person must understand that having a wonderful home situation, while offering peace and bliss, is a situation that can make him become too complacent. He is likely to remain with the *moshol* of life and never get to the *nimshal*.

As for most people, who do not have a perfect domestic situation, we can realize from this that it’s to show us that we cannot get our emotional needs met by family life, and we have no one else to turn to but Hashem.

Just as a child feels a yearning for his mother, so can our soul feel a yearning for Hashem; it is written, “*She [the soul] clings and is attached to You.*” Yearning for Hashem is not something you know about; it’s something that needs to be palpably felt.

The purpose of why we get so hurt in life from other people is essentially to come to this realization: that we need to channel our yearning for connection with people to yearning for a close relationship with Hashem.

## FINDING YOUR INNER SANCTUARY

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<sup>74</sup> For more on this point, see Tefillah #0124 – *The Only Lasting Connection*



In our current generation, there is no peace anymore in the world, because of all the strife going on. Our soul has no choice but to seek a different world where it can dwell in, a world of love, warmth, and complete good.

All of this can be understood by even the non-spiritual of our soul, our *nefesh habehaimis*; for even our *nefesh habehaimis* seeks connection, therefore, it also wants to be close to Hashem, though not as much as our spiritual element of the soul seeks closeness with Hashem. Even more so, the spiritual element in our soul [the G-dly soul] seeks a spiritual world to dwell in.

If we reflect about the situation of this world, we can feel that This World is a miniature version of Hell. This world is full of people who engage in sin and impurity; we live in a world in which most people are not doing the will of Hashem. Our soul can feel very sad at this.

Our very existence on this world, in this current generation, demands us to live in a different world. We can be on this world yet live an angelic kind of existence, apart from how others live their life.<sup>75</sup>

The intention here does not mean that we should wish to ascend to Gan Eden as we live on this world. There are people who would like to do that, but that is impossible. Rather, we can live on this world, but only in the bodily sense; our soul can be connected to the spiritual even as our body is here on this earth.<sup>76</sup>

How many souls are so lonely on this world! How much pain people have on this world! Even our animalistic layers of our existence are crying out to seek another place to live than this world. The little bit of spirituality that each person has is certainly demanding in us that we live in a different world than this one; the reality of this cold world we live on is a painful reality to bear.

Woe to the person who remains that way his whole life and never escapes the painful reality of life on this world! It is impossible if he were to try to survive live that way. There is only one true piece of advice, for anyone who identifies with this pain: We must find a new kind of life, a life of “*Hear our voice, Hashem our G-d, have pity and compassion on us.*” We must reveal an inner kind of life on this world; our soul needs to return to its inner source, to the depth of the Torah, to be near Hashem and with Him, to “*cling and be attached to You.*”

Any Jewish soul on this world is living either one kind of life or another: either one is suffering terribly from loneliness on this world, because he lacks a deep connection with Hashem<sup>77</sup> – or he has already run away from the life of this world and he has taken shelter with Hashem and the inner depth of Torah. In the situation of the world we live in today, without taking shelter in Hashem, a person’s feeling towards spirituality are certainly deadened. How sad is it if a person remains in the cold life of this world and never frees himself from it.

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<sup>75</sup> A statement of the Chazon Ish in *Igros Chazon Ish, Vol. I*

<sup>76</sup> See *Tefillah #0128- Body On Earth, Mind In Heaven.*

<sup>77</sup> See *Tefillah #0131 – The Cure To Loneliness*

The more we go through disappointments from people on this world, the more we can realize how much we need to demand to live in a different world than this one, to live in an inner world.

## IN CONCLUSION

The time of *Elul* is a special opportunity for us to gain this perspective. A person who indeed acquires this matter lives in a world of light, a Gan Eden on this world. It doesn't mean for a person to run away from his troubles and put himself out of his misery. It means to run away from this world for a deeper purpose, and discover a whole new meaning to life.

There is so much impurity on this world - and that, itself, is why it is so crucial to escape it, and to find somewhere else to live.

May we merit to recognize the depth of the place and time we are in right now, to realize the situation and how much we need to run away from it, to run away to Hashem and take shelter underneath Him. In that way, we will find the total attachment of Hashem, as it is written, "*And you shall cling to Hashem your G-d.*"<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Similar context of this shiur is explained in Tefillah #0102 - *When You Feel Unloved* and Tefillah #0123 - *The Only Lasting Connection*, and Fixing Your Water #018 - *The Desire To Be Loved*

26 | Elul – Action <sup>79</sup>ELUL – THE MONTH OF MAASEH/ACTION

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we are nearing the month of Elul, may it come upon us for good tidings. Let us try to understand a little, with the help of Hashem, the *avodah* upon us during these days, and hopefully we will each merit to also act upon these words, each on his own level.

Each month contains a special power that is connected to the particular time of the year that it is found in. The power of Elul is called *maaseh*, action. The power in man to “act” is especially manifest in Elul.

The Sages state (according to one opinion) that the world was created on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Elul. The Creation is called the “handiwork of Hashem”, His *maaseh* (action), thus the month of Elul is rooted in the original *maaseh* of Creation. Hashem revealed the power of His *maaseh* in Elul, so to speak; He “made” the heavens and the earth, which is all in terminology of “*maaseh*”.

When Elul arrives each year, the power of Hashem’s *maaseh* returns each year, as it were. Being that man has an *avodah* to resemble Hashem (as the Sages say, “Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful; just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate”), there must also be a power of *maaseh* on man’s own level, in some small resemblance to Hashem’s power of *maaseh*. What exactly is that *maaseh*, though, that we must perform?

The *Gemara* says that “the purpose of Torah is *teshuvah* (repentance) and *maasim tovim* (good deeds).” The simple meaning of this is that these are two different things the Torah leads to: repenting, and good deeds. It seems as if these two matters bear no connection; simply speaking, if a person commits a bad deed, he must repent over it, and thereafter he must perform good deeds. But the depth of the matter is as follows.

When Hashem created the world, He made it over the course of six days. This was an utterly pure and holy action, but even more so, Hashem created it with His ten expressions; His *dibbur* (word). He said “Let there be light” and there was light. He told the heavens to be created, and they were created. All of Creation is thereby powered by His word. When people perform an action, we usually attribute it to ourselves, thinking that it is our hands which do things. Our hands are the symbol of human action. But the symbol of Hashem’s actions are His word, for it is His word which created each thing.

Elul are days of *maaseh*, but it is hard to understand how exactly these days are days of *maaseh*. The *Tur* says that Moshe Rabbeinu stood for 40 days to receive the Torah, and the first 30 days of

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<sup>79</sup> <http://bilvavi.net/english/essence-month-007-elul-action>

this were in Elul. The 40<sup>th</sup> day was Yom Kippur. Where is the ‘action’ in these 30 days of receiving the Torah? Moshe stood there for 40 days to receive the Torah, but how was this “action”? In truth, however, it shows that Elul is both a time of action and a time of receiving Torah. It is just hard to understand how exactly it is a time of action. What we need to understand is that these days are of a different kind of action that the usual kind of “action” that we are familiar with.

This is a deep concept, so we will need to explain it very thoroughly.

## ACTION/BUILDING IN ELUL: USING OUR POWER OF SPEECH IN SELICHOS

The *Gemara* says that Torah scholars are called builders<sup>80</sup>, for it is written, “*And all your builders are those who learn [the Torah of] Hashem*”. How is something built? The power to ‘build’ [in the spiritual dimension] is not like how we build physically, which is through our hands, but through speaking words of Torah. A Torah scholar spends his day speaking of Torah, and that is how he builds the world.

This power is also given to all of us as well: we can build and perform deeds, through our power of speech. Just as Hashem created the world through His word, so did He give us the power to build, through words.

Where do we see this kind of ‘building’ take place, though? In Elul and in the Ten Days of Repentance, we make heavy use of our power of speech. There is *Selichos*, where we repeatedly ask Hashem for mercy. This is surely connected with the fact that we must increase our good deeds during Elul; but we just need to understand what exactly the connection is.

The way we know the answer to this depends on knowing what our soul’s power of *maaseh* is. What does it really mean to ‘do’ something? In the spiritual dimension, how can we ‘do’ something? We can understand that our body ‘does’ something, but how does our soul “do” something? If we understand what it is, we can understand what the *avodah* of “*maaseh*” in in Elul, but if not, then perhaps we will be able to increase our good deeds in Elul, but we will not have succeeded in developing the soul’s power of *maaseh*.

Let us reflect into the soul’s power of *maaseh*. The body performs actions, and it is our words which execute actions. Man is called “*nefesh chayah*” (living spirit), and Targum translates this to mean “*ruach memalelah*”, a talking spirit; man’s power of speech is essentially his spiritual power to “do” things. Thus, our power of *dibbur* (speech) is the source of our power to perform deeds (*maaseh*).

To illustrate this [on a deeper level], a Torah scholar lives in the realm of Torah words. He is constantly accessing his spiritual power of *maaseh*. In contrast, someone who does not live in the

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<sup>80</sup> *Berachos 64a*

realm of Torah is not making use of the spiritual power of *maaseh*; the only *maaseh* he performs are physical actions with his hands,

Being that *dibbur* (speech) is identified with man's title of *nefesh chayah* (living spirit), *dibbur*/speech is the source of all our spiritual actions. In Elul where we use the power of *dibbur* a lot [through prayer and *Selichos*], we are thus involving ourselves in a *dibbur* that leads to *maaseh*; we are involved with a kind of *dibbur* that is all about *maaseh*. Soon we will explain what it is, but this is the outline of the concept.

## ACTION IS ABOUT COMPLETION

What exactly is the soul's power of *maaseh*/action that is contained in the power of *dibbur*/speech?

The *Gemara* says that one should perform that which he says. Otherwise, he has not completed that which he spoke about. We can learn from here that an "action" implies the *completion* of something. [On a deeper level], the "world of action" we live in is the finalized and completed form of all the higher worlds which precede it. What we "do" here on this world is the last step of everything that emanates from the higher worlds; it all ends here. Hashem intentionally created an imperfect world - and it is "completed" in the world of action we live in. We were created imperfect, and it is our task to complete ourselves, here on this world, this world of action.

A person thinks, then he says what he is thinking, and then he acts upon what he says. The action is the final step of the thinking process; it is the final step of everything. So action is not just an action – it is the completed and final step of a process.

What is the soul's power of *maaseh*, then? It is essentially the *completion* of the soul. Our body completes an action when it finishes "doing" some kind of labor or work, and our soul "does" something when it has completed its spiritual work on this world.

## THE DEPTH OF TESHUVAH: UPROOTING THE REASON TO SIN

Let us try to understand a little more about the concept of *maaseh*.

Elul is the time where the world began (according to one opinion in the Sages, as mentioned earlier), but in the order of the months, it is the final month of the year. This shows the connection between Elul and *maaseh*: because Elul is the completion of the year. This is not because it is the 'last month on the Jewish calendar'; it is the time of the year where *our soul has finished its work* for this past year.

*Teshuvah* (repentance) includes regret and confession, and the Ramban famously writes that Hashem knows what the person is really thinking as he does *teshuvah*, if he is earnest or not. The

depth of his words is because *teshuvah* is about putting an end to the sinful action. If one continues to sin, his “action” continues, thus he has not reached completion. If one confesses the sin but he continues to sin, he has not yet ended his sinful action. He is missing his soul’s completion. But if he does *teshuvah*, that means he has put an end to the sinful action; he has reached completion.

Thus, the soul’s power of *maaseh* is to put an end to things; for one to place boundaries and limitations on himself that he will not cross.

Elul, the days of *maaseh*, are also days of *teshuvah*. The connection between these two facts lies in the understanding of the earlier-quoted statement of our Sages, “The purpose of Torah is *teshuvah* and good deeds”. It is because when we do proper *teshuvah*, we access the power of *maaseh*. The concept of *teshuvah* is thus connected to the soul’s power of *maaseh*, which is essentially the idea of putting an end to things, to place boundaries and limitations on any sinful acts which we were doing, so that the sinful actions won’t continue to spread any further.

There are some parts of the soul which do not need boundaries to be placed on them. The desire in our soul to learn Torah, to *daven*, and to do *mitzvos* are all holy desires, which should only be increased, not decreased. But there are parts to the soul which we need to place limitations on. That is the idea of *teshuvah*.

*Teshuvah* is about returning the soul after one has sinned, not just to stop sinning. In order to do *teshuvah* in which one will not return to the sin, it is not enough to do *teshuvah* over the act itself, but to do *teshuvah* over the reason that motivated the person to sin. Often we are used to doing *teshuvah* over the sinful act, but not over the reason that caused us to sin. For this reason, the *teshuvah* of many people does not last. The depth of *teshuvah* is to stop the particular aspect in the [external layer of the] soul that is being motivated to sin.

