

BILVAVI

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS

THE GATEWAY TO DEVELOPING THE POTENTIAL OF YOUR MIND

Adapted From The Hebrew Shiurim
by the Author of "Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh"

דע את מחשבותיך

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Editor's Introduction

Getting To Know Your Thoughts, an English adaptation of “*Da Es Machshovosecha*”, is the sequel volume to *Getting To Know Your Feelings*, continuing the series on self-knowledge which began with *Getting To Know Your Self* – a series that offers a complete course of self-actualization, based entirely on Torah sources.

Getting To Know Your Thoughts discusses the mind - the power of *machshavah* (thought), and it is geared towards anyone who is an aspiring thinker. It is a *sefer* that requires contemplation and patience to read through.

In the author's previous *sefarim*, it has been explained that the soul has three layers: the actions of a person, the feelings of a person, and the thoughts of a person. In the first book of this series on self-knowledge, *Getting To Know Your Self*, it is explained on a general level of how a person can build the areas of action, feeling, and thought in the soul. The area of our feelings and emotions is explained more in-depth *Getting To Know Your Feelings*, and the next step is to learn about the area of thought in the soul. That is the subject of the book you now have in your hands, *Getting To Know Your Thoughts* - a guide to understanding the mind.

While the focus of this *sefer* is on how to build and develop the power of our *machshavah* (thought), its greater purpose is to help a person develop the analytical abilities that are necessary to learn Gemara with. **Part One (Your Thoughts)** focuses on how to build the power of thought, analysis, and decision-making. The goal is to become a more inner person, by learning how to make use of our power of thought; and there is a more specific goal here – namely, to be able to have in-depth Torah learning. It is also explained here of the differences between abstract thought vs. imagination\visualization. (**Chapters Three and Four** are geared specifically towards men).

We are then led into **Part Two (Your Imagination)**, which explains more about the difference between thought and imagination – and how imagination needs to be improved.

Author's Introduction

Our power of thought has three parts to it: our *machshavah* (thoughts), our *medameh* (imagination) and our *Da'as* (internalized knowledge).

This book focuses on the first two parts of our thoughts – *machshavah* and *medameh*; the topic of “*da'as*” has its own separate work (which has not been published yet; it is a continuation of this volume, and it deals with the power of our *da'as* in more detail, as well as how it relates to the imagination.)¹

This book is about our thoughts and our imagination. Chazal teach us that a person is where his thoughts are. A person must ascend the ladder of *Avodas Hashem* – first through improving how he acts, then how he feels, and then how he thinks. On a more subtle note, a person cannot really improve how he acts and feels unless he understands how to think.

This is not just a book about our power of thought and imagination; it is about how we can improve the rest of our life as well – how we act, and how we feel – through learning about our abilities of thought and imagination.

¹ This is available in Hebrew in audio format under the title “*Da Es Da'atcha*”; see the compilation of “*Utilizing Your Daas*”



1

Your Thoughts

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1.1 | The Basis of Thought

Our Goal – Reaching Our Soul So That We Can Become Close To The Creator

We will attempt to study the power of *machshavah* (thought) in a person.

“*Sof maaseh b’machshavah techilah*” – “*the end of actions is first with thoughts*”. First we need to learn what the purpose of this study is before we learn about what it is.

The purpose of learning about our thoughts is not for the sake of developing our thoughts, but it is only a **tool** to reach a greater purpose – to reach **our soul**.

There are three general parts to the soul – the *Nefesh*, the *Ruach* and the *Neshamah*. To be more specific, the *Nefesh* is located in the liver, the *Ruach* is in the heart, and the *Neshamah*, which is the Godly intellect of a person, is located in the brain²; the *Neshamah* is the highest part of our soul, which implies that thoughts are the highest function of our soul.

Developing our mind is thus essentially to reveal our *Neshamah*. The reason why we should want to reveal our *Neshamah* is because we want to become close to Hashem. The Rambam³ writes that we are attached to Hashem only through our minds.

That is why we should want to develop our mind – to reach our goal, which is to become close to Hashem.

In short, that is the purpose of this book. We will now, with the help of Hashem, begin to explain the foundations of how we build our power of thought.

Our Thoughts Can Take Us Beyond Our Limits

What are our thoughts? Thoughts are termed by the Sages as “a bird flying in the sky.” A person can be lifted up by his thoughts and fly away from where he is, when he thinks of something that isn’t in front of him.

All of the physical senses – such as smell, hearing, and speech – have limits. The root of all senses is the brain, but the brain itself can go above limits. Thoughts are not limited to any one place or time – a person sits in one place, but his thoughts can go to another place. This is why thoughts are called “a bird that flies in the sky”, because thoughts can fly above all boundaries!

² *Sefer Tanya*.

³ *Moreh Nevuchim*.

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However, the disadvantage to our thoughts is that we can fly too much with them. Our thoughts, if unbalanced, will be unstable and fly around too much, just like birds that can fly wherever they please.

We are referring to the problem of *dimyonos* – imagination. When a person's thoughts take him too far, he enters into his imagination. Reb Yisrael Salanter⁴ wrote that a person's imagination roams around to go wherever it pleases – which is detrimental. Our thoughts can take us away to faraway places that we should not go – the imagination. Most people who have not worked on developing their thoughts are wandering around with their mind, and their minds are lacking stability.

When it comes to our abilities of action and speech most people are able to stay focused. But when it comes to our thoughts, people usually don't focus and go from one subject to another in their minds, and all this takes place very quickly.

This is why we see that most people who haven't worked to build their thoughts have a problem in that their heads are wandering around all day with all types of thoughts. They are lacking stability in their thoughts.

When it comes to our actions, we don't jump too quickly from one action to another; we stay focused on what we are doing before we start something else. When we talk, we usually do not jump from one kind of conversation to another within three words; we focus on the topic at hand. But when it comes to thoughts, we think many different things in one minute!

This is unlike our actions and our speech, which we usually don't lose focus on. Of course, our actions and our speech could also use some improvement, but with our thoughts we can see clearly that we are jumping around too much.

If a person goes over what he thought about the entire day, he would discover that he thought about thousands of different things each day. Our thoughts literally fly around like birds in the sky.

Forming A Place in Our Mind to Build Our Thoughts

If we don't develop our thoughts, they wander to faraway places that we shouldn't go – places which our mind doesn't belong in.

It is written, “*With wisdom you shall build a house.*”⁵ In order to build anything, one needs wisdom. If a person's thoughts are roaming around, he lacks structure to his mind.

⁴ *Ohr Yisrael, Letter 30.*

⁵ *Mishlei 24: 3*

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The root of this is really because ever since Adam sinned, the world became mixed up with good and evil, and so our thoughts as well are all mixed up. This affected our thoughts to become shaky and unstable, lacking certain groundwork to hold it up.

In order to build up our thoughts properly, we need to first build a foundation to lay the ground upon. Just like when you want to build a building you first clear a big space on the ground so you can have a foundation to build it on, so do we need spiritual groundwork in order to build up our thoughts.

This is the root idea of what it means to begin building up the thoughts – that we first need the ground to build it upon. Without this solid foundation, our thoughts will not last, just like a building that isn't founded on anything; it will topple over.

If we try (and with the help of Hashem, we should succeed) to build and understand what this groundwork for our thoughts is, then we will be able to have the groundwork to be able to build our thoughts. But before we learn how to actually build our thoughts, first we must know what the groundwork of it is.

The Effect of Our Thoughts

Before we` build up our thoughts, first we need ground to lay upon its structure. This groundwork we need is essentially to enter a new world. We need to enter a whole different world if we are to begin building our thoughts.