Whenever our Sages said their words, they were not speaking to our bodies. They were speaking to our souls. The language of the soul is different than the language that the body understands. Of course, our body is a factor; much of keeping *Halachah* affects our body, not just our souls. But *teshuvah* is about returning the soul, not just to stop sinning. When one sins, the action is no longer here, but the motivation to sin is still here. We aren’t supposed to do *teshuvah* just on the mere actions that we did; we are meant to do *teshuvah* on the motivations to sin, which remains on this world long after the sin is over. That is how we return our soul when we do *teshuvah* - and that is the depth of *teshuvah*.

## TO FEEL COMPLETE

Let’s attempt now to explain this in clearer terms. We will ask: Why does a person sin? What is the internal source in the person that causes a person to do the opposite of Hashem’s will, *chas v’shalom*?

In the blessing of *Borei Nefashos*, we say, “*Borei Nefashos rabbos v’chesronam*” –the Creator of many souls and their deficiencies.” A person sins when he feels deficient about something and he seeks to fill that deficiency. If he would feel filled, he would not seek to fill himself with anything from the outside, and he would never commit the sin.

Thus, we can now understand better how the depth of *teshuvah* is not merely about stopping to sin, but about uprooting the reason that caused the sin in the first place.

For example, if a person spoke *lashon hora* about someone, why did he speak *lashon hora*? He was jealous of him, or doesn’t like him. What is his *teshuvah*? To stop talking *lashon hora* about the person? Or to uproot his negative emotions towards him? The only reason why he spoke evil speech about the person was because he had an evil ‘eye’ towards the person. Every sin stems from some deficiency in the soul. That is where the main aspect of the *teshuvah* lies.

The main *avodah* of a person in doing *teshuvah*, besides for avoiding the sin, is to do “complete *teshuvah*” – to uproot the inner reason that caused one to sin. Incomplete *teshuvah*, by contrast, is to repent over the evil deed that was committed, without regretting the evil motivation that caused it. *Teshuvah* is therefore about returning the soul’s abilities to their pure source, after they had been used for evil.

For example, when a person steals 100 dollars, not only should he return the money; his *teshuvah* should be about regretting the desire he had to steal. If he would have been “happy with his lot” as the Sages teach, then he wouldn’t have come to steal. He only stole because he felt deficient about himself. Had he felt complete within himself, he never would have come to sin. The main part of the *teshuvah* is thus to return the soul from its deficient state into its original, complete state.

This is the meaning of “complete *teshuvah*” which we daven for in *Shemoneh Esrei*, and this is also the idea behind the soul’s power of *maaseh*.

Now we can understand better what the power of *maaseh* is. *Maaseh* is to feel complete and to feel that we lack for nothing; to feel complete within ourselves.

Of course, this is a power that needs to be used in its proper time and place. It does not mean that one should not have aspirations for holiness. If one learned a page of *Gemara*, he must certainly want to learn more pages of *Gemara* and he must not remain satisfied with the page of *Gemara* he learned. The power of *maaseh*, to feel complete, is only referring to being at peace from avoiding materialistic desires, not spiritual desires.

If a person is jealous of another person, if a person lusted after something, it was because he felt deficient about himself. The root of sin is always about some kind of deficiency the person felt. Thus the depth of *teshuvah* is to nullify the very desire for the sin, not just to regret the act of sin itself.

The days of Elul are called *yemai ratzon*, “days of will” – for it is the time to get in touch with our innermost will; to uproot the negative desires we have. This is what lays in the power of *maaseh*. When I don’t feel a necessity to pursue a desire, because I feel complete within myself, this is called *maaseh* – the “action” is complete.

## THE DEEP SOURCE OF TESHUVAH

This is a subtle and deep approach towards *teshuvah*. We all know we must do *teshuvah*, we all resolve to be better this year, but there is much more to *teshuvah* than this!

*Chazal* say that *teshuvah* was one of the things that existed already before Hashem created the world. Why was there a need for *teshuvah* if nothing was missing at that point from Creation and there was no possibility of sin? It is to show us that the level of “complete *teshuvah*” is only when one connects to his deep inner source which lacks nothing.

If we do not know this deep source of *teshuvah*, it is very hard to actually do *teshuvah*. We all know what *teshuvah* is, we all want to *teshuvah*, but if we do not understand the deep source that it comes from, we cannot really do *teshuvah*.

The Sages said (concerning physical action): “The eyes sees, the heart desires, and the actions complete.” Not only does the body complete and “do” action that begins in the eyes and the heart (this was said in the context of physical desire), but so does the soul contain the power to “do” actions that complete: by feeling complete within itself, with no need for anything else outside of it. In this way, a person will never feel deficient, and he will never come to sin.

On *Rosh HaShanah*, it is brought in *Halacha* that one must rejoice<sup>81</sup>. How can we rejoice on *Rosh HaShanah*, when Hashem is judging the world? It is because if one doesn’t rejoice on *Rosh HaShanah*, it is because he feels deficient. If he is incomplete, he cannot come to do real *teshuvah*.

So we must really know what *teshuvah* is about. *Teshuvah* is not only about regretting the sin and resolving not to sin again. The depth of *teshuvah* is to reach the deepest part of our soul, where we feel complete. When we feel that completion, we will find there that we have no desire to sin.

“One who is greater than his friend, has a greater *yetzer hora* than him.”<sup>82</sup> Why is this so? Compare this to a person who has a hundred dollars, who wants two hundred dollars. The more one has, the more he wants. But how indeed does one get rid of all his extraneous desires? By accessing the power of *teshuvah* that came before Creation. (In spirituality, we must aspire endlessly and always want more. But when it comes to materialistic desires, we must nullify all of these desires.)

That is complete *teshuvah*: to return to the deepest part of ourselves, where there are no desires. In that place in our soul we find the deeper power of *teshuvah* that has been around before Creation.

The *teshuvah* in Elul leads to Rosh HaShanah, the beginning of the year; thus the *teshuvah* in Elul leads to a new beginning. It is not simply leaving this past year (5771) and entering the new year (5772). It is about reaching an entirely new beginning.

Elul are days of *maaseh*. It is not about simply doing more good deeds, although that is also true that we must increase our goods. It is about reaching the completion of our soul, where we feel

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<sup>81</sup> *Tur: Orach Chaim 597:1*

<sup>82</sup> *Sukkah 52a*



complete inside ourselves, where we are so attached in closeness to Hashem that we feel the greatest sense of completion from this.

Elul is depicted as “*Ani L’Dodi V’Dodi Li*” (“I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”)—one who does not feel this in Elul cannot feel completion, and then he will be missing the true depth of *teshuvah*. But if one feels the meaning of “*Dodi*” (“my Beloved”) in Elul – that Hashem is our Beloved companion Who fills all of our life – this enables him to feel completion at this, and from that place in himself, he is spurred on to do “complete *teshuvah*”.

## THE DEEP SOURCE OF OUR COMPLETION

Thus, we can now understand that “Torah scholars are called builders” in the sense that they build from a place of completion in themselves, not out of deficiency. They build the world through their words of Torah, and the Torah is complete; thus they are building the world from a complete source.

The more a person is attached in closeness with Hashem, he is connected to completion and perfection, and he lacks for nothing. It won’t be possible for him to sin, because there is no more reason that motivates him to sin. Of course, we are human and imperfect. But when one is close to Hashem, he receives a special spiritual light of completion, which makes him feel complete and doesn’t allow him to sin.

In the days of Elul and *Yomim Noraim*, we should know that these are not just days to increase Torah learning and to do more *mitzvos*, although that is certainly truthful to do; it is not the purpose. The purpose of these days is to enter the depth of this time, to enter the deepest part of our own souls, where our soul is connected to the reality of Hashem. It is a place in the soul which is attached to perfection, and when we connect to this place in our soul, we are connected to completion and perfection, and there is then no possibility of sin there, with the more we are connected to that place. It is there that we can do complete *teshuvah*.

## IN CONCLUSION

We ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei*, “Return us, in complete repentance, before You.” To do *teshuvah* “before Hashem” is to do *teshuvah* and become closer to Hashem through it. If the *teshuvah* doesn’t bring one closer to Hashem from it, it is not “complete” *teshuvah*.

May the Creator merit us to reach this perfection in our souls and to connect ourselves to the reality of the Creator, and to do His will always, throughout every day of the year.

27 | Elul – Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li <sup>83</sup>THE "I" THAT CONNECTS TO "MY BELOVED"

Elul אלול is an acronym for “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*” (אני לדודי, ודודי לי), (“I am to my Beloved, and me Beloved is to me”).

There is “*Dodi*” (“my Beloved”/Hashem) - and there is our “*ani*” (the “I”). But what exactly is that ‘*ani*’ that bonds with our ‘*Dodi*’?

Let us reflect on this. When Elul comes, every Jew feels somewhat inspired; we all feel some level of spiritual awakening. But is that inspiration on a level of “*ani*” (“I”)? There is no Jew in Elul who does not feel inspiration (as long as his soul contains a bit of holiness). Everyone feels some kind of awakening. But the question is, if this inspiration translates into the level of “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*.” Has the inspiration become a part of one’s ‘*ani*’ - a part of his “I”?

GOING BEYOND INSPIRATION

The word for “inspiration” in Hebrew is “*hisorerus*”, which is from the word “*raua*”, “shaky”. This implies that all *hisorerus*/inspiration is a shaky foundation to build upon. Although inspiration is better than nothing at all, and it is certainly important, we cannot [only] build ourselves on inspiration. We need something more than inspiration in order to build ourselves. When we rely on inspiration to do it for us, we are on a shaky foundation. But if we make something a part of ourselves and we allow it to become our actual level, we are connected to it on an ongoing basis.

Inspiration to do something nice does not come from the deepest part of our existence (our *havayah*). If it would be a part of our essence, then it wouldn’t be inspiration. “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*” is describing the bond we can reach with Hashem in Elul which can only come from being in touch with our “*ani*”, with our “I”, our inner self. If it is not coming from one’s ‘*ani*’, then there is no “*V'Dodi “Li*” that follows.

DEFINING THE "ANI" (OUR "I")

So what is the ‘*ani*’? Similarly, what exactly is the “*Li*” (“to me”) that is in the words “*Dodi “Li*”?

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/essence-month-008-elul-ani-l-dodi-v-dodi-li>

It is definitely not referring to inspiration, as we explained above. It is much more than inspiration. Inspiration is wonderful, but it does not lead to “*Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi Li*”. So we first must understand what the “*ani*” is.

We are used to assuming that our “*ani*” (our “I”, our self) should become dedicated to our *Dodi* (“My beloved”/Hashem), and that all we have to do is direct our *ani* to our *Dodi*; to become closer to Hashem. But it is more than that: our *avodah* begins with the getting in touch with our “*ani*” in the first place.

Rav Chaim Vital said that the “*ani*” of a person is not defined by his physical flesh, but by the *nefesh*, the spiritual life-force of man.<sup>84</sup> Yet, there is even more depth to the “*ani*” of a person than this.

There are three letters contained in the word “*ani*” (אני) – the letters *aleph* (א) *nun* (נ) and *yud* (י). There is a rule taught by Sages [in the *sefarim hakedoshim*] that the letters of *Lashon HaKodesh* (the Hebrew alphabet) which describe a word are really the very essence of the thing being described. The “I” of the person is called “*ani*” in *Lashon HaKodesh*, which will mean that the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* are describing our very essence.

This “*ani*” of ours must become dedicated to our “*Dodi*”, but we first must know what the “*ani*” is. What is the “*ani*” in us? [Now the question has become clearer and deeper]: What does it mean that the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* form our actual essence?

Someone who doesn’t like to think deeply will balk at this question. “What do you mean, “*Who am I?* I am who I *am!* That is who I *am.*” But if a person has never thought deeply about his *ani*“I”, it means that he has never reached his “*ani*” yet - and he definitely won’t be able to connect his “*ani*” with Hashem.

Returning to the original question: What is the significance that our “*ani*” consists of the letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud*?

## THE CONCEPTS OF ALEPH, YUD, AND NUN

The letter “*aleph*” represents beginnings; it is the source. *Aleph* is the first letter of the *Aleph Beis*, and Hashem created the world from the letter *Aleph*.

Where do the letters *nun* and *yud* come into the picture?

The Sages say that “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”. The Ramban says that “the Torah consists entirely of names of Hashem”. Although Hashem has many “names”, He has one name which is His main name: the four-letter name of *havayah*, which contain the letters

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<sup>84</sup> *Shaarei Kedushah* 1:1

*yud*, *hey*, *vav*, and *hey*. Within Hashem's name of *havayah*, the letter "*yud*" is the first and root letter; thus the letter *yud* represents a higher kind of beginning that precedes all.

The letter *nun* is equal in numerical value to the number 50, paralleling the concept of the "50 Gates of Understanding" which the world was created with.

At first these concepts will appear abstract the first time we hear them. We hope to explain these concepts more clearly as we continue. At this point, all we can understand is that these three letters of *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* (and the concepts they represent) form our "*ani*", our "I"; and when we have these three aspects integrated, we can then connect our "*ani*" to our "*Dodi*", to Hashem. If we are missing the integration of these three aspects, there is no formation of our "*ani*" - and then there is no "*ani*" to connect with to our *Dodi*.

## "ALEPH" – GETTING TO THE ROOT/SOURCE OF THINGS

We encounter many things each day. Do we ever look into the source of each thing we encounter? For example, when learning a *halacha*, does a person make sure to look up the source of the *halacha*? One kind of person learns the *halacha* because he wants to know what to do, but another person will not only learn the halacha to know it, he also looks into the source. He wants to understand it at its root. This is a power in the soul to search for the root of things, and it is a very deep power. One can keep looking further into the root of things, then into the root of that root, then into the preceding root, until he reaches the very Root itself.

Of course, if we ask any person what the very source and root of each thing is, every person will say, "Hashem." But is that perspective carried over into our own soul as well?

Everything is rooted in the Torah. Does a person see how something is rooted in the Torah? To give another example, does a person ever wonder what the source of the word "Elul" is? Where does it come from? **We speak of Elul, Elul, Elul – but what is the word "Elul" and what does it come from? Do we ever think of this?**

This is just one example, but there are many more examples as well, of this idea. The point is not to amass knowledge. The point is to uncover the source and root of the things we come across.

This puts us in touch with the power in our soul to see beginnings. This is a unique ability to the Jew's soul, called "*raishis*" (beginning; the power to see the beginning). The Sages state, "Yisrael is called "*raishis*" (the beginning)", because a Jew's soul has the special ability to get to the "*raishis*" beginning of things. A Jew has the ability to see the "*raishis*" of each thing – to see the root of each thing, and at its deeper level, it used to get to the very Root of all: Hashem. A Jew can get to the *raishis* of the *havayah* (essence) of each thing. The "*aleph*" of our "*ani*" is to get to the beginning of each thing, and then we have the power to connect to the Creator. This is one aspect of how our "*ani*" can connect to our "*Dodi*".

## "YUD" – REFLECTING INTO THE CHOCHMAH (WISDOM) OF EVERYTHING

The second aspect of our “*ani*” is the letter *yud*, which hints to the root of the four-letter name of Hashem. The letter *yud* represents the higher beginning of Creation – a beginning that came before the ‘beginning’ of Creation. We say how “*All of them You made with wisdom*” - Hashem created the world with His *chochmah* (wisdom); all of the creation stems from Hashem’s *chochmah*/wisdom. The inner essence of each thing is thus the *chochmah*/wisdom of Hashem which empowers it.

The “*yud*” aspect of our “*ani*” is thus referring to searching for the *chochmah*/wisdom that is found in each thing we encounter. The creation in front of us is not simple; it is very complex and deep<sup>85</sup>. You can see wisdom in each thing in Creation. If a person only sees what his eyes see, he only sees the superficial layer of what he is seeing. If he is seeing the G-dly wisdom in it, he is seeing its essence, its reality.

Thus, the second aspect of our “*ani*” is to think deeply into things. It essentially refers to our true *seichel* (intellect). This is not referring to normal level of human logic, which even the gentiles possess (and *Chazal* say that we can even trust this basic level wisdom found in the gentiles). It refers to a higher kind of *seichel* which comes from the Creator - a “G-dly” kind of intellect that is poured down into the soul.

To give an example of it, if a person eats bread every day, he should reflect on the concept of bread. He can think: Where does the Torah talk about bread? What is the purpose of bread according to the Torah? What is its concept? In this way, you gain doubly: you see its source in the Torah (which is the first aspect of our *ani*), and you also see the *chochmah* in it (the second aspect of our *ani*).

## "NUN" – EXPANDING UPON OUR THOUGHTS (BINAH)

Now we will explain the third aspect of our “*ani*”, which is the letter *nun*.

The letter *nun* is equal in numerical value to the number 50, corresponding to the “50 Gates of *Binah* (understanding)” that Hashem created the world with. *Binah* is the power we have to reflect deeper and expand upon our original thoughts, which gives us greater understanding [of the matter at hand].

Thus, in summary, our ‘*ani*’ is meant to look for the root of each thing in the Torah (this is the ‘*aleph*’ aspect of the ‘*ani*’), it can see the G-dly wisdom found in each thing (this is the ‘*yud*’ aspect of the ‘*ani*’), and it then reflects deeper into those thoughts (the ‘*nun*’ aspect of the ‘*ani*’).

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<sup>85</sup> Editor’s Note: Elsewhere, the Rav has quoted the statement of the Chazon Ish that “There is no such thing as something in Creation that is not complicated – everything in Creation is complex and deep.” (See *Getting To Know Your Thoughts\_01\_The Basis of Thought*). In other places, the Rav has quoted the teaching of Rabbi Nachman of Breslev that there is an *avodah* to see the *seichel* (G-dly wisdom and intellect) in each thing.

This parallels the statement of the Sages that “Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one” – the “*ani*” of the Jew’s soul (Yisrael) is a part of the Torah (by seeing how the source of each thing is in Torah), and the Torah is connected with Hashem.

## REACHING OUR “ANI”

Thus, when one reflects into the root of each thing and into the wisdom of each thing, he reaches his “*ani*”. After reaching his “*ani*”, he can then dedicate his “*ani*” to Hashem: “*Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi Li.*” How many people think they are already in touch with themselves, and they think that all they have to do is become closer to Hashem...? They are really missing their connection to their “*ani*” to begin with!

One’s awareness towards his “*ani*” is usually very superficial, shallow, and shaky. When one tries to connect to “*Dodi Li*” when he hasn’t yet reached his “*ani*”, he will try to ‘inspire’ himself, but as we can all see, this inspiration does not last for very long. It usually lasts until a little bit after *Simchas Torah*, and then people quickly return to the routine of the year. In most instances, inspiration usually does not last. It is all because the person did not really use his “*ani*”. If he would have, it would have become “*Dodi li*”; the person would have felt that Hashem’s presence has become more permanent in his life.

“*Ani L’Dodi*” is not a perception that is reached through waking up one day and learning a *mussar sefer* or a *sefer on chassidus*, and to suddenly feel inspired and feel, “*Ani L’Dodi!*” There is a structure that must precede it; it is only reached through a certain approach towards life from during the rest of the year. When a person has the proper approach during the rest of the year, he gains a holy intellect from this, which enables him to come to the understanding of “*Ani L’Dodi*”, during Elul.

## REMOVING EXTRANEIOUS DESIRES FROM THE HEART

In order to get to this understanding and live in this way, one needs to improve his spiritual heart. If one’s heart is not pure and it is full of desires for This World and it contains unfixed *middos*, the heart will block the true *da’as* (awareness) from the mind and it will prevent a person from accessing his higher intellect.<sup>86</sup>

Dovid *HaMelech* said, “*My heart is empty within me.*” One must empty out the heart from all traces of evil, and then there is space in his heart to allow his *da’as* to settle there. The truth of Hashem’s existence can then be internalized there. Then one can attain a bond with Hashem.

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<sup>86</sup> See the author’s *sefer*, *Getting to Know Your Thoughts*

But if the heart remains unfixed, a person will continue to have desires that are for other things, and it will be like a “strange god” living inside the person. It will prevent his mind from having the clarity to see truth. One needs to uproot his desire for This World and the worldly desires which are not truthful. When one yearns instead for Hashem, this is “*Ani L’Dodi*”.

Yearning for Hashem needs to be accomplished both through our mind (which contains our *neshamah*/Divine soul, also known as the power of “*seichel d’kedushah*”, holy intellect), and through our heart (which contains our *Ruach*, the “G-dly spirit”, contained within man). These two parts (the mind and the heart) comprise our true “*ani*” that enables us to reach “*Dodi Li*.”

## WHY INSPIRATION OFTEN DOESN'T LAST

Inspiration as well stems from our heart, but it first has to pass through the various desires that are in our heart, and if there are still unholy desires in our heart, the inspiration wanes. There are many desires in the heart, in quality and in their magnitude, so if a person feels awakened to desire something holy, it is quickly washed over by the many desires in the heart that contradict it. For this reason, inspiration is usually gone as soon as it appeared.

What was missing from the person? Did he not have a desire to improve? He surely had a holy desire; we aren't arguing with that. But the problem is that he didn't uproot the other many desires of his heart, so his one desire to improve didn't stand a chance, against all those many desires.

The days of Elul are called “*yemai ratzon*”, “days of will”. The simple meaning of this is that Elul is when Hashem's desire for the Jewish people is more revealed and He draws us closer to Him. But it is also because these are days where we can reveal one *ratzon* (will) alone: “Our desire to do Your will.” The *Gemara* says that we all want to do Hashem's will, but the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) prevents us. So what, then, is our *avodah*? Our *avodah* is to get rid of the unholy desires in the heart.

Practically speaking, one cannot uproot all negative desires at once. They must be uprooted slowly and in steps.

## IMPROVING THE MIND AND THE HEART

Our *avodah* in Elul is really two-fold. We need to gain a holy mind and a holy heart, and integrate them.

We gain a holy mind by thinking into the source of each thing. One can keep probing into the source of each thing, more and more, until he discovers its beginning in the Torah.

We gain a holy heart by getting rid of our unholy desires. We cannot do it by simply trying to want the right thing, as many people think. This won't do much; at best we will be able to inspire

ourselves for some time, and it will not last beyond Elul. It is of course a wonderful thing to desire holiness, but it will not be enough to implement change; we will also need to get rid of the other desires in ourselves, if we are to really change. This is because as long as the unholy desires remain in our heart, they prevent us from holding onto our holy desires.

## INSPIRATION VS. LASTING CHANGE

The Ramban says that one must be able to turn inspiration into lasting change. From this we can see that inspiration itself is temporary and it doesn't have much value. It can definitely get a person started on the path towards change, but after inspiration goes away, it is very difficult and unrealistic for a person to keep it up. Often when a person is inspired he makes resolutions to change in certain areas, but soon after he is back to routine.

Instead, a person needs to accept upon himself something that he can never veer from, long after the inspiration is over. If inspiration has caused a person to take upon himself an absolute change which he never reverses, then the inspiration has served its purpose. But if the inspiration is just something that came and went with time, such inspiration is not describing Elul.

Thus, the point of this time of inspiration is so that we can resolve to make *absolute changes* in our life; *decisions*, and not merely to feel spiritual awakening. It must cause a person to feel obligated to change and to accept himself a certain change that he will never veer from.

That change, as we explained, consists of two parts. We need to make use of our mind (holy intellect) and our heart for it. As we explained, these changes must be gradual and in steps. When we attempt to remove our unholy desires,<sup>87</sup> this must not be done rapidly and in an extreme manner, but slowly and in steps. We must slowly eliminate each desire, one by one.

If this is what our inspiration in Elul leads us to, the changes are permanent; our mind and heart is changed. This enables us to truly build ourselves, to build our own inner worlds, to reach our true “*ani*”, and it is that *ani* which can become the “*Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi, Li*” (“I am to my Beloved – and my Beloved is to me”).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> See the author's sefer, *Getting to Know Your Thoughts*

<sup>88</sup> For more on how to maintain our inspiration, see *Tefillah #0119 – Inspiring Ourselves Vs. Building Ourselves*



28 | How We Look At Ourselves <sup>89</sup>SHOULD WE FOCUS ON OUR WEAKNESSES OR ON OUR GREATNESS?

It is brought in *Shulchan Aruch* that when one *davens*, he should think about the greatness of Hashem, and how small he is.

Is a person big or small? In *Shulchan Aruch*, it says that one should think how lowly he is, in comparison to Hashem. What does this mean? Are we supposed to look at ourselves as lowly beings?

The true approach we need to have is that one has to realize that man is very great, but at the same time, man is also a lowly being. One can have simultaneous views towards himself at once.

How can this be, though? Either we are great, or we are lowly. How can we be both at the same time?

We all have certain bad *middos* (character traits). That can help us understand how lowly we are. But we are also beloved to Hashem, for we were created in His image. In our actual essence, we are all great.

We are lowly in the sense that we are materialistic, and we also have bad *middos*; these two factors together contribute to our lowliness. We have certain human weaknesses and shortcomings. But our soul is called a *cheilek eloka mimaal*, “a portion of Hashem”. What is the main part of who we are? Is it the fact that we are a soul? Or is it the fact that we have bad *middos* which we must fix?