The ground we need to build upon our thoughts with is not from this physical world. Just like if you go to the moon you will find different material there than on the earth, so will we need different material to build our thoughts -- a spiritual kind of material. We will explain what this is.

What is this groundwork we will need? People usually think that thoughts aren't real. We think, let's say, if we have to do something or not...but what we actually think doesn't seem to be reality. But the truth is that thoughts are real. How do we see this?

The Sages⁶ warn a person not to think lewd thoughts during the day, because if he thinks such thoughts, he will become contaminated at night. Why does this happen? It is because when he had these thoughts, these thoughts were like reality to him. The reality of these thoughts is revealed at night in his sleep.

Thoughts are a reality. In the example of one who thinks about forbidden thoughts, we see this in an evil usage. But the very reality of our thoughts can be either evil or good.

In the case of one who thinks evil, he is laying the "ground" for his thoughts by giving in to his thoughts for an evil desire. The evil thoughts are then built up on this ground, and

⁶ *Avodah Zarah 20b*

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eventually he will commit evil acts as well from those thoughts. He absorbs the evil thoughts during the day, which lays the groundwork for the building of further evil thoughts.

From a superficial viewpoint, thoughts seem to be intangible. But from an inner viewpoint, which is the truth, there is nothing more clearly felt than a thought.

Thoughts Experienced Through the Imagination

If we don't consider our thoughts to be tangible, then we cannot build our thought. If a person only imagines that he is building something, when he's done imagining he will see that he hasn't built anything.

If a person is still at the level of imagination, then even his very thoughts are imagination, and he can't build anything. He will only be imagining that he is building up something. Such a person, even if he is in thinking mode and not in imagination mode, is at the level of imagination, and thus all his thoughts are built upon imagination.

When a person lives in imagination, like when he is in a dream, it is clear that it's imagination. But the truth is that a person can still be in his imagination even when he's actually thinking, because his soul is still at the level of imagination. He has no groundwork to lay his thoughts upon and he doesn't realize the reality of thoughts. If a thought isn't perceived as real, it can essentially be defined as imagination.

This we can see from toddlers who play with each other a game. As they play, they are living in a world of imagination. In their eyes, imagination is reality. It is not only children who are like this -- all people are like this, if they do not properly build up their power of thought. It is written, "*We were like dreamers.*"⁷ Imagination mainly takes place in our dreams, but all people who do not develop their minds are thinking entirely through the prism of their imagination.

When a person is imagining something, he knows for sure it's in his imagination. When a person thinks that he has to do something, he thinks that this is a definite thought, and that it is not in his imagination. But really, he is in a sense still imagining it, because his soul is still at the level of imagination.

To illustrate what we mean, let's say a person has a dream about something, and then he wakes up in the morning. He knows for sure that what he dreamed about isn't real. But then you can have a person that dreams that he got up in the morning and went to daven. Although he's dreaming about a thought, for all purposes it's still imagination, because he only dreamed about it. This brings out the idea we are saying, that even when a person thinks about something, it is still rooted in his imagination, because his very thinking is still at the level of imagination.

⁷ *Tehillim 126: 1*

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It is written, “*For you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return.*” A man, *adam*, which comes from the word *adamah* (earth), comes from the word *dimayon* (imagination). This shows us that a man by nature is linked to imagination.

Although we all have the power to think and the power to imagine, our thinking is generally experienced through our imagination when we don't work to develop it. If we don't have the groundwork to build our thoughts, then all our building will be based on imagination, and all our work will just be imagined. The Gemara tells of a story in which two people were sitting on top of an island, and suddenly the island flipped over and there was no more island. It was really a whale, and they had been sitting on it all along without realizing. If we don't consider thoughts to be real, we can't build anything upon it, and any improvement we will try to make will just be imagined.

Of course, if you ask any person if his thoughts are being imagined or not, he will answer no. A person is apt to say that a thought which you don't consider real is definitely not being imagined, and that it must be that there are three kinds of thoughts: real thoughts, unreal thoughts and imagination. This is erroneous, as we will see; if he thinks this way, then he doesn't even realize that even his thoughts are being imagined.

In order to build up our thought we first need the groundwork for it. This is when we consider thoughts to be real.

How We Can See The Reality of Our Thoughts

In order to realize the reality which we are describing, we need to contemplate it a lot. But even before we do that, we need something else that precedes it.

To illustrate, at first a person has a small space of ground and builds a little structure on it. Then if he wants to make it bigger, he clears more ground so he can expand his structure. So the first little ground we will need to start out with is to realize that thoughts are a reality and they are not being imagined.

We can see this from the example of imagining evil thoughts during the day, which have effects on a person at night. When it comes to evil, it is clear that thoughts have a real effect on reality, but when it comes to good it is not so clear to us if thoughts affect reality. This is because the power of thought has fallen to evil, as a result of Adam's sin.

Chazal say that “sinful thoughts are worse than sin.” How can this be? It is because a sinful thought is not just to think about sinning, but it becomes a reality to the person. The reality of these evil thoughts are revealed to the person, so in a sense, just to think about it is worse than committing it. The thoughts are a higher power in a person than one's actions, and thus a sinful thought is considered a more grave error than the action of sin itself.

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If a person has thought to eat *chametz* on Pesach but he didn't commit the sin, he is not as bad as someone who did commit the sin, for all practical purposes. But when it comes to certain sins, such as idol worship and lustful thoughts, Chazal consider the thought about it to be worse than committing the act. To think about idol worship is just as bad as committing it, and to think lustful thoughts is like committing it because it causes a change in the body that brings one to sin.

When one absorbs this, he begins to enter the world of thought.

We are not yet speaking *how* to build the world of thought, just how to begin *entering* it. If a person begins to absorb this concept just a little, he already is beginning to realize that thoughts are real, and he has the groundwork with which to build his thoughts on.

Until now we have explained how our soul can view our power of thought; now we will speak about it on an intellectual level. But we should stress here that this can only be comprehended if one is ready to accept that there is a reality called thoughts.

We all know that the ground is real. We can sense it with our feet. How can a person know that thoughts are real?

We have three parts to our self: our actions, our speech and our thoughts. Our actions we are aware of. Our speech is a little harder to perceive as something tangible, but we can basically comprehend that it is also very real. There is an argument in the Gemara if speech is considered like a physical action. If you ask someone if words are real and tangible, he might not be sure. Yet we can bring proof that speech is real, because Chazal say that Hashem carries out what *tzaddikim* say. We also know that according to *Halachah*, person can use his speech to acquire something, like calling an animal to come to him. Although this is a bit hard for us to understand, still, we know that speech is real.

But when it comes to our thoughts, a person usually doesn't consider them to be real at all. We don't see our thoughts, and we don't know what others are thinking. We have a hard time knowing what our own thoughts are. People thus have a hard time seeing how thoughts are real.

How can we then see the reality of thoughts, using our intellect?

When Hashem created the world, He created it in three steps: first He used his wisdom, then His speech, and then His actions. These are the three parts to the world – wisdom/thought, speech, and action.

If Hashem used thought to create the world, this tells us something about thoughts. We think that thoughts are just a tool we use to do something, but really, thoughts keep something going.

To illustrate, we don't see thoughts in a table; we are just aware that someone had to think in order to make this table. Although that is true, there is more to this. Really, if there would be no thoughts even presently in this table, it can't exist!

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This is something our mind needs to understand: when you see something in front of you, be aware that it is made up of three things: the action in it, the speech in it, and the thought in it. Hashem created each thing with action, speech and thought; there is still a thought present in each thing.

The classical example of this is the miracle with the *Aron* (Ark) that it was able to lift itself and didn't need others to carry it. Inside the *Aron* were the *Luchos* (Tablets). The depth of this is that inside an action, there are thoughts. The thoughts are the wisdom in something, and it is the wisdom behind something which keeps it going.

Everything is intertwined with action, speech and thought. The world stands on Torah – from the actions of Torah, from our speech in Torah and from our thoughts in Torah. The *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* says that if there would be one second in the world without learning Torah, the entire universe would collapse.

Superficially, this means that when a person learns Torah in one country, his learning supports another person on the other side of the world. Although that is true, it is not because of merits. It is really because learning the Torah is what supports a person. The Torah, which is the power of thought in the world, is behind everything to keep it going.

The thoughts are the essence of a matter; they are clothed by our speech, and our speech is clothed by our actions. The thoughts of something are at the core of a matter; that is why we can't see them. We only see the outside layer of something, which are the actions. But the essence of something is the thought that lays in it.

To illustrate, the *Aron* had three layers: the innermost layer, which was gold, the middle layer which was wood, and the outer layer which was gold. It would appear to someone that the *Aron* is the outer layer which is gold, because he only sees the outside. But really, it was lifted by a more inner layer, which was lifted by an even more inner layer.

Whatever I see, I am only seeing the outer layer of what it really is, which is its physical shell. Inside the physicality of object you see is act is the word of Hashem that created it, and inside that are the thoughts of Hashem that keep it going. The essence is always the thoughts. Just like the *Aron* was “lifted its carriers” – its entire importance is attributed to the fact that it contained the *luchos* inside it, which is the Torah – the power of wisdom and thought – so do the thoughts contain all actions. The thoughts are the essence of everything and they keep everything going.

Thoughts Carry Our Body

We must realize that there is a reality of thoughts. It's not simply that a person should feel that he has thoughts in him -- that is still a superficial viewpoint of the body. A person has to realize that his very essence is thought, and that his body is only a garment.

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It is brought in the sefarim hekodoshim⁸, that where a person's thoughts are -- that is where he is found. Of course, our body and our speech cover our thoughts, but it is our thoughts which carry us – just like the inside of the Aron lifted the outside of the Aron. It is not our body which is carrying us. The proof to this is that when a person dies, his soul leaves him and the body is helpless.

It's not simply that that we have a body, and that within our body is a brain, and that within our brain is our thoughts. If that would be the attitude, then we are saying that our body is the basis of everything, and that it is our body which is holding our thoughts. The true perspective to have is that it is our thoughts which carry the body; the groundwork upon which everything is based is the thoughts.

If a person merely thinks that he just has thoughts in himself, he will never be able to understand how he is in essence a reality of thought, and he will never be able to see how thoughts are real. The true outlook one needs to have is that he is a reality of thought.

Chazal say that a person is where his thoughts are. Our thoughts are clothed by our body, and it is our thoughts which carry our body.

This is the first step in entering our world of thought: we must form a basis in our minds for building our thoughts, which is by realizing the reality of our thoughts. We must realize that we are our thoughts, and it is our thoughts which guide us.

Seeing Thought Behind Everything

Now that we have understood what we have said until now, we can make this more practical.

A person is capable of thought. How does a person look at everything in his life? Reb Yisroel Salanter said that each person sees things through his perspective. A shoemaker walks through the street and notices people's shoes, a carpenter notices the quality of trees and a glassmaker notices windows.

When a person looks at the world through a truthful prism, he sees thought and wisdom in everything. He looks at a table and sees wisdom in it. He looks at a flower and doesn't just see a flower, but he sees the wisdom behind it.

One time the Chazon Ish was looking at a flower, and he became amazed at it. Then he stopped. It seems that he was doing this because he wanted to see *niflaos haborei*, and he stopped looking at it because he had reached a high level. But there was more to this. It is because when a person lives in a world of thought, like the Chazon Ish, he sees thought in everything. He stopped to examine a flower because he wanted to see the wisdom behind it.

⁸ Brought from the Baal Shem Tov, and also by the Ramban

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When a person is inclined to want to see the wisdom behind everything, this is the groundwork to building up a world of thought. In order for a person to have the groundwork, he must see all of creation as a great wisdom.

The Chazon Ish also remarked once, “I do not know anything that is simple. Everything I know of is a complex *sugya*.”

This was because the Chazon Ish saw wisdom in everything, thus everything was deep and complex to him.

How can a person know if he is at this point? We will give a simple example how to train oneself to do this.

Let’s say a person sees a dollar in front of him. If he is a regular person, he sees it as money he can use, and if he is a businessman, he sees it as a business transaction. Both people see it as money. But a deeper person thinks: Why isn’t this forged? What is money made out of?

We do not mean that this should be how we spend our entire life and think how each thing came about. We are just saying that we should begin to look at simple items and see wisdom behind it. When a person doesn’t think into things, is it because he is so immersed in his learning? That is not why. It is really because he never thought into something before. He never thought about how money works because he never thought into simple things.

The basis to building up our thoughts is to see the wisdom behind everything. This does not mean that we have to understand everything; it is just that we should know that everything contains wisdom. We can know that everything has something more to it that we don’t know of yet, or we can think that we simply don’t have the time to think into it because we’re immersed in our learning; but the point is that we should know that everything we see has depth to it.

This has to change our view on life. It is not only Gemara which is deep and complex; everything is complex! Sometimes a person comes to me and says, “I have a simple question...” and I tell him, “The question might be simple, but the answer is not simple.” It is already a mistake to assume that any question is simple. There is no such thing as a simple question. Everything is a complex, deep and a *sugya* in and of itself.

Let us stress again that we do not mean for one to sit and reflect upon the wonders of creation. It is impossible for us to discover the deep wisdom of everything in Creation. What we want to accomplish here is: how do we view anything? Just like a shoemaker always notices people’s shoes, so must a thinking person notice the wisdom of everything he encounters.

The Rambam says that people who thrive on wisdom cannot survive without Torah. This is not simply because such people search for wisdom; it is rather because they see everything

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as wisdom. It is written (*Tehillim* 104:24), “*All of them You made with wisdom.*” There is wisdom hidden in everything, and that is what gives it existence.

We Cannot Build Our Thoughts Without This Groundwork

This attitude is what enables a person to have the groundwork for building up his world of thought. It’s not that there is wisdom in something; it is instead that everything in reality is in essence a kind of wisdom. Wisdom is what keeps something going, thus the groundwork of something is its wisdom.

Let us repeat that we cannot build our mind without the proper groundwork. There are people who search for wisdom but do not succeed in building it. What is the reason for this? There are many reasons, but the root reason is because they do not see that the essence of everything is wisdom.

A person might know that there is wisdom contained in the Gemara on his *shtender*, but when he goes out into the street, he thinks that there is no wisdom to be found. This is incorrect; there is wisdom in everything we see. Hashem created all of Creation with wisdom. When this is a person’s attitude, he can live in a reality of wisdom.

If the attitude is merely that there is “wisdom contained in everything”, he will not be able to live the wisdom of everything, because he views reality and wisdom as two separate things. The real attitude to have is that the **essence** of everything is wisdom.

This might sound very far away from us when we hear this the first time and maybe a little too lofty, but it is a question of how to live our life.

Chazal say that “Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people are one.” There is much depth to this statement, but it pertains to us now as follows: the Torah is entirely wisdom, and if the Jewish people are part of the Torah, it is because we have the power to see everything as wisdom.

“Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” Everything Hashem created is a kind of wisdom. Everything has a physical garment over it, but the basis of each thing in creation is the wisdom that lies in it. This is the beginning of entering a life of thought.

This is just the beginning of how we enter the world of thought – we haven’t learned yet how to build it. In the coming chapters, we will learn how to build our thoughts, with the help of Hashem.

1.2 | Building Up Our World of Thought

Each Person Has His Own Way To Think

In the first chapter, we have laid the foundation for our thoughts; we have said what the groundwork for our thoughts is. Now, with the help of Hashem, we will speak about how to build the thoughts, and to be more exact, we will speak about how to **begin** building them.

Before a person builds something, he first thinks how he will build it. “*With wisdom a house is built.*” To illustrate what we mean, we know that no two structures are ever the same; every house is different. If everything would be built the same, no one would have to think how to build. Even the *Beis HaMikdash*, which had a very specific design, was different each time in its measurements. Our soul is the same – there are always different ways how to think.

Chazal say that just as all faces are different, so does every person think differently. Every soul has its own way how to think. It’s not simply that everyone has their own opinion; it is that everyone has their own way to build their thoughts.

A person must see everything as a structure. The nature of a person is that we don’t see how a bunch of things connect, but we need to see how things are not random and that they really connect.

To illustrate what we mean, we know that many times throughout the Talmud, there are two schools of thought – Hillel and Shamaï. Every time we come across a statement of Hillel or Shamaï, do we see how all their statements connect, or do we look at them as just randomly dispersed statements? A superficial kind of person would say that it’s all random and there’s no connection. But the truth is that each of them had their own way to think. A person with true wisdom can read a statement of Hillel or Shamaï and be able to tell who is saying it, because he knows how the schools of Hillel and Shamaï think.

There is a story that someone once came to Rav Chaim Soloveitchik zt”l and asked him for an approbation to a *sefer* he was publishing. Rav Chaim perused the pages of the *sefer* and said, “Whatever question you asked in this *sefer*, I can predict what you will answer.” This was not *ruach hakodesh*. It was that he had absorbed the way of thinking of the author.

In order to know someone else’s thoughts, one has to have *ruach hakodesh* or to be astoundingly brilliant. But something everyone can understand is that each person has his own independent way of thinking.

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All the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* had their own way how to think and their own writing style. Some wrote in a lengthier manner and some wrote very briefly. In order for a person to build up his own way how he thinks, he needs to learn the different ways that there are to think. For this, a person to first amass a lot of information contained in the Torah.

Learning How To Think On Your Own

People are used to thinking based on the way they grew up and where they grew up; if a person's community thinks a certain way, then a person naturally thinks like his community.

The place where you grew up thinks a certain way, but does that mean that you must remain thinking that way? When you were a child, you couldn't do anything about this, and that is what Hashem wanted from you. Hashem indeed wanted you to grow up in the place you grew up in. It could be that even as you get older and mature, you were also supposed to remain in your community, but that still doesn't mean that you must think **now** like how your surroundings think.

To explain a little more what we mean, often people like to visit their families. Often, because we are around our families so much, we think that we have to think like them. But who says that a person needs to always be around his family that he grew up with? Just because a person grew up in this family doesn't mean that he fits in with them. It could be that he was sent into this family so that his soul can be rectified...but that doesn't mean that he is in a place that's good for him. As long as the home isn't dysfunctional, a child loves his home, but that still doesn't mean he is growing up in a surrounding that is right for him. Now that you are older, it is time to re-evaluate your thinking.

Chazal say that in the first year of marriage, a married woman longs for her family (*Yevamos* 42b). But does that mean that it's good for her? Not necessarily. Some will say that if this is her family, then it must be that Hashem wants her to be around them. But this is not true; it may be part of her mission in life to have grown up with them, and it may have even developed her into the person who she is today, but this still doesn't mean it's good for her to be there. Even if we know for sure that she was sent to this family by Hashem in order to achieve a *tikkun* (soul rectification), this still doesn't make it **good** for her to be there. In Egypt, the people were afflicted in that the men had to do women's labor and the women had to do men's labor; we learn from here that it's possible for a person to grow up in a family in which he wasn't really being himself – he grew up in a sort of exile in which he had to do things that did not express who he is. Being in exile helps you cleanse your soul, but it's not meant for you to stay that way. You have to move on at some point.

Let's say a person feels a certain affinity to something. Does this mean he is really acting like who he is? Most of the time, a person is drawn toward something not because of his actual self-expression, but for superficial reasons.

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For example, if a person grew up in a place where they eat certain kinds of foods and listened to certain kinds of music, and he likes that food and music, it's only because he grew up getting used to it, but not because he really likes those things. What you learn as a child is called "*girsá d'yankusa*", and often people have *girsá d'yankusa* in their physical life too – but it's just coming from nostalgia, not from the person's honest self-expressions that are true to who he is.

The same can go for our thinking. Many times in our thinking we rely on our *girsá d'yankusa*, the way we thought as children. If a person doesn't try to change his thinking, he still thinks like how he used to think when he was a child.

We usually don't see people who worked on learning how to think. If they grew up a certain way, that's how they think, and it's not because they clarified this on their own. They just take life as it comes and never try to figure out who they really are and how they are really supposed to think.

Every person needs to search for a new beginning, just like Avraham Avinu had to leave his father Terach's house and never return to there.

Of course, we have to continue what we were doing until now and keep all our *minhagim* (customs) and *mesorah* (traditions) we have, but to remain at that level alone is to be superficial. At some point, each person needs to find his own way how he thinks.

To give another example, a father and a son don't have to learn in the same *yeshiva*. We are not referring to choosing how you dress and how you behave, which are discussions about externalities. We are referring to something that must go on in our soul – a kind of soul-searching. Even if a father lived a truthful kind of life and acted properly, this doesn't mean that his child has to continue doing everything his father did.

We must continue our *mesorah*, but that doesn't mean we have to continue how our fathers and teachers **thought**. What, then, is the meaning of carrying on the *mesorah* of our fathers and teachers? It means that we must continue our *mesorah* **in searching for the truth**, and that always stays the same, throughout all the generations. But *how* we get to the truth must be in each person's individual way.

Although we have been thinking since we were children, we can't just rely on our old thinking patterns. We need to build up our thoughts, and in order to do this, we need to become familiar with the different ways how to think which are brought by our teachers.

This takes at least a few years! After you know the different ways how to think, you can then begin to find where **you** belong in all of it.

If you don't know the different ways to think that are available, you will not be able to find where you belong in all of it. **A young person cannot and should not do this**, and he will harm himself in the process if he tries to do it. But as a person gets older and is more

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mature – it is impossible to say exactly when and how much – a person should begin to acquire different ways how to think.

What we are saying applies to every part of the Torah – *Halacha*, *Agadta* (homiletics), *Iyun* (learning in-depth) and *Bekius* (learning on a basic level). There are different ways to think in each part of the Torah, and a person needs to first have this information. There is no part of the Torah which doesn't have in it many ways how to think.

This is the beginning of building our actual self. When a person learns about the different systems of thought, he needs to find himself in it – where he personally belongs. But without first learning the actual information, a person won't be able to build up his self.

Learning What Your Heart Desires

This is a very subtle job. It involves both searching our external and inner layers of our self.

Sometimes a person feels a connection to something, but that doesn't mean it comes from an inner place in himself; it can really be superficial.