This is a very fundamental question: How does one view himself?

WE ARE ALL A 'TZELEM ELOKIM' (IN THE IMAGE OF G-D) - A 'NESHAMAH' (DIVINE SOUL)

To explain more what we mean: the fact that one is a *tzelem elokim* (“in the image of G-d”) is not just because one must view himself as “I, Reuven, was created as a *tzelem elokim*”, in the same way that Shimon and Levi are a *tzelem elokim*. The fact that we are a *tzelem elokim* is not part of your aspect of individuality, because if it was, it would be *gaavah* (conceit), and then you wouldn't honor others for being a *tzelem elokim*. This is because the same way you honor yourself for being a *tzelem elokim* is the same reason that you should honor another for being a *tzelem elokim*. Otherwise, you are just using your ‘*tzelem elokim*’ for the purposes of your own ego.

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/droshos-how-we-look-ourselves>

When you make a self-accounting and you want to improve, what are you thinking about? Are you just thinking about your faults and that you want to change? Or are you also realizing that you have greatness in yourself - that you are a *tzelem elokim*?

If you look at yourself as just a lowly being, you won't be able to ever reach self-perfection. Just focusing on your lowliness won't perfect you. If you want to have a true kind of life, you need to first focus on how you are good. You are a *neshamah* - your soul is pure, for it was placed in you by Hashem.

## HOW SHOULD WE VIEW OUR FAULTS?

Of course, you must know your faults, and you must also repent for your sins, but you need to view yourself as mainly being a good person. If you view yourself as a good person, you will have an inner source in yourself to draw forth great spiritual strength from to improve in Torah, *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven) and holiness.

If you don't connect to that inner source and you instead focus on your lowly aspects, you have nothing to draw forth inner strength from, because then it doesn't do anything for you.

In order for you to survive, you need to feel that you are precious to Hashem, for you are a *tzelem elokim*, and that your essence - your soul - is pure.

It can be compared to a stone covering over a well with pure water underneath. We have rough layers covering us, but beneath the surface, lies our pure *neshamah*. Our faults and our bad *middos* definitely exist, but they are not the source of our inner 'wellspring'. The source of our inner 'wellspring' is completely pure and good and holy.

When you reflect about yourself personally, where do you think your thoughts and feelings come from? Do they come from your lower aspects of your existence, or from your pure soul? We definitely have actions, feelings, and thoughts that come from the bad parts, but the real issue is, for a person to *know* where they actually come from.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONCEIT AND PROPER JEWISH SELF-ESTEEM

What is the difference between a superficial person and an inner [spiritual] kind of person? A superficial person views his thoughts and feelings as coming from an external part of himself. He does not view himself as being a good person in essence. Therefore, he suspects that his thoughts and feelings are not good. When a person views himself as only good, though, it is because he has *gaavah*; he doesn't realize where his thoughts and feelings stem from in himself.

By contrast, a person who lives an inner kind of life gets his feelings and thoughts from a pure place in himself. It can still happen that he receives bad thoughts and feelings, but they are mainly pure. So when a person lives an inner kind of life and not a superficial kind of life, he lives with inner strength.

If one lives superficially and he gets the strength from his inner self – this is all stemming from a strong amount of *gaavah* (conceit), which is a negative trait. But one who lives inwardly gets his thoughts and feelings from a pure place in himself.

#### Believing In Our Inner Point of Purity

The *avodah* of each of us is to reveal that completely good and holy part of ourselves. Many times people live superficially, and thus they don't realize that there is a pure place in themselves. They see others who are not truthful, so they view themselves in the same way, and they lose belief in the pure part of themselves. If you don't believe that there is a pure place in yourself, you won't be able to get to it.

We must all know that even though we have faults, our soul contains a place which is totally pure. This inner place is really what we have to reveal. A person who hasn't revealed it views himself with a low self-image, and this is a false way of viewing himself. But if one has revealed it, he views himself as being pure, as a person who contains greatness.

## DEALING WITH EVIL

How will we be able to deal with the coming year, and all the situations that it will bring? If we try to deal with it superficially, we won't be able to handle it. But if we merit to reveal the inner place in our soul which is pure, then whatever trying situation we will face this year to our spirituality, we will be able to return to that pure place and connect to its holiness.

Why is it that people usually succumb to evil when they are tempted? It is because they view themselves as mainly evil, so their evil is awakened, when they see evil. But if one is tempted in a situation yet he identifies with the pure place in his soul, even when he is tempted, he will remain attached to the pure place in his soul. True, he still has free will, and he can still fall. But he will be able to place in himself in a place that is pure, even as he is being tempted.

Every day, the *yetzer hora* gets stronger, *Chazal* say; and if not for Hashem's help, we cannot overcome.<sup>90</sup> Why can't we overcome evil, and why is it impossible without Hashem? When a person identifies himself superficially, the *yetzer hora* can sway him to do evil. Hashem helps a person in that a person can awaken his pure point when he is tempted with evil.

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<sup>90</sup> *Sukkah* 52a

*Chazal* say that when the *yetzer hora* is present, there is no *yetzer tov*<sup>91</sup>. You don't remember any *tov* (good) when *ra* (evil) is present. But if you are already used to dwelling on the pure point in yourself, then when you meet temptation, you will be very close to returning yourself to the good place in yourself, and then the evil won't be able to sway you.

If you're not used to dwelling on your inner purity, it will be very hard to overcome evil temptations when you are faced with them. This is why most people are struggling with their *yetzer hora*.

## ROSH HASHANAH: RETURNING TO THE STATE OF ADAM BEFORE THE SIN

Every year, when Rosh HaShanah comes, the original spiritual light returns to the world. When we were first created, we were pure. When Adam sinned, he fell into a mixture of good and evil. On Rosh HaShanah, we have the opportunity to identify our original pure state and connect to it.

Rosh HaShanah is a great light –it is a power to identify our pure point in the soul, which existed before Adam's sin, in which the world was still a pure place. If we want a true kind of life, we need to reveal that inner point in ourselves.

If we check ourselves and we want to see how we view ourselves, we should see what our first thoughts are when we think about ourselves: Do we initially feel negative towards ourselves, or positive towards ourselves?

If we have a positive view towards ourselves, we are connecting to the light that comes on Rosh HaShanah. But if we just look at Rosh HaShanah as a scary day in which we are judged for our actions, this is a superficial outlook, which only dwells on the mixture of good and evil that is This World.

Our Rabbis pointed out that on Rosh HaShanah, we don't mention any sins. Not only don't we verbalize them, but even to think about our sins on Rosh HaShanah is not allowed, according to the writings of our Rabbis. What is the depth of this? It is because when you think about your faults and sins, you are connecting yourself to the external parts to yourself, which are not pure.

On Rosh HaShanah, our main *avodah* is to connect ourselves to the way we are the beginning of creation, before the sin, when we were entirely pure. We need to awaken in ourselves the part in the soul which resembles Adam's state before the sin.

To clarify what this means, this is not simply to 'take our mind off' our sins; it is to enter deep into our soul, where there is a place in which there is no sin.

Shofar on Rosh HaShanah: Awakening Your Inner Point

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<sup>91</sup> *Nedarim 32a*

*Shofar* on Rosh HaShanah is meant to penetrate into our soul, that we should enter our souls. One aspect of *Shofar* is to remind us to do *teshuvah*, but that is only the external part of *Shofar*. The inner message behind *Shofar*, as Rav Saadyah Gaon says, is to remind us of *Shofar* at Har Sinai, when we were pure again.

If one hears *Shofar* and only thinks about improving his ways, his Rosh HaShanah is superficial. But if one hears the *Shofar* and is reminded of his purity, he enters the place in his soul where there is no sin.

There is *Shofar* in Elul and in *Rosh HaShanah*. The sound of the *Shofar* in Elul is to get us to cry and improve our ways. *Shofar* on Rosh HaShanah is to help us enter the place in our souls where there is no sin. This is Rosh HaShanah, the ‘head of the year’ – to begin the year from a pure, clean place. We each need to reveal in our own personal soul that our beginning point is a place of no sin. We don’t begin with sin; we begin with a place where there is no sin.

## THERE IS NEVER REASON TO DESPAIR

When one who absorbs this concept - first intellectually, and then in his heart – these words can transform his entire life, from beginning until end!

There is a [Chassidic] saying that goes, “Think good, and then it will be good.” Where does this saying come from? It is really based on the concept of thinking about the pure place in your soul, where there is no evil. Rosh HaShanah is when this perspective shines particularly.

Even a person who kept falling into sins this year, time and time again, should not despair. One of the reasons why we should never despair is because we can change our very orientations. As we have explained here, we can train ourselves to dwell on our pure essence, and this will help us succeed, with Heavenly assistance.

You can do this by reflecting every day into the concept that you are renewed each day by Hashem.

## BEGIN ANEW EACH DAY

We will now try to explain how we can access this practically.

The inner part of our soul is entirely pure, and the outer part of our soul is a mix of good and evil. How do we connect to the pure part in our soul? The pure part in the soul is deep in the soul, so it is very hidden from us. How, then, can we connect to it?

One major way to get there is through purifying the soul, and that is how one can penetrate to there. But there is a piece of advice that can be used even for someone who hasn’t purified his soul.

The advice is to begin every day anew! Not only in the morning should you feel renewed, but throughout the day, keep viewing yourself as “new”.

What does it mean to keep renewing yourself? You should not look at yourself as merely continuing the previous moment. This is because the previous moment was a mixture of good and evil. Instead, look at yourself as being born anew each second.

Rosh HaShanah is the day to remember the first day of Creation. What does it mean to remember the beginning of Creation? To look at this year as if it's the only year!

We must extend Rosh HaShanah to the rest of the year: that we should look at each day as the beginning. If you begin anew each day, not just as yourself but because the entire Creation is being renewed – this is not imagination; why not? Because the renewal is really there, it is just covered over and hidden, and you just need to connect yourself to it.

If a person tries this, not superficially and not through fooling himself, but because he believes in the renewal of Creation and that he can connect to it, each day he can connect to the pure place of renewal.

Of course, there will always be tests, even after you reach that place in the soul. Adam *HaRishon* also had a test, even when he was in his pure state. But the tests will look totally different, when we acquire this perspective.

Thus, each day, whenever you feel *timtum halev* (when you feel like your heart is stuffed and blocked from spiritual inspiration), or when your head is cloudy, or when you're upset at yourself for having bad *middos*, or anything that's not good in yourself - tell yourself that **you can begin again anew**, and you can tell yourself hundreds and thousands of times, that **your essence is good**. For you are, in you very essence, a *neshamah* - a “*cheilek eloka mimaal*” (portion of G-d above).

One who does this every day will feel purity in his soul each day, and he will acquire great power to deal with all events of life.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See also *Rosh Chodesh Avodah\_06\_Elul – Renewal*

## 29 | The Father-Son Relationship <sup>93</sup>

### BEN SORER U'MOREH – THE WAYWARD CHILD

*Parshas Ki Seitzei* talks about *ben sorer u'moreh*, the wayward child, who rebels against the Torah, “who does not listen to the voice of his father and to the voice of his mother.” In this part of the Torah, we are taught that there are children who do not listen to their parents, who do not continue their parents’ ways, by forfeiting the path of the Torah that they are taught.

This is especially happening in our current generation, where there are many children who abandon the ways of their parents and they go their own separate ways, throwing away the yoke of Torah from upon them.

### THE ‘WAYWARD CHILD’ THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Not every parent merits to have children who listen to them. The first child in history who did not continue in his father’s ways was Kayin, son of Adam. Later in history, Noach had a son Cham, who did not either go in his father’s ways. Avraham *Avinu* had a wayward son, Yishmael, and Yitzchok *Avinu* had Esav.

We see from this that a wayward child is not always due to the parents’ fault. It is simply because not every parent has the *zechus* (merit) to be saved from having a wayward child.

Avraham and Yitzchok were perfectly righteous, yet they bore children who completely rebelled against their teachings. And in fact, even Yaakov *Avinu*, who is praised for having perfect progeny, also had to deal with grief from his children, so they did not always go in his ways and emulate his teachings. Although the sons of Yaakov were all perfectly righteous, they caused grief to their father Yaakov *Avinu*, by refusing to talk to Yosef and by hating him, when they were upset with him.

Although this does not compare at all to the evils committed by Esav and Yishmael, who became wicked individuals that completely abandoned the ways of their fathers, still, the sons of Yaakov *Avinu* still caused a considerable amount of grief to their father, and this is also a degree of “not going in the ways” of the parents.

So there are two kinds of children who do not continue in the ways of their parents and who cause grief to the parents. One kind of child rebels totally against the Torah, like Esav and Yishmael. Another kind of child can be a good child, but he still can cause grief to his parents, such as what we

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<sup>93</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/weekly-shmooze-002-father-son-relationship>

see with the 12 sons of Yaakov *Avinu*, who were all righteous, yet their father had pain from them, because they did not always emulate his ways.

In our generation especially, there are children who are not going in the ways of their parents, and their parents have considerable grief from them. This problem did not begin in today's times; it has already been rooted into our history, that there will be children who don't go in the ways of their fathers.

The sons of Yaakov were all perfectly righteous, and although their hatred towards Yosef did not take away their status of being *tzaddikim*, it eventually bore evil results later on, in their own descendants. Levi had an evil grandson, Korach, who caused disparity amongst *Klal Yisrael* and he lost his share in the World To Come because of this; he is not counted amongst the progeny of Yaakov *Avinu*.

Our *Avos* and our *Imahos* had to deal with having evil children like Esav and Yishmael, and they also bore descendants such as Korach. They were as spiritual and as righteous as can be and they did their best, but they were not always spared from having troubles with their children.

## CHINUCH: HOW PARENTS CAN DO THEIR BEST

The *avodah* of our *Avos* was to imbibe the principles of belief into the Jewish people. They perfected their own character, and that was how they could succeed in getting their children to emulate them and to continue in their ways.

Thus, *chinuch* (child education) is not simply about training the child to do certain deeds. Parents must work on themselves, on perfecting their own character, in order to imbibe a good *chinuch* on their children and to teach them what they want to teach them, just as the *Avos* did.

But if the parents themselves are weak in their own *emunah* and in their own observance of the Torah, and they live their lives by rote, they will not succeed to implant truth in their children. And when that is missing, there is usually rebelliousness amongst the children, and the child is not to blame for this. "*What should the child do, and not sin?*"<sup>94</sup>

On a deeper note, when the parents themselves are not earnest in how they live and keep Judaism, there is no "voice" for the children to listen to and emulate. The *ben sorer u'moreh* turns out the way he is because "he does not listen to the voice of his father and to the voice of his mother", but if the father and mother themselves are not earnest about what they do, then the "voice" of the father and his mother are not a genuine voice for the child to listen to. If their voice would be a voice of truth, when their words to him are coming from their heart, there is a rule that "words that come from the heart, enter the heart", and usually the child will be affected by their words, because he knows that his parents are earnest.

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<sup>94</sup> From the prayers we recite in *Selichos*



## CHINUCH, PART I: EXPRESSING LOVE & CREATING 'SIMCHAS HACHAIM' IN THE HOME

In our generation, there is more of a need than ever, that the parents show their love to their children, and **express** it to them. It is not enough if the parents know deep down that they love their children; this remains as “hidden love”<sup>95</sup> and it will not be enough to nourish the children’s emotional needs. This was always the case, but nowadays, it is even more so.

The parent’s love for the child must be outwardly revealed and **expressed**. Such a home will be a home of *simchas hachaim* (joy of life), which is absolutely necessary for a child to thrive in and develop properly.

Without an atmosphere of *simchas hachaim* in the home, a home might look like it is functioning, and the children have clothing to wear and they have other things too, but there is no spirit of life there. This is such a basic part of the home, which any home needs: there must be love **expressed** in the home. The parents must keep showering their love in the home upon their children, and this is what creates a *simchas hachaim* in the home that the children will need.<sup>96</sup>

## CHINUCH, PART 2: A HOME OF EMES\TRUTH

However, there is more than this that is needed in the home. A *simchas hachaim* in the home, created by the parents’ outward expression of love, is all but the physical layer of the home. There is a deeper part to the home that is needed: the parents need to implant *emes* (truth) into the home. The children must see that their parents really mean what they do. Often the child does not turn out truthful because it was the parents who are not earnest in their own level of *Yiddishkeit*.<sup>97</sup>

But if there is a combination of *simchas hachaim* in the home, together with an atmosphere of *emes* in the home, these two factors together are what creates the proper and successful Jewish home, enabling there to be far less of a chance of a “*ben sorer o’moreh*” from happening.

## WHEN THE PARENTS DID EVERYTHING RIGHT

Yet, even if the parents did all of the above and they did everything right, there is still no guarantee that the parents will always have perfect children. Is any one of us more righteous than Avraham *Avinu*? Is anyone among us greater than Yitzchok *Avinu*? Our great *Avos* bore evil children,

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95 “*ahavah musteres*”, “hidden love”, a concept mentioned in *sefer Tanya*, who explains that although we all have a hidden love for Hashem in our hearts, it is not enough for us to develop feelings for Hashem, and we must reveal it outward.

96 For more on expressing love in the home and in bringing *simchas hachaim* into the home, see *Getting To Know Your Family\_02\_Expressing Love In The Home*, and *Getting To Know Your Family\_09\_Infusing Spirituality Into The Home*

97 See *Getting To Know Your Simcha\_011\_Raising Happy Children*

Yishmael and Esav, who totally rebelled against the ways of their parents. Some of our greatest *Gedolim* had children who did not follow in the way of the Torah.<sup>98</sup>

Certainly as a first measure, the father and mother must do everything they can in order to implant **love** and **truth** in their home, as we said; and the son will usually reciprocate these feelings. This is usually the case, for the parent-child bond is such an integral part of life that forms the basis of how the child will act. But sometimes, the parents have done everything they can, and it is not their fault that their child has abandoned the way of Torah.

When that happens, we must be aware of the following. Although the parent-child relationship is integral to our development, and it is very important part of life which shapes us, there is still a deeper aspect of life than this which we must access than our parent-child relationship.

Dovid HaMelech said, “*For my father and my mother have abandoned me, and Hashem will gather me.*”<sup>99</sup> Our father and mother represent our physical side of life, which must be certainly be healthy in order for us to survive, but there is also our *neshamah* (Divine soul). Our *neshamah* relates only to Hashem as its Father, for only Hashem is “our Father in Heaven”. We have a *mitzvah* to honor our physical parents, but the inner essence of life is: to honor our Father in heaven. Honoring parents is just a *moshol* (parable) that helps us reach the *nimshal* (lesson).

Therefore, we must know that the bond we have with our parents is only one side of life. It cannot be everything, for it all stems from our physical side of life. We come from our physical parents, therefore, we are connected to them in the physical sense, for they had a part in forming our physical existence.<sup>100</sup> But our physical layer is not all there is to us, for we have a soul in us, and our essence is our soul. Our soul needs a relationship with Hashem, and it is not satisfied with just the physical relationship we have with our parents.

Avraham had a rebellious son, Yishmael. How did he get over the grief he must have had from this? The Torah tells us that when Hashem told Avraham that Yishmael will not be his progeny, Avraham still prayed for Yishmael’s life, hoping that Yishmael would live and continue. But although he prayed for Yishmael’s survival, he still knew that Yishmael is no longer regarded as his son. How did he console himself over the pain of this?

It must be because there is a point in the soul which goes deeper than the father-son relationship. The father-child relationship is very powerful, but there is a point in the soul that is even stronger than this: our bond with our true, merciful Father in heaven. (In terms of the soul, the father-son relationship is called the point of “*av u’ben*” (father and child) in the soul, and the point above that is called *l’maalah m’av u’ben*, “above father-and-child”.)

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*98 Editor’s Note: Some examples are the sons of Eli HaKohen (Chofni and Pinchas), the son of King Chizkiyahu (the wicked king Menasheh), and the wicked sons of Dovid HaMelech – Avshalom and Amnon. In recent history as well, many righteous tzaddikim did not merit to always have good children.*

*99 Tehillim 27:10*

*100 See Tefillah #0124 – The Only Lasting Connection*

Therefore, if a child does not go in the ways of his father and he abandons the Torah, the father must certainly repent that perhaps it is his own fault - and hopefully, in this merit, the child will become inspired and return to his father's ways; but if the child does not return, the father must now let go of the father-child relationship, and instead turn to the deeper point in his soul, the relationship that goes beyond father and son: our bond with our Father in heaven.<sup>101</sup>

## "AVINU"

These days of Elul are days where we must penetrate into the depths of the soul and find our inner "Father". The inner "Father" in our soul which we must reveal is, essentially, *to feel a palpable sense of our Father*.

Throughout the days of *Selichos*, Rosh HaShanah, the days of *teshuvah*, and Yom Kippur, we keep saying the words, "*Avinu Malkeinu, Avinu Malkeinu, Avinu Malkeinu!!*" ("Our Father, our King"). But if we really mean it, we must really *feel* that Hashem is indeed *Avinu*, our Father.

How, indeed, can we get ourselves to realize that Hashem is "*Avinu*"? We know that when a child grows up with his parents, he turns to his parents for all his needs. Later he grows up and he becomes more independent of his parents, but at first, a child is totally dependent on his parents. He asks his parents for anything he needs. So, too, one must turn to Hashem for everything, for all his needs, just like a child in his parents' home. He must ask Hashem for everything, big or small. When a person gets used to this, he will slowly begin to feel that Hashem is indeed his Father.

One who merits fulfilling the *mitzvah* of honoring parents properly has a good *moshol* to work with for this. But even if one did not merit fulfilling the *mitzvah* of honoring parents, he can still get used to asking Hashem for everything and thereby come to relate to Hashem as his Father.

During these days of mercy, we ask Hashem for many things. We ask for life, livelihood, health, Torah, *yiras shomayim*, and more. Although all of these requests are about things we need, the deeper part of life is to build for ourselves a bond with our Father.

We all have this power, but it has become concealed deep within and it is covered over by many layers that have accumulated from all the years. But we still all have this power in ourselves deep down, and we just need to reveal it outward, from its hidden state.

One can train himself to keep turning to Hashem, on a regular basis, for all things that he needs. This will slowly enable a person to have a bond with Hashem, more and more, as we get used to this. When one lives this way and he turns to Hashem hundreds of times throughout the day, and not just during the three *tefillos* we daven each day, he slowly develops his bond with Hashem and he begins to relate to him as the true "Father."

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<sup>101</sup> Refer also to *Getting To Know Your Feelings, Chapter Seven: Developing Our Relationships*

## YAMIM NORAIM – DAYS OF LEARNING HOW TO TALK TO HASHEM

These days of mercy reveal to us this particular aspect of realizing that Hashem is our Father. These days are not just about *davening* more; these are days which show us how the rest of the year should look like – to constantly turn to Hashem for everything and relate to Him as our Father.

Of course, this does not mean *chas v'shalom* that we should *daven* the entire day and not learn Torah. The point we are saying is that the inner layer to the life that we live is, to always talk to Hashem, over all matters, big or small, and to turn to Him throughout the day whenever we need something.

Getting used to it helps us acquire the nature that is really deep in our soul to turn to Hashem. It enables a person to have true closeness with Hashem throughout the day. It transforms a person's Torah learning into truthful Torah learning, and it makes our prayers more earnest, and it causes our performance of the *mitzvos* and the act of doing Hashem's will to stem from a deeper place in ourselves, to be more genuine.

## IN CONCLUSION

This is the perfection of our *avodah* we can reach on this world – to merit a relationship with Hashem in which we feel like He is our Father and that we are His child. And when we feel like a child of Hashem, we will be like the child who naturally listens to his parent – the child who hears the voice of Hashem.

But in order to truly feel like a child of Hashem, we need to relate to Him as our Father, as we explained above.<sup>102</sup>

This is the true kind of life – to be constantly connected with Hashem, every day and throughout the entire day, always desiring closeness with Him.

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*102 Editor's Note: The sefer of Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Daled (Building A Sanctuary In The Heart – Part 4) is devoted to how we can build a father-son relationship with Hashem. See also the collected shiurim of Practice of Hisbodedus – Talking To Hashem.*

## 30 | Examining Our Hearts Before Rosh HaShanah <sup>103</sup>

### HASHEM SEES INTO OUR HEARTS

"לבוחן לבבות ביום דין" We recite in the *piyutim* of Rosh HaShanah that Hashem sees into our hearts as He judges us; nothing is hidden from Him. Hashem sees straight into the person's heart, as it is written, "האדם יראה לעינים, וה' יראה ללבב", "*Man sees with his eyes, [but] Hashem sees the heart*".

Hashem sees what's in a person's heart, and judges Him accordingly, based on what He sees there. He sees all the layers of the heart, both the external layers and the inner layers.

Being that this is so, we must know what is going on in our heart.

If we were being judged for just our actions alone, then we must examine our deeds and then we are fine. But Hashem is looking into our heart - this shows us that we also need to discover what is in our hearts, when we examine ourselves. If one does not figure out what is going on in his heart, he is like a person who comes to court without preparing what he will say, because he has no idea what is going on with himself.

One cannot know this superficially. In order for one to prepare himself for the "court case" on Rosh HaShanah, he must reveal the deepest layers of his heart - and then he can know what is in his heart.