For example, Chazal say that a person should learn *mah shelibo chofetz*, “what his heart desires.” Does this mean that if a person “desires” to learn in a bad environment that he should learn there, just because he feels that way?! Of course not. Just because a person feels a certain way doesn't mean that he should act upon it.

When a person is in a certain place that thinks differently than him, he naturally feels like a stranger there. He would rather return to the old way how he's used to thinking; he is apt to think to himself, “Well, Chazal say that a person has to learn in a place where his heart desires to be, and this is not my place...”

This is erroneous. Chazal say that a person should learn in a place where his heart desires, but does that mean that a person should learn wherever it is pleasant to be? If a person finds it pleasant to learn in a place where people sit around and waste their time and where he can hear lots of interesting conversations, does this mean that he should learn in such a place, just because he finds it pleasant?! Certainly this was not the intention of Chazal. A person has to first “learn” in order to learn where his heart desires to be.

The point of what we are saying is that sometimes a person feels or thinks a certain way, but this doesn't emanate from a pure, deep place within himself. It is rather due to superficial reasons, not from his essence.

How can a person know if he wants something from his essence or if it's just coming from superficial influence? This is a very subtle point, but we will try to learn how, with the help of Hashem.

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Revealing Your Power Of Unique Thought

Anyone who learns Torah goes through a beginning stage. At the beginning, a person first absorbs and receives knowledge from his teachers. At this beginning stage, that is the way to learn.

At the beginning stage, when one is still receiving knowledge from his teachers, he hasn't yet revealed his true self. He is only revealing the knowledge he is taught. There can be somewhat of a self-revelation as well in this stage, because in learning there are two parts – *Chochmah* (the wisdom that a person receives from his teachers) and *Binah* (what he has understood on his own). But the nature of a person in the beginning stage of learning is to focus on what he's receiving from his teachers and not look to come up with his own novelties (*chiddushim*). It is only when a person begins to come up with his own novelties that he begins to become like a “flowing spring” and reveal his true self.

Of course, a person must receive guidance from his teachers. But that is only part of one's goal in life. What you receive reveals your teacher, but it doesn't reveal who you are yet.

Let's say a person is able to come up with his own *chiddushim* (novel Torah thoughts) based on how his teacher thinks, but they are not based on his own way of thinking. Such *chiddushim* don't come from his true self, from the inner “I” that is in every person. A person needs to access his own unique flow of thoughts in himself, which are the source for his thoughts. Many *chiddushim* of people, although they are true, are not really their own *chiddushim*, but they are borrowed from what they have seen by others.

In order to discover who you really are, you need to reach your power of *chiddush* – to develop your own new thinking. When a person never reaches the inner source of himself, he hasn't yet identified himself. He might know what he likes and what he doesn't like, and he can know what's close to his heart and what isn't – but he hasn't yet identified his true self. But when a person discovers that deep down he has an inner source from which original thoughts flow out of, he reveals his true essence.

We are not saying that he must differ from the way of thinking of his teachers; a person's power of original thought that he must uncover should be coming from the tools he has received from his teachers to learn how to think. But this discovery will be his own unique inner flow of thought.

Bribery Of The Mind

There is a danger to this though, because many people are really lying to themselves and they aren't aware of it. Their thinking is based on haughtiness, and they are entirely focused on their “I” that is thinking.

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Some people cannot learn something unless they have what to say on it, because they have to always see how “I” come into the picture. If Rashi says A, such a person is inclined to say B. He might say, “Rashi is true, but I have my own way to explain it.”

This is not because of his inner source of thought we are speaking about; it is just an inflated ego. It is his haughtiness which leads him to always find “his” opinion; such a person will force himself to always say something different than what is in front of him. A person might be aware of this or he might not be, but even if he isn’t, it is still going on in his subconscious.

There are also people who have a different problem: when they learn a *sugya*, they feel that it is dry, unless they are able to come up with a *chiddush*. Such *chiddushim* aren’t true *chiddushim*; they come from the person’s ego, which always seeks to get noticed. The ego is always at work even as a person learns Torah, always trying to find itself by coming up with something new, so that it can express itself and receive some attention.

The real, true inner source of thought in a person is a pure place in the soul, but the problem is that there is an evil force in the soul called *shochad* – a mental “bribe”, which distorts someone’s perception and makes him biased. A person can have bribery in his mind, and if he does, everything he says comes from his warped thinking, a result of his mental bribery.

To illustrate, you can have pure spring water, but by the time it comes to your cup it has gone through a lot of dirty pipes, so it is not as clear as its original source.

Most people, in fact, never reach their true unique flow of thought inside of them, and there can be many reasons for this. But what applies to us is because they have a mental bribery, which warps their whole thinking.

We are not speaking about a monetary bribe; we are referring to the personal desires of a person, which are the root of swaying one’s mind. When a person wants to arrive at a certain conclusion, his whole head is leaning toward what he wants to arrive at, and he misses his real source of thinking.

The Chazon Ish said that there are people who already have their preconceived agendas even before they begin a *sugya*. For example, if a person wants to conclude that something is permissible to do, he will learn the whole *sugya* in order to arrive at this conclusion.

Even when a person asks a question to a Rov, who is wiser than him, it is possible for him to mentally bribe the Rov! The Rov might give him the answer that the questioner wanted, and he won’t even realize that the questioner has bribed him into his thinking. This is quite astounding!

Unless the questioner is really prepared to accept the answer of the Rov, it is possible that he’s bribing the Rov...that is the power of bribery.

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Reaching Your Potential In Learning Torah

Chazal⁹ state that a baby in its mother's stomach learns the entire Torah. We are taught that this doesn't only mean the Torah we received at Har Sinai, but it refers to one's unique part of the Torah. Whatever you will learn in this lifetime, that is what you are taught. When he exits the womb, an angel strikes him and he forgets all his learning.

A person's job in his life is to return to his unique portion in the Torah which he was taught in the womb.

But if a person hasn't purified himself internally, it is possible that he is learning a part of Torah which isn't for him. He might learn Torah his entire life, but it won't be the unique part of the Torah that was meant for him. When he comes to the world of truth, he will be shown that he didn't learn what he was supposed to...

How can a person know if he is learning his rightful part of the Torah? The Ramban says that since we can't find out from a prophet what's right for our soul, we need to get rid of our mental bribery. Just like a person is able to know how something tastes, so is a person able to know what part of the Torah he must learn. A person can't know if he is blinded by personal interests.

In other words, in order to know your unique part in the Torah, you will need to do two things. The outer part of your job is to amass the information you must know, and the inner part of your job is to reach your inner source of thought. The information which you amass is the tool you need to receive your inner source of thought.

If we don't have a container to hold what we gain, we won't be able to hold onto it. But if we just build our "container" and don't put anything into it, we might know a lot, but we won't reach our own potential.

Torah Lishmah Enables A Person To Trust His First Thoughts

Why does a very great leader use his first thought? What is so special about the first thought? Shouldn't it be the other way around – that only after hearing all the details can a person decide? A *Gadol* doesn't think that way. It is precisely his first thought which he trusts; why?

By a *Gadol*, the first thought that entered his mind comes from a pure place, from the true source of thought in the soul. A *Gadol*'s thoughts come from this inner source, because since he learns the Torah is a true way, he bears the "seal of Hashem, which is truth".

⁹ *Niddah 30b*

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A person can only trust his first thought if he is certain that he learns Torah *lishmah*. One who doesn't learn Torah *lishmah* is not able to give advice from this inner place in himself.

Build Up The Way You Think, Not The Way Others Think

This last point was said to bring out the intensity this discussion, but practically speaking, there is no person who is totally clean from personal interests. We are just saying that there is an inner place in the soul where a person desires the truth, and we must reach it.

Without reaching this inner point in our soul (of reaching your own unique way to think, which is the source of your thoughts), a person can go his whole life and amass a lot of Torah knowledge, but it's like a contractor who is always building houses according to his buyer's exact wishes. A good contractor builds houses that he designs and then he sells them; a person has to build "his" house, not others' houses.

There are people who know how to build up entire structures of thought in the Torah, but they never end up building their own potential in learning. "*And give to us our portion in Your Torah*" – we each want our own portion in the Torah. To uncover our unique potential that each of us has, we all must reach our inner source of thought.

It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that in the upper worlds, each scholar has his own *beis midrash* (place of study). What is the depth behind this? Why are there so many *yeshivos* and *batei midrashim* in heaven? Why doesn't everyone just learn in the *beis midrash* of Avraham Avinu?

It is because every *beis midrash* there has its own way how to think. Each person has his own *beis midrash* in heaven that he builds up, using his inner source of thought which is unique only to him.

It is written, "*With wisdom, a house is built.*" We build our "house" through how we think – through our own wisdom. We can't remain satisfied with what we were taught by our teachers. We need to build upon that and uncover our own way how to think.

Later we will learn that these are essentially two different stages to our thinking. The first stage is the lower kind of *Chochmah*, in which a person receives from his teachers. The second stage we need to reach in our thinking is the higher *Chochmah*, which is to think from ourselves.

Beginning To Understand A Sugya

To give an example of what we mean, when the Chazon Ish learned a *sugya*, he didn't glance right away at Rashi. First, he thought on his own what the Gemara could mean, and

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only after that did he take a look at Rashi. If he found that Rashi said the same thing as he thought, good, and if not, he would try to understand why not.

We are not saying that everyone needs to learn like this; the point is that when one learns Gemara, he has to have his own original understanding at first.

The tools we need to think are what we gain from our teachers, and this is an unchanging chain throughout each generation. But the subtlety and the depth of how we think is up to each person to uncover on his own.

The truth is that everything has already been revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai, but it is our job to actually come and reveal it to its full potential. This is our job – to reveal our potential. It is up to each person to do.

This is not because we are trying to simply sharpen our brain, but it is because we need to find our unique way of thinking. You need to train yourself and get used to thinking according to your own unique thinking patterns. If a person begins to learn something only according to another person's understanding that is not his own, he right away loses his own thinking. Again, we must emphasize that we are not saying that one should be haughty and only value his own opinion; we are referring to the deep place in one's soul where his thoughts flow from.

We have mentioned so far two things. The first thing we need is to truly learn the Torah. We have to dedicate ourselves to it; when one learns Torah, he is actually connected to his very self. This is difficult; the second thing we need, which is also hard but not as hard as the first, is to train ourselves to always think in the same pattern. One's thoughts should be an expression of his own source of thought, found in his own soul.

We are not saying that a person has to remain with thinking like how he first thought; we mean that a person should **begin** to learn a *sugya* after he has his own thought about it, and then see *Rashi*, *Tosafos*, the *Rishonim* and the *Acharonim* until he learns the practical *Halacha*; he doesn't necessarily have to end his learning like how he thought originally.

Learning The Details Of A Sugya

When a person begins to reveal his inner source of thought, his thinking strengthens with time. It's like weaving a garment; the more you weave it, the more beautiful it looks in the end.

At the beginning stage of this, a person learns a *sugya* and tries to understand what he has to say about it. He then learns another *sugya* and again tries to know how what he thinks about what he has just learned. After getting used to this a person should then clarify for himself: "What is my style of thinking?"

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Although Chazal say that “A wise person learns from each person”, the fact that we must ask other’s opinions is something which needs to be balanced with your own independent thinking. You shouldn’t forget about your own opinion when you learn a *sugya*. Although there is much wisdom to be learned from all wise people, there is an even deeper wisdom than this -- what you learn from yourself. We aren’t addressing right now how the soul works; we are speaking about how you think. What do we mean by this?

Superficially, this means for a person to know how he is making himself think. But the true definition of it is for a person to see if his thinking is emanating from within himself.

The inner source of a person’s thoughts doesn’t get revealed all at once. Each time a person taps into it, more and more thoughts are revealed from it. The Vilna Gaon said that this was because ever since Moshe Rabbeinu hit the stone, a person’s thinking only comes to him drop by drop. It doesn’t all come out at once.

So even if you get one of these inner thoughts, this still doesn’t mean that you know how you really think. It is only after you see the general style of your first thought, which you need to amass a lot of. Slowly. after experiencing this many times, you will begin to see how you think.

When we learn the words of Chazal, we know that it’s not enough to just read what it says; we have to learn how they think. The same goes for our own thinking; we need to know how **we** think. The way a person can know this is by writing down all his *chiddushim*. After some time, take a look at your notes and learn what you written in-depth; you will see your train of thought from within the words.

In this way, what a person learns reveals to a person how he thinks.

Sometimes it will happen that you notice contradictions in your way of thinking, and you will need to look into yourself and ask yourself why you didn’t think the way you really should have. These are very subtle matters, but it’s possible for a person to do: a person has the subtle ability to be able to discern what his root thoughts are. This is how a person reveals his unique potential in learning.

Without seeing how you think, it’s possible that you will enjoy learning, but you won’t know from where your thinking is coming from.

Sukkos is called *zman simchaseinu* (time of our happiness) and it is also *chag ha’assif* (time of gathering). There is a connection between happiness and what we gather. When we gather together all our knowledge, there is certain happiness. By gathering together all our thoughts, we see the details of how we think as well as the general way how we think. Through collecting all this together, we reach our root thoughts – we discover how we think.

This is how a person builds the power of thought.

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Building Up The Way You Think, Step-by-Step

On a superficial level, building our power of thought is like how we understand simply to build a building, which is by adding brick by brick, until it is complete. But really, building our thoughts is not like that. There actually is a structure that is already there in ourselves, and all we need to do is to remove what's covering it.

To illustrate what we mean, the first and second *Beis Hamikdash* was built by people, so it was built brick by brick. But the third *Beis Hamikdash*, we know, will come down from heaven already complete. All we need to do to build the third *Beis Hamikdash* is by taking away what holds it back, and then it will come down, complete.

When a person never uncovers his own way to think, he might know how others think, and he might even work at this step-by-step until he discovers how his friend thinks. But he will just be absorbing information – he isn't using his deep thoughts. It is only when a person reveals his true source of thought that he already has hidden within himself that he can know how he thinks. This is also a step-by-step process, but when he arrives at the end, he will see that he is just revealing what's already in him.

For this reason, our *neshamah* is called *seichel d'kedushah*, the holy intellect. It is because each person has his own way to think, and each soul has its own root. Each person receives his special part in learning Torah according to his unique soul root (*shoresh haneshamah*).

How can a person actually reveal it? Each time that a person thinks on his own, more and more details of how he thinks are being added up to give a person a general idea to him about how he thinks. When a person sees how he generally thinks, he will realize that he didn't actually build up his thoughts – he has simply revealed it from within himself! Something which is physical and only superficial has to be “built up”, while a person's source of thinking is an inner material, which isn't “built” – it is rather something you “reveal.”

Thus, when we speak of “building” our world of thought, we aren't really “building” it. We are really learning about the way to build it, but the way that the thoughts are actually built is through revealing what's already in us. It is hidden deep within us and we must uncover it.