This has to be done *before* Rosh HaShanah, because it is how one prepares for Rosh HaShanah. One needs to reveal the depths of his heart, and prepare it for Hashem – and that is how he becomes prepared for Rosh HaShanah.

"*Man sees with his eyes, but Hashem sees into the heart*" - Hashem sees the heart of a person, whereas people cannot see into each other's hearts. But there are many people who do not even see what is in their *own* heart!

How, indeed, do we check our hearts?

### GETTING TO KNOW YOUR DESIRES

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<sup>103</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-049-examining-our-hearts-rosh-hashanah>

The heart is the seat of our desires. The *yetzer tov*<sup>104</sup> and the *yetzer hora*<sup>105</sup> are in there. The word *yetzer* (inclination) is from the word *ratzon* (will), because both of our inclinations are present in our *ratzon*\will; the *yetzer tov* is present in our good desires, and the *yetzer hora* lies in our evil desires.

The *yetzer tov* in us is essentially the good desires which we want; the *yetzer hora* in us is the evil desires which we also want. We want both of these desires. When we are checking into our hearts, we must discover those things that we want – both the good and the bad.

Each of us has many, many things that we want. We have things we want which are holy, and some things which are mundane, and some things which are not good at all. Either way, we must get to know what is going on in our heart.

To apply this practically, take a pen and paper and write them all down. Sit and think, and wonder what you want in life - and write it down. Make two rows. On one row, write down your good desires, which may include your desires to learn Torah, do mitzvos, daven, to do chessed, etc. You may also want holiness and purity, and also comfort, livelihood, and health. Whatever you want, write it all down – all of it.

In one row, write down the desires which you attribute to your *yetzer tov*, and in the other row, write down the desires which you think come from your *yetzer hora*.

This is not about writing down your deeds; that is something else entirely. In this list, write down just what you *want* - not what you *did* this year. Only the *Beis Din* in Heaven knows what you did this year; all you can know about yourself is what you want.

It is explained that there are two different judgments – one judgment is meted by the Heavenly Court with Hashem at the head, and the other judgment is meted out by Hashem Himself. During the rest of the year, we are judged by the Heavenly court, for our actions. On Rosh Hashanah, we are judged by Hashem Himself – on what we want. Hashem sees into our hearts on Rosh HaShanah and He sees what we really want, and judges us accordingly, as we say in the *piyutim*: לבוחן לבבות ביום דין.

Our Sages state, “When there is *din* (judgment) below, there is no judgment above; if there is no judgment below, there is judgment above.” The meaning of this is that if a person makes sure to be a judge over himself down here on this earth – by examining his heart’s desire – then he is saved from being judged in Heaven. But if he doesn’t examine himself here on this world, then there is no judgment here on this world, so he is judged above in Heaven, *chas v’shalom*.

## WRITING IT DOWN

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<sup>104</sup> good inclination

<sup>105</sup> evil inclination

Preparing for Rosh HaShanah, simply, is by discovering what you really want. Make a list and write down what you want – the good and the bad. Write down also the things you want which are in-between good and bad. Write down *what you really want* - and not what you know Hashem wants from you. We all know what Hashem wants from us; write down what *you* want. Be honest with yourself.

Write it in order of preference: What you want the most, what you want second-to-most, then third-to-most, and so forth. This takes at least one entire learning *seder* (learning session) to figure out.

Examine your heart, in-depth, like a *sugya* that you learn in-depth. As long as a person only examines his deeds alone and he doesn't know what is in his heart, he does not know himself at all. The Sages say that he *yetzer hora* hides in the heart of man<sup>106</sup>. A person does not know about his desires until he examines them; that is how the *yetzer hora* is initially hidden. It is hidden until one discovers it and thinks into it.

One should know what his desires are, in order of preference. Then, he should make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul-accounting) and ask himself if the order of his desires are in line with the order that it should be, or if perhaps he is only doing what's comfortable.

For example, does a person feel more of a desire to do a mitzvah than to learn Torah? Chazal say that Torah is more prominent than mitzvos, for "Torah brings one to good deeds". If so, a desire for Torah must precede a desire for doing mitzvos. If a person discovers that he desires to do mitzvos than to learn Torah, he has just discovered that he needs to give proper order to his desires and re-evaluate his priorities.

Then, write down all the bad things you want. Don't deny any of them. Then write down what you want for the next year.

Doing this will help you become aware of what you really want. Remember that the *yetzer hora* that resides in our heart stays there as long as we never figure out what we desire.

After listing our good desires and our bad desires, in order of preference, we have checked our hearts. But this is not yet the goal; it is only a means to a greater goal. The goal is to have an order of *avodah* for the rest of the year, now that we have given some kind of order to what our desires should be.

## IN CONCLUSION

The average person will say that he does not need to figure this out at all, and he will say that of course, he wants to learn Torah and do mitzvos. But the question is: Is he uprooting the evil desires

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<sup>106</sup> *Sukkah 52a*

in his heart from all his learning Torah and doing the mitzvos? Not always. Only Dovid HaMelech erased his *yetzer hora* entirely.

Of course, we are not on Dovid HaMelech's level, but on our own level, we can also work to lessen the evil present in our heart, and increase the amount of good.

One should enter Rosh Hashanah after examining himself like this, becoming aware of his heart's desires, and then he will have a lot easier of a time with his *yetzer hora* during the rest of the year.

An ignoramus does *teshuvah* on his basic level; a Torah scholar needs to do *teshuvah* in-depth, just like he learns the Torah in-depth. He should examine his heart in-depth, and he should examine the *sefer* (ideal order) of what his *avodah* will be this year, and he should think about this in-depth.

May we merit to reveal the depths of our heart to ourselves, and through this, to merit to be written for a good year.



31 | Crying In Elul <sup>107</sup>TWO REASONS TO CRY IN ELUL

We are in the days of Elul, and nearing Rosh HaShanah. The Torah writes about a *yefas toar* (captive maidservant), who is given a time of thirty days to mourn her parents. The Zohar says that this refers to the 30 days of Elul, where we cry.

What do we cry for in Elul? In the month of Av, we cried about the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*. That is where we find crying. But what is there to cry about in Elul? What is the concept of crying in Elul?

There are two kinds of crying in Elul. One kind of crying is when a person makes a *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) for the past year and he reflects into what he did. He wonders about his deeds and what will be with him this year. “The heart knows the bitterness of its soul” - if a person really feels the far-reaching consequences of what he did, he comes to feel pained at his sins of this year (as opposed to just merely knowing about it), these feelings can bring a person to tears. Our Rabbis point out that “Elul” is from the word “yelalah”, which means to cry.

That is one kind of crying that can happen in Elul, but there is another kind of crying in Elul, which is deeper. Elul is an acronym for “Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi Li” (I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me). When one thinks about how Elul is “Ani L’Dodi V’Dodi Li”, it must cause a yearning in his soul for this. This is the inner kind of crying that is needed in Elul, as well as on Rosh HaShanah. It is to cry from our soul, from yearning, for Hashem.

YEARNING TO RETURN TO OUR SOURCE

When the soul of a person really feels the *Ribono shel Olam* (Master of the world) with a true feeling, a person has yearnings to return to his inner Source, where the *Ribono Shel Olam* is fully revealed and sensed.

It is written in the psalm of “*L’Dovid*” which we recite in Elul after the prayers: “*For my father and my mother have abandoned me, and Hashem will gather me.*” But one must have a yearning for “*And Hashem will gather me*”.

Here is a simple thought to think about. All of us, before we came down onto this world, lived in Heaven. It was decreed on us to come down onto This World, and we’ve been living here for many

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<sup>107</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/ellul-017-crying-elul>

years, 20 years and 30 years and more. If we did not see our father for 20 years, wouldn't we miss him? Of course we would. Our soul came down from Heaven where it came from, and it has been here on this world for at least 20 years and more. If one feels totally disconnected from Heaven, then he will not yearn for Heaven. After all, he doesn't remember it anyway, he has no idea what it's like, so why he should he miss it if he's not there... But when a person is even a bit open to some feeling for the spiritual, and he is aware that there is a more inner layer to our life, he has yearnings to return to the spiritual dimension that he came from.

## TECHNOLOGY: WHERE HAVE WE COME TO?

Here is a very simple example from our world that can help us relate to what we are describing here.

Everyone here remembers what the world looked like 20 years ago, compared to what it looks like today. The world has changed drastically in just the last 20 years alone. If one doesn't feel the *tum'ah* (spiritual impurity) of today's times, he feels okay with it; he thinks that just as there were always "*nisyonos*" (tests) in each generation, so are there "*nisyonos*" in our generation as well. But if anyone even feels a little bit of the situation going on in today's times, he must feel some kind of yearning to return to a purer kind of world; at least the kind of world that was here 20 years ago.

If we would take a person from 20 years ago and put him in today's generation, he would faint from what he sees. We are very concerned when we watch the children growing up in today's new generation and of the challenges that they face [with technology] in today's times. But there are fully grown adults, who did not grow up using computers and laptops, and they grew up totally sheltered from any of these things, yet they have gotten used to these gadgets now - just as much as children growing up in this generation. How could this happen? And it has even become accepted as part of life to act this way.

We can understand why children of this new generation have such a hard time to withstand the temptations of these gadgets; they never saw a generation where these things were nonexistent, so it's like they never saw the light yet. But the adults of this generation are well-aware of the previous time in our world where these things didn't exist. How then could these adults get used to these gadgets when they go out there into the world, and they are just fine with it?

## TO FEEL LIKE A 'STRANGER' TOWARDS THIS WORLD

Is there a yearning in our soul to return to a different world than the one we see today? Do we wish we could return to the way things used to be? Does a person on this world feel that his house is his house, or does he feel "*I am a stranger in this land*"?

Someone who has suffering in his life surely knows what it's like to feel like a 'stranger' on this earth. But if someone has a pretty good life - if he has a good wife and good children (*Baruch Hashem*), and if he also has good health and livelihood and *nachas* and he has everything he needs—what does he feel like? Does he feel like a “stranger” to this earth as he is supposed to feel, or does he feel instead that everything is good here on this world?

## WHAT TO YEARN FOR

Our soul must feel a yearning to go back to a purer world. We used the above example so that we can make this matter very practical, even for those who are living a very materialistic kind of life.

The soul of a Jew must always be filled with yearnings! There are some people who are too embarrassed to cry. Why are they embarrassed? What is there to be ashamed of about crying? A person who lives a truthful kind of life lives a life of yearnings- he cries. If a person yearns, can he restrain himself from crying? There is no such thing. If there are yearnings, a person cries.

A child cries when he doesn't get what he wants badly. But a mature adult, a *bar daas*, must cry about things that an adult needs to yearn for. And what should an adult yearn for? An adult must yearn for totally different things than the things that the world wants.

## THE SITUATION OF THE WORLD TODAY

Logically speaking, from the perspective of our straight intellect (*seichel hayoshor*), this Rosh HaShanah should really be the last Rosh HaShanah ever. The world cannot survive anymore the way it is. But Hashem desires that it should continue, so it continues. His thoughts are above our logic. But from the viewpoint of our own logic, it really doesn't make sense that the world should continue anymore.

If you know what goes on in the world today, your *seichel hayoshor* can tell you that it should not go on anymore, and every day that goes by, you can feel a yearning to live in a purer and cleaner world than the way it is now.

## YEARNING FOR A DIFFERENT LIFE

A Jewish life, throughout the generations, and especially in this generation, is a life that needs to be filled with yearnings. If a person doesn't yearn for a different world than the world of today's times, it is a sign that he has become too accepting of the lifestyle of today's times, as if today's lifestyle is a valid way of living.

A *yefas toar* cries over her parents for 30 days, and the 30 days of Elul are days where we are meant to cry over what we yearn for and what we miss. At the very least, each person needs to at least feel what kind of situation we are in now and where our true place is; to wonder where a Jewish *neshamah* really belongs and how it must live.

True, we will never be able to totally free ourselves from all of the obstacles today; there are many factors which enslave us, both on our outside and inside. But we must make sure that we never lose our yearnings. We must yearn for a totally different kind of life than the lifestyle of today's world. Yes, we must eat, drink, make a living, make sure we have good health, and have nachas from the children. But our source of vitality in life needs to come from a totally different area than any of these.

When Rosh HaShanah comes – the day where Hashem created man – each Jew has to reflect on the following simple reflection: How did man look when Hashem created him, and how does man look in the year 5773? Man looked like “*adam*” then, and he looks a lot different now.

In order to yearn, one must think about what was before, in comparison to what is now. Does man now have yearnings to return to the original state of man, when he was in Gan Eden? Or has man gotten used to the lifestyle of today and he'd rather stay here?