1.3 | Learning How To Constantly Think

The Soul's Ability To Constantly Think

The Gemara states¹⁰ that a Torah scholar is not allowed to walk in an unclean place, because he is always thinking Torah thoughts. Here we see that the essence of a person is to think, and man by essence is always thinking.

However, if a person never builds up his world of thoughts, his thoughts wander from place to place and he ends up imagining things. His thoughts are misplaced and there is no structure to them.

It is impossible for a person to go without thinking. He is for sure thinking something! The question is if his thoughts are stable or not. When a person doesn't build up his power of thought, his thoughts wander around everywhere. His thoughts are scattered and nothing holds them together.

The power of thought, in its essence, is really something constantly taking place. The Ramchal writes¹¹ that "it is the way of Torah scholars to always think as they go". Why is it so important for a person to always think?

Just like we can understand that the body needs certain things to survive, so does our inner world need a certain vitality to survive. Our body needs to breathe in and out in order to live, and our inner world of the soul needs an able mind that thinks in order to gain vitality.

When we breathe in and out, we do this on a constant basis. We can't stop breathing for even one second. When it comes to our inner world, people are used to putting it to use only at certain times. We aren't feeling enough the spiritual vitality that we need.

But when one lives an internal kind of life of the soul, he realizes that he needs constant thought in order to feel alive. The Rambam¹² writes that those who seek wisdom cannot stop learning Torah, because if they were to stop learning, it would feel like death.

¹⁰ *Berachos 24b*

¹¹ *Derech Eitz Chaim*

¹² *Hilchos Rotzeiach 7:1*

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A Soul-Based Life Demands Constant Thought

How can a person learn how to have constant thought?

Superficially, this is through getting used to it. There is a concept that when a person becomes used to something, it becomes “second nature” to him. The more a person does something, the more his heart is pulled after it; Chazal indeed say that “*the heart is pulled after the actions.*”¹³ But this is only the superficial understanding of why we need to always think. The inner reason why we must always think is because we need vitality, and the thoughts of a person are his inner vitality.

If a person doesn’t ever feel certain vitality from his thoughts, he won’t be able to develop constant thought. Even if he tries to develop it, he will just get headaches in trying to do so, and he might even make himself get sick.

A person can only have constant thought when he has vitality from thinking. “*Wisdom sustains its owner.*” We will try to explain what this means in simple words and make it practical for us.

When a person isn’t involved with thinking, he usually doesn’t feel vitality from thinking. Even if he learns *Halacha* or *Daf Yomi* every day, it’s only because of a good feeling he gets out of it - either because he feels like he’s utilizing his time, or because he knows that he is fulfilling a goal. Although this is commendable, this doesn’t show that he is connected to thinking.

A person on a higher level than this enjoys thinking, but only because it gives him certain clarity and helps him feel more organized. He gets vitality from having clarity, and that is why he thinks. Yet even this is not really receiving vitality from actual thinking; the person is getting satisfaction from the clarity in his life, which is something else (although commendable). Another kind of person receives vitality from thinking only when he has *chiddushim*, and he is busy all the time looking for *chiddushim*. Although this is also a holy kind of vitality, it is not yet deriving vitality from thinking.

A person only derives vitality from thinking when he considers it just as important as breathing. He realizes that his soul demands constant thought in order to feel alive.

How is a person able to always think? From where does a person draw this power from?

It is impossible for a person to **only** live from his thoughts; such a person is mentally ill. What we want to know is: how can we use our thoughts to guide us (just as the Aron lifted its carriers)?

If a person wants to live a wise kind of life, it’s not about looking for *chiddushim*. A wise kind of life is a soul-based kind of life. We are not even referring to the Torah; the Torah is definitely the tool a person uses to get to a *chiddush*, but it is not what we use necessarily as

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the source to living a soul-based life. Only a life of constant wisdom can be a source for a person to find constant vitality. This doesn't mean a constant feeling of renewal, but rather, a constant vitality. It is when our soul lives based on wisdom, to learn about the wisdom that pertains to one's own unique soul. We don't know why it is that way, but Hashem made us that way.

To build our mind, we need to realize the very concept: life is a constant wisdom. True Torah scholars don't just always think because they are used to it, but because they realize that wisdom is life itself.

Entering the World Of Thought

In order to live a life in which wisdom and thought is a reality, a person has to enter inward at least a little into a world of thought. There has to be somewhat of a disconnection from physicality for this to happen.

One who lives only through his body's viewpoint doesn't have a constant source of vitality. In order to live a soul-based life, which is a life of wisdom, a person need to enter the world of the soul -- and be there. This doesn't simply mean to "become a thinker"; it is something else entirely. Our teachers (the Ramban, and especially the Baal Shem Tov) taught that a person is found where his thoughts are. This is only true in the case of one who lives in the world of thought and knows what it is in a very real sense.

Machshavah – thought – doesn't just mean that a person "thinks." It is to experience the reality of what thought is -- to live there. This is not an intellectual definition. It is a basic, essential concept about the soul. Any person can absorb this point, each according to his own level of understanding.

To give an example, we can find people who are so deep in thought that if they are waiting at the bus stop, they don't even realize how late the bus is, because they are so immersed in their thoughts. From a superficial understanding, this sounds like something negative, but upon an inner outlook we can understand that there is an ability in a person to live in his thoughts. When a person lives in the thoughts, he is able to disconnect from his surroundings.

To disconnect from one's surroundings doesn't mean to become disconnected in the simple sense. It is to enter into an inner place of thought and to be there. In the world of thought, the bus never comes to pick you up! The bus is in the street, but the person is in his thoughts – the bus doesn't even pass by him...! In the inner sense, a person who is in his thoughts isn't here on this world!

A person who lives in the world of thought simply isn't here on this world. If someone comes to the door and asks him if anyone else is home to speak to, and he answers, "No" (when really there is someone else home), if you think about it, he is not lying! (I am not

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saying you should actually do this, because your children might learn from this that it's permitted to lie, since they don't understand why you didn't say "Yes.") In the inner take on reality, a person who is immersed in thoughts isn't living in his house – he's somewhere else. This is only true with someone who is really in the world of thought.

This is the depth of the statement, "I have seen those who ascend spiritually, but they are few" (*Sukkah* 45b). In a house, there is a first floor and an attic; one person can inhabit the first floor, while another person lives in the attic. In practical terms for us, we have in us a body and a power of thought. Our body is like the first floor of a house, while the attic is our head – the place which we use to think. There are indeed few people who live in thought.

This doesn't mean simply that a person always "thinks". It means that a person is found in a world of thought.

Disconnecting From Physicality

A person who lives in a world of thought is also able to experience the reality of the feelings. He experiences the emotions of happiness or sadness as a reality, no less than he feels the senses of being cold or hot.

There is a famous story in which Rav Chaim Soloveitchik was learning and he accidentally hurt his hands, oblivious to this fact. (I am not getting into if this story is true or not, but even if it isn't, there are many such stories brought in the Gemara where one of the Sages was so immersed in his learning that he wasn't aware that he was suffering physically). From a superficial viewpoint, this appears to be a negative outcome of learning – "He's learning so much that he loses attention of his surroundings...he's brilliant and gifted, but not all there..."

That would be a reaction of a superficial person who sees this. But the inner way to view this is that because Rav Chaim lived in the world of thought, he wasn't living with his body at all; he was totally divested of his body, because he lived in a world of the soul.

Why People Like To Get Their Pictures Taken

We will give a simple example that brings out this point (of disconnecting from physicality).