Every single week, for once a week, each of us is able to have a small spark of the World To Come: Shabbos. Shabbos is called a resemblance of the World To Come; it reminds us a little bit of where we come from. It reminds us a little of how a different world looks like. We have this one time of the week where we can see how a different world looks like in which there is no work, no labor, no having to earning a livelihood (at least in action) – where we can have a little bit of a yearning for a different world.

Most people are busy all day making a living, from morning until night. Does a person have a yearning to return to a world where there is no work, where he can instead have a day entirely devoted to serving the Creator from morning until night? “The Sages desired the days of *Moshiach* only so that they could sit and be entirely dedicated to learning Torah and receiving more wisdom.” Of course, a person will say “I can't just leave my job and not earn a livelihood.” But is there at least a yearning for a world in which you don't have to work? Does the person have such a yearning?

If a person just reflects a little bit into what the world used to look like at the beginning of Creation and he compares it to where we are now and to where we have to get to, he will be filled with yearnings. These yearnings make a person feel more alive, and they connect the person to a different world, removing him somewhat from this current lifestyle.

One of our thirteen principles of faith is that we believe that *Moshiach* will come, “and even though he tarries, I await for him.” Why must we await *Moshiach*? What does our soul yearn for in *Moshiach*'s coming? Part of the belief is that even though he tarries, we still yearn for his arrival. The point is not to be able to say these words of the *Ani Maamin* by heart and to believe that *Moshiach* will come. The point is to truly yearn for a different kind of life than today's times.



## THE DARKNESS OF TODAY

There was always a spiritual slumber throughout all of the generations. For this reason, we need the *shofar* to awaken us, as the Rambam says, that the purpose of *shofar* is to awaken man from his ‘slumber’ and from chasing trivialities. But if a person is very sick, he needs even more than the usual to help him. In the plague of darkness in Egypt, everyone was paralyzed. If we would blow *shofar* during the plague of darkness, would it awaken them from their spiritual slumber...?

We must know what the world is found in right now, and what our *avodah* is now. Our Sages compare the final generation to the order of events that took place in the redemption from Egypt. We are right now in the three days of the plague of darkness of Egypt, where darkness fills everything, and it is paralyzing. You can even feel it tangibly - just like they tangibly felt it in Egypt.

If somebody doesn’t tangibly feel the darkness in our times, he is not just blind; he is missing the sense of touch. The darkness in today’s times is not the darkness you see at night. It is the kind of darkness that was the plague of darkness in Egypt. It is a darkness which envelopes the entire world; **we are referring to all the kinds of technology that exists today.**

It is not the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination). It is much more than the *yetzer hora* – it is darkness itself which you can feel, tangibly. It is not felt by those who have become numb to feeling the spiritual. But those who do feel the spiritual, can feel the darkness.

The darkness of today’s times is not the same as the darkness that was here 20 years ago or even 10 years ago. Now there is a new kind of darkness that has descended onto the world. Everyone knows of different problems that it has caused; each to his own. But in any case, it is essentially a darkness that has come down onto the world. Even if a person hears *shofar* 100 times, he is not “hearing” it these days. Maybe his head is busy thinking about his four species on Sukkos, his *sukkah* and how it needs to get built, and *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah*. But he’s not “hearing” the [message of] *shofar*.

## WHAT WILL AWAKEN US?

There is a need now for a new force to awaken people from their spiritual slumber and from the new darkness that has befallen the world in recent times. What worked 20 years ago to awaken people doesn’t work anymore. In our times, not only will it “go into one ear and come out the other ear”; it doesn’t even enter the ear in the first place, because the person doesn’t even hear. This is not just another kind of “*yetzer hora*” we have in the world; it’s a whole different existence, of darkness, that has entered the world.

Most people are no longer inspired by the ways they were inspired 10 years ago. For some people the same old inspiration works, but for most people, they are not inspired anymore by what worked 10 years ago. We need a deeper kind of inspiration these days which can shake our hearts. It needs to

be an awakening that causes us to stay awakened, and not just to return to routine after we are inspired. Can anyone today say that there is something that inspires him? Can any person today know of something that would cause him to yearn and return to a purer and more spiritual life, a life of closeness with Hashem?

Many people today claim that they feel helpless, due to their various human weaknesses. Or, they blame it on their community or on the city they live in. But that is not the issue. It is because darkness fills the world today.

There is no “shepherd” or “leader” anymore who can lead the entire *Klal Yisrael* today. One by one, each of the *Gedolim* have left the world, one after the other, and the world is left an orphaned generation. These days, each person lives by according to what he thinks he is correct; each person lives according to how he wishes.

## A CHANGED WORLD

These words are not here to cause inspiration; the purpose here is to simply explain what situation the world is found in right now. Compare this to a family who moves into a new house, and the day they move, the father tells his little children, “Write down the address of the new house, this way if you get lost, you shouldn’t return to our old house and know how to get back to our new address.” So too, the “address” we lived in 10 years ago is not the same “address” anymore. It is a new world entirely.

Any *bar daas* can see that the world has changed so much in the last few years – even physically. Even the weather has changed. It is much hotter lately. Does anyone here know the reason of why there are hotter temperatures lately? It is because the world today is closer to *Gehinnom*. The heat of *Gehinnom* is starting to penetrate into the world. There are also natural ways to explain it, but this is the deeper reason.

The world today is not the same anymore. What is the new address we live in today? The new ‘address’ we live in today is: a “world of darkness”. That is what we live in today.

## FINDING THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

But, the Torah tells us that in the plague of darkness in Egypt, all of the Jewish people had light in their homes. Therefore, all of what we said until now is only one side of the coin. There is another side of the coin: there was light in every Jewish home, even amidst all of the darkness outside.

Similarly, by the sons of Korach, [as they were falling into *Gehinnom*, they did *teshuvah*], there was a special place prepared for them where they could be protected from *Gehinnom*, even as they were surrounded by it. So too, even though we are surrounded by *Gehinnom*, there is a light in the

darkness available to us – for those who want it and yearn for it and will do anything to connect to it.

For the amount of darkness that descends onto the world, there is an equal amount of light that comes onto the world. The light of Hashem is therefore more readily accessed in our times, much more than ever. However, one must be willing to separate himself from the darkness of the world, with *mesirus nefesh* (total willingness), to be willing to give up his soul for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and to really agree, that the world today is not such a good place to stay on.

After all, is it really such a ‘good’ world to live on? Look how much suffering fills most people’s lives. It’s so ‘good’? Does anyone realize that the world cannot continue on anymore like this?

The Jewish people had light in their homes during the plague of darkness. Every Jew had it. Similarly, each Jew today has the *bechirah* (free choice) to decide if he will continue to remain immersed in the darkness of today’s times, continuing to buy more technological gadgets and to fall further and further into the “50<sup>th</sup> Gate of Impurity” (otherwise known as the ‘point of no return’) – or if he will choose to live a different life altogether: to instead live a life of Hashem’s light, of closeness to Hashem, a life in which our desire is to desire what Hashem wants, to desire His Torah, truly, and in our heart.

This is the new power of free choice we have been given now, and it is available to anyone who desires to live a truthful life.

If someone truly chooses to live a truthful life in our generation in the times we live in, and in the year we are found in, to truly desire Hashem – then Hashem’s presence will be revealed to him in a great light, in rays of the *Shechinah*, which is pure bliss to behold. But one has to really choose and he must really want to separate himself from the lifestyle of the world today.

There was never such a deep power of choice since the beginning of Creation as the choices we must make today in our *bechirah*, where we are faced with such darkness.<sup>108</sup>

I hope that the words here should reach their desired intent and cause a yearning for true life - not simply to break through the darkness, but out of revealing a total hope that we can merit eternal life.

Let us pray together that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* should merit all of *Klal Yisrael* - even before it comes Rosh HaShanah - that we should desire to disconnect ourselves from all of the technology and gadgets today that are causing people to fall into the lowest possible places, and to instead choose the truest kind of life that exists, to choose eternal life, a life of Torah, of Hashem, of *ahavas Yisrael* and true connection to others; not superficially, but from the deepest place in ourselves.

May we all merit together to be written and sealed for a good year.

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108 See also *Bein HaMitzarim 005\_ A Time of Light and Darkness*



32 | The Baal Teshuvah Within <sup>109</sup>

TWO KINDS OF TESHUVAH – FROM “FIRE” OR FROM “EARTH” IN THE SOUL *The element of earth is dry and cold; the dryness of earth, when it becomes total, removes a person’s sense of vitality, but the coldness of earth, which really gets its source from the element of water, can revitalize the dryness. So when coldness of water is used on earth, the earth begins to get fixed. The coldness of the water shakes the person up, making him recede backwards from his obstacles, and this stirs him on to have some movement. It is like the ocean waves, which recede backwards, as we explained earlier.*

When a person recedes backwards in the opposite direction, he now has the power to go in an opposite direction. We began to explain earlier that moving in the opposite direction shows that the person now has the power to return to his source and start anew. Of the four elements, there are two elements which can return something to its source: fire and earth. Fire destroys something. Since the four elements are contained in everything, when fire destroys anything, it returns all the four elements back to its source. Earth returns the body back to the earth where it came from, after death.

This idea is the secret behind *teshuvah*! One way a person does *teshuvah* is by destroying his evil, and then he returns to his good source. This uses the element of fire in the soul, which “returns” something to its source by destroying it. But there is another kind of *teshuvah* as well that one can do: when he takes his evil and instead channels it in the right direction. If we have a tool that is being used for evil, we need to destroy it. But if we have an ability that was until now being used for evil, we do not have to destroy it; instead, we need to learn how to use it for good.

For example, an idol must be destroyed; we cannot repair an idol by using it for holiness. But the person who committed idol worship, who was engrossed in this idol, can now fix his search and instead channel his search in the direction of holiness. An evil object of *avodah zarah* needs to be destroyed, but the ability in a person that was drawn towards *avodah zarah* need not be destroyed; it just needs to be channeled in its proper direction, which is to be attached to holiness.

Another example: if a person loved to eat food, and he ate food which was not kosher, what does he need to do *teshuvah* for? The food that went into his stomach has to be cleansed out; he needs to clean out his system and destroy and trace of the non-kosher food left in him. But as for the fact that he loved the food, he need not get rid of his ability to love things. Instead, he needs to channel his love for food in a direction of holiness, and he should instead love holiness. Thus, there are two different kinds of *teshuvah*. One kind of *teshuvah* is when a person destroys the evil within him, thus returning to his good source. This is enabled by his element of fire, which destroys and then returns

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109 from “Understanding Your Middos\_006\_Limits and Beyond Limits

something back to its root. But another kind of *teshuvah* is when a person recedes from the evil direction he was going in, which gets him to begin a new kind of movement. The movement, as we said, is not evil in essence; it merely needs to be channeled in a proper direction.

**HOW TESHUVAH CAN REMOVE OUR DESPAIR** *The element of earth in us can therefore be used a source to renew ourselves with teshuvah. Earth in the soul, when it becomes too dominant, can bring a person to a deathlike kind of existence – when he gets too confined within himself, and he has no source of vitality going on. Then, just when the person is at the apex of his deathlike existence, it is precisely the heavy amount of earth in the soul that acts as the very catalyst that can get him to return to his source. This facilitates teshuvah.*

*“Return, o man, until [you are] crushed – until your soul feels utterly crushed.”*<sup>110</sup> When a sinner truly feels crushed inside, it is then that he can be spurred on to *teshuvah*. This is the true level of *teshuvah*. It can be reached precisely when a person feels that he is at the end point of things, when he can’t go on any more like this, that he can be moved to *teshuvah*.

When a person has despair, his abilities are deadened. He feels dead inside, that “it’s all over”, so he despairs. But if he feels like he has come to the end of his capabilities, yet he does not despair from this, he has the ability to return to his source. When he feels how much his earth is limiting him and constricting him, he can get himself to move again, and he “rebounds” off the earthen wall he has run into, like the arrow that bounces off the wall and then gets sent back to its owner.

Thus, the element of earth is rectified through *teshuvah*, when it returns a person back to his source. Earth has the power to return things back to their source; just like the curse of death placed on mankind was that the body would be returned to earth where it came from – a negative use of earth’s power to return things – so can this power of earth be used constructively, to “return” a person back to his Source, when he does *teshuvah*.

The Sages recount that after Kayin killed Hevel, he wandered around the world doing *teshuvah*. Once he ran into his father, Adam, who asked him: “Whatever happened with you?” [How did Hashem judge you for killing Hevel?] Kayin answered, “I did *teshuvah*. I have been acquiesced.”<sup>111</sup> The inner kind of *teshuvah* a person can do is when he realizes that without *teshuvah*, he really has no vitality. *Teshuvah* provides life-giving energy to a person.