People often love to get their pictures taken. Whenever people make a family occasion or whenever they go away on trips, people usually take pictures of themselves.

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Why do people want pictures of themselves? It is because people want to be remembered...and why do people indeed want to be remembered?

The deep reason behind this is because people identify themselves as mainly being a body and not a soul. If people would identify themselves as being a soul, why do they need their body to be remembered in a picture? It is only because people place their main value on their body, and thus they want their body to always be remembered...

When a person identifies himself as his body, he wants his physical appearance to be remembered, because he thinks, "This is how I look." But when a person knows that he is his thoughts, he considers his body only to be a garment on top of his essence.

When a person is very concerned about his ego, it is really because he identifies himself as being a physical existence. He thinks that his body is who he is; he fears death because it's very scary that his body will disappear after he dies, and he therefore wants very much to be remembered in a picture. But if a person knows what his essence is, he knows that a picture of him is not really his picture, because his physical appearance isn't himself. He knows that he doesn't ever die, because the soul is eternal and does not die.

Chazal state that "the righteous are called being alive even after they die." This is because great people don't view themselves with a body attitude, but from a soul attitude.

A more inner kind of person, when he sees a picture of himself, is able to say, "This isn't me. It might be a garment of who I am, but it's not who I am." He differentiates between his physical appearance and his essence.

Identifying Who You Really Are

Everyone knows he has an essence, but the question is: how do we identify ourselves? We are not having an intellectual discussion here, but how you actually feel toward yourself.

Where are you? You have a body, from your head to your toes. Somewhere inside this is where you are. Where do you think you are? Some people will remark to this, "What does it make difference where I actually am? My whole body is who I am."

But if a person thinks this way, he is too connected to his body. It could even be that he learns Torah all day and does all the *mitzvos*, but he still identifies himself as a body.

Where is your "I"? Although your "I" extends to every part of your body, that is only the vitality that extends from your "I." It is not your actual "I." Where is your actual "I"?

If a person closes his eyes and tries to sense his existence and he cannot feel his existence within his body, it is clear that he doesn't really know of his own existence yet. He might be aware of the fact that he is alive, but he doesn't know his essence. He identifies his body as the source of his life.

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But when a person knows how to identify the source of his vitality, he discovers what is called a *maayan novea*, a “flowing wellspring” within. The Gemara (*Berachos* 63b) states that if one wants to become wise, he should study financial matters, because there is no part in Torah that has more wisdom than this; they are called a “flowing wellspring”. Chazal are teaching us that there is a place in our soul that is called a “flowing wellspring”, from which our thoughts flow out from. This wisdom is found in the monetary laws of the Torah, but inside ourselves we can find it also. Where can we find this inner flow -- the place where we can identify our essence?

You Are Found In Thoughts

The answer is in the thoughts (and also in the heart). All other places in the body are just extensions of one’s life-giving energy, but they are not the actual life force in a person. The actual vitality of a person, his very essence, is found in the thoughts (or in the heart).

This is essentially what we said before: there are some people who are thinkers, but then there are people who are actually **found** in their thoughts. A person who is found in the thoughts is not simply because he entered the world of thought, but because he identifies it as his source of vitality. He lives this vitality and thus he lives the thoughts.

When one learns Torah *lishmah* (for its own sake), he merits to become a “mighty wellspring” (*maayan hamisgaber*). One who learns Torah for pure motives, even for a short amount of time, connects to this inner source of vitality in himself, and it is there that he identifies himself. “*Wisdom sustains its owner.*” He feels his existence in this place of thought in himself.

If a person doesn’t feel that it is his mind or heart which is where he exists, he has never reached his essence yet. He will not either be able to reach his potential in learning. It’s possible for a person to learn a lot of Torah, but he has never yet reached his unique potential in learning.

Everyone has a unique share in learning from Hashem. It is there where a person can feel his existence.

In the beginning of this chapter, we mentioned that the Ramchal writes that it is the way of wise scholars to constantly think wherever they go. This is because they have found their inner source of thoughts which flows out from their essence. This doesn’t come from straining the mind to concentrate very hard. It comes from the source of thought in a person – his very essence.

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To illustrate, if a person is dead, he still exists, but he is dead. When a person isn't connected to his inner source of thought, he still exists, but it is as if he is dead. He isn't connected to himself.

To live in a world of thought means that one lives in a place in which he is connected to his actual self.

The Torah Of Truth

Wisdom is "*the Torah of truth planted within us.*" The Torah is called a "Torah of truth" – as opposed to not being a Torah of truth. What does that mean?

The truth is really what sustains anything to exist. Falsity cannot sustain anything – it is a lie, so it cannot give vitality to anything. Truth is essentially a continuation of something, while falsity is when something begins from nowhere.

When a person has falsity in his soul, he is always making new beginnings with no solid basis to rely upon. He produces ideas which don't come from his essence.

When a person never reaches his essence, he is really living a lie. When a person lies to himself, he isn't connected to his actual self and creates a new "I" that isn't who he is. This cannot be a source of vitality to him.

If a person doesn't reach the truth of who he really is, he will never have the inner source of thought from which his true wisdom is found in – he will never reach *Toras Emes*, the "Torah of truth".

We do not mean that if he never reaches it, he is a liar. We are referring to something else: someone who does not reach the truth of himself. This can be, for example, when a person learns someone else's share in Torah -- and not his own. Such a person doesn't connect to his own source of thought – he is living something else other than who he is, and he is just creating new ideas that are not true to who he is.

Chazal¹⁴ say that "Every day, a person should consider the Torah as precious as on the day he received it at Har Sinai". The depth of this is that each person needs to learn his unique part of the Torah that is specially meant for him; if Reuven learns Shimon's part of Torah, he isn't connected to the wisdom he could be having.

Even if he learns a lot, in his soul he is living a lie, and as a result he doesn't derive vitality from such knowledge.

Thus, he has to always connect to his part of the Torah -- which he received at Har Sinai.

¹⁴ *Yalkut Shimeoni, Devarim 938.*

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Searching For The Truth

A person must seek the truth if he wants to be connected to his inner flow of thought and to live a life of wisdom. Sometimes a person needs to endure a lot of physical suffering for this, but the proper way we can all handle is to live a truthful kind of life.

The Torah gives a commandment to avoid lies¹⁵. A person needs to always look for what is the absolute truth. If you look for the real truth in something, you will be able to reach your inner source of thought from that.

Searching for the truth doesn't just mean to look for the truth – it means that you look for the truth which is meant **for you**.

For example, when a person is learning and he comes up with a certain *sevarah*, and he wants to know if it is correct or not – it is not enough to ask someone else what he thinks. Even if you get someone else's approval of what you have come up with, you need to still ask yourself if it's really the truth. When you keep searching for the truth – the absolute truth – eventually you will find your inner source of thought.

There are other ways to reach the truth, such as physical suffering or absolute dedication to learning the Torah. But there is a more inner way to reach the truth – by always searching for the absolute truth.

For this, a person must be very determined to find the truth – it is not about looking for every opinion out there, nor is it about finding out always how to act (although these two things are necessary). It is to find what the truth is in any point – to turn a matter over again and again and question if it's really the absolute truth.

We are not talking about guessing right when you're learning. It can happen also that a person guesses correctly, but that is not the depth of this concept.

Don't Look For Leniencies

This is a very refined and subtle part of our soul – the power to search for the truth. To illustrate this, we will give some examples from life to explain what it is.

People often ask if it is permissible to lie in certain situations, but just because it may be permissible