When fire is the source of a person’s *teshuvah*, he destroys his evil. But when earth is the source of one’s *teshuvah*, he returns all of his abilities to their Source, and he reveals how there is no such thing as being beyond hope. From this we see how we can remove despair. When a person runs into an obstacle and he can’t get past it, either he can despair from this, or he can say: “Just like I was able to get here until this point, so can I go back and return to my source again.” This is the power of hope in a person, which is called *tikvah* in Hebrew. The word *tikvah* contains in it the word *kav*, which

<sup>110</sup> *Rus Rabbah* 6:4

<sup>111</sup> *Beraishis Rabbah* 22:13

means “straight line.” In a straight line, you can either move forward to one end of the line, or you can move back to the beginning of the line. In the same way that I was able to move forward and get to the point I am now, so can I use the same path to return to my original Source. [Not on the same exact path, of course, but rather, I have the power to return to my Source].

*Teshuvah* can reveal in a person his point of connecting to the Endlessness of Hashem (the *Ein Sof*). Without *teshuvah*, a person remains with his sins, and the sins destroy the person; “*The soul who sins must die.*” But Hashem said, “One can do *teshuvah* and be forgiven.”<sup>112</sup> When a person does *teshuvah*, he reaches the endless, because now he can see that it is possible to rise above anything, even when he thought he had reached his hopeless end.

*Teshuvah* is what truly rectifies the element of earth in a person. Mankind was cursed with a death as a result of sin, and by death, the body returns to earth. When left un-rectified, our earth symbolizes the end, the ultimate limitation placed on man – death. But Hashem has in front of Him “a book of life and a book of death.” The deep understanding behind this concept is that the “book of death” contains those who give up when they feel like they are at their end, while the “book of life” symbolizes those who know that even when it seems like they have reached their end, they can transcend the “end” and find continuity.

**THE “BAAL TESHUVAH” WITHIN YOU** *Thus, a baal teshuvah essentially reveals the deep power of the Jew’s soul to connect to the Endlessness of Hashem. He has reached the point which he really felt as the “point of no return”, in which he feels that his teshuvah won’t even be accepted if he tries to return; but he chooses to return anyway, revealing forth his power of mesirus nefesh (self-sacrifice). He resembles Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordaya, who had almost completely given up on doing teshuvah, and at the apex of his broken-heartedness, he utilized his innate power of mesirus nefesh to do teshuvah anyway. The baal teshuvah reveals how there is no situation in Creation that can really be called “the end”, because there is always hope.*

The *Gemara* says that although *Gehinnom* will cease, the wicked do not cease<sup>113</sup>; at some point, they are rectified. If they have some more merits, they merit to become the dust under the feet of *tzaddikim*. What exactly does this mean, that the wicked become the dust under the feet of *tzaddikim*? The depth of this is that the *tzaddikim* reveals the power of “*teshuvah*” which lays dormant in the “earth” under their feet, and in this way, the “*teshuvah*” that the wicked can reach can show them to the Endlessness of Hashem. When the wicked become the dust under the feet of *tzaddikim*, this is how they receive their rectification – at first, these wicked thought they were hopeless and at their ultimate end, and now, [through being the dust underneath the *tzaddikim*] they can connect to the Endlessness.

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<sup>112</sup> *Yalkut Shimeoni, Yechezkel 358*

<sup>113</sup> *Rosh HaShanah 17a*

## 33 | Elul – Believing In Renewal <sup>114</sup>

The *mazal* of the month of *Elul* is *besulah* (virgin), as is well-known. A *besulah* refers to anything that is new; in the Talmud, there is a concept of “*besulah*” in land (*besulah karka*, “new land”), and a woman who has never had relations is called a *besulah*. Hence, the term *besulah* connotes something new. If a person reflects into the Creation, he sees a creation that is thousands of years old; if one thinks about his own life, he thinks simply that he is found here on this world and that he has been here for a certain amount of years, etc. That is the simple perspective. But through the spiritual light of Elul, a new perspective can be revealed. The Sages state that the world was created on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Elul, but Elul is not just the creation of the world – it is a month which contains a spiritual illumination that enables a person to begin anew.

The physical eyes only see what is in front of them and what happened until now. But the light contained in Elul reveals a deep power: that it is possible to begin again anew. This is really the idea of *teshuvah* (repentance). When a person sins, G-d forbid, he must do *teshuvah*. The simple understanding of *teshuvah* is, as the *Rishonim* explain, that one must return to the situation he was in before the sin. But the inner understanding of *teshuvah* is for one to believe that it possible to begin again anew. *Teshuvah* is therefore based upon a certain *emunah* (belief) that must precede it, as described above.

One of the deep reasons of why most people do *teshuvah* and don't change is because although they had earnest intentions as they did *teshuvah*, they were far from the word of the Rambam about *teshuvah*: “One must repent until the One Who knows all secrets can testify on him that he will never return to this sin, forever.” Complete *teshuvah* is based on something that must come before it, and when that something is missing, the *teshuvah* will be like a tower floating in the air, which has nothing to hold it up and support it.

*Teshuvah* is therefore based on the *emunah* that a person believes that Hashem renews Creation, and just as He renews the creation every day, so did He give this power of renewal to each person. It is a power to believe in renewal, and upon this belief, *teshuvah* can happen.

There are actually two times of renewal in the year. One renewal takes place in the month of Sivan, and the other time of renewal takes place in the months of Elul and Tishrei.

Regarding the month of Sivan, where we received the Torah, *Chazal* say that “the words of Torah should be upon you like new, as if it was given today”. This was the beginning of all renewal, and it is because Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world. This power of renewal in Torah was given to us during that time.

But the power of renewal in the month of Elul, which continues into the Ten Days of Repentance, is a renewal that is based upon destruction, ruination, and breaking. It is a renewal after sin. This a new kind of renewal, a more novel kind of renewal than Sivan's renewal, and it is the renewal that is used for *teshuvah*.

The Rambam says that a *baal teshuvah* changes his name, meaning, that he is no longer the same person who committed those sins; he is no longer the man who committed those certain deeds. The simple understanding of these words of the Rambam is that if a person has changed his deeds, he is no longer the same person anymore, just as there is a concept that a person who steals can acquire the time by changing its appearance. In the same way, a person changes himself, by having a change in action.

But the deeper understanding of it is because *teshuvah* is based on believing in the power of renewal. The original renewal took place in Sivan, and a new kind of renewal comes in the month Elul, which takes place after destruction [Av], and it continues into the Ten Days of Repentance. When something is destroyed and is ruined, it needs *teshuvah* in order to make it new again like it was in the beginning. In order for the *teshuvah* to last, in the depths of the soul, and to be actualized from its potential state, one needs to precede it with personal *avodah* – to believe in the power of renewal.

*Teshuvah*, as our Sages explain, is to uproot the sin retroactively. The *Mesillas Yeshtarim* explains that, and the root of this is the concept of a *neder* (vow), which is annulled retroactively. That shows us that there is a power which can cause a retroactive change (as opposed to a change that is merely from now and onward). *Teshuvah* reveals that even though there was previously destruction, there can be a retroactive change, and therefore, it is possible to begin again from the start; to be renewed.

The more a person is clear about the power of renewal, the more effective his *teshuvah* will be; it will have something to stand upon. In turn, the less a person is aware about this belief in the power of renewal, or if he doesn't think about it enough and he is almost entirely unaware of it, even if he will do *teshuvah* on a "Halachic" level, usually such *teshuvah* will not last into the rest of the year.

We should understand deeply that each and every one of us has gone through decades on this world already, where we did many *mitzvos*, as well as sins, G-d forbid. A person has learned a lot of Torah, but there were also many times of wasting time from Torah study. The pressures of life weigh heavily upon each individual, with a millstone around the neck. There is a tremendous burden upon every soul, and all of these burdens have gathered on top of each other, over the years of a person's life. A great deal of sins and improper actions have accumulated, in addition to the various stresses of life. When a person tries to unload this huge burden from his shoulders, he finds it nearly impossible. It seems to a person that it is impossible for him to leave this situation behind.

What happens, as a result of that realization? Usually a person will try even harder, trying to make things work. He will try to bear the yoke of Torah upon him, he will try to get some spiritual uplift, he will try to better his actions, and he will try to continue and move on. But the truth is that the

giant “package” that has accumulated over the years upon his soul is too big for him to carry, and it is beyond his energies. It is a burden that he cannot carry.

Some people, when they come to that point, will give up completely. Others do not give up, and they continue to try harder, with the belief that that if they try harder, they will eventually get assistance from Heaven and then succeed, or through some other means. When the days of Elul arrive – the end of this year, and the beginning of the next year – every person feels a need to become spiritually elevated, to continue to strive higher, and to attempt to get there.

But the truth is, as mentioned above, that this is really too big of a burden for a person to carry. So what does Hashem ask of you? If the burden is too enormous to carry, what does Hashem want from us?

The simpler answer to this is that it’s true, you really can’t carry the burdens that are upon you, but if you try your hardest, you do your part, and Hashem will do the rest. That is a true perspective. However, there is a more inner perspective, which is a totally different attitude towards life.

*Teshuvah* offers a person renewal in the same way that a small child feels that first grade is completely new for him, and how a thirteen-year old boys views his *bar mitzvah*, and how entering high school feels new, and later, how entering *Beis Midrash* feels new. He sees it as new, and everything feels new to him, when entering these situations. The same is true of the feeling of renewal that is *teshuvah*.

Believing in renewal is the root of *teshuvah*. It shows a person that if he truly does *teshuvah*, he is not merely throwing away his sins. That is the basic part of *teshuvah* – getting rid of sin. But the depth of *teshuvah* is that all that has piled upon the person until now, can now be thrown off, and the person can begin anew. When one begins again anew, he will able to “light like an eagle, bold as a leopard, swift as a deer, strong as a lion” to do the will of his Father in Heaven.”

If a person does not view *teshuvah* with this inner attitude, his life will feel too burdensome and heavy to bear, and it will only continue to feel more burdensome. There are some individuals who literally feel alive from their Torah learning and mitzvos that they do, which revitalizes them and elevates them, but they are still feeling very burdened from all that has gathered upon them; each person can write an entire book about his stresses and troubles that he’s carrying on his shoulders.

*Teshuvah* accomplishes the same effect for the soul as a convert, who is considered born anew. It is with the person’s belief that it is possible to become a new creation.

These words will seem far-fetched to some people, but if someone believes the idea we are explaining, a new window will be opened up to him, which will enable him to begin instantly from a new place.

The secret of *teshuvah* is a hidden matter, because it seems to many people that *teshuvah* means “repentance from sin.” But that is just the beginning of *teshuvah*. A person can do that part of *teshuvah* instantly, and he may succeed. But in order to do “complete” *teshuvah*, he will not get there

just through repenting from sin alone. If he has accessed the power to believe in renewal, **before** the Ten Days of Repentance have arrived – then he will be able to do the complete level of *teshuvah*.

For this reason, Elul precedes the ten days of *Teshuvah*. Elul is about believing in the power of renewal. Upon believing in the power of renewal, a person can then come into the Ten Days of Repentance having done complete *teshuvah*. The days of Elul are given to us for this reason. Hashem has implanted these days into Creation to give us this power.

Elul has the *mazal* of *besulah* (virgin), because a *besulah* signifies something new, and it symbolizes the power to become renewed.

One should reflect deeply into this idea and firmly believe in this power of *emunah*, to activate it from its potential state. He should clearly believe that that a person has the power to become renewed, every day, at any moment. Although it doesn't seem that way at first, with the more we strengthen this *emunah* and reveal it in our souls, we enable ourselves to throw away the packages of sin that have accumulated upon us. As opposed to an elderly person writing on paper after erasing its ink, through renewal we can become like a child writing on a fresh new piece of paper.

Elderly Torah scholars become wiser the more they age. The simple understanding of this is because they get their life from Torah, therefore they have energy from it. That is true, but the more precise way to understand this is because they are connected to the power of renewal, and therefore whatever they have gone through until now is like a nullified vow, which becomes annulled retroactively – enabling them to always begin again anew.

The words here, on one hand, will seem very far; but on the other hand, they are closely attainable to anyone who deepens this belief in the power of renewal, within himself.

One who merits revealing this power, with *siyata d'shmaya*, will be able to undergo a renewal even after going through a stressful, burdensome day, or after a long, stressful period of his life. There is always this power to rise above the past burdens and become renewed, as if nothing has happened until now, no matter how much a person has been through. Once this power to believe in renewal becomes revealed within the person, it will accompany him throughout the year, and for eternity.

*Teshuvah* is a secret. It is a secret based upon the belief in the power of renewal. The clearer one is about this belief, the result will be that he will merit with *siyata d'shmaya* to do complete *teshuvah*, as we say,

Return us, in complete repentance, before You **החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך**



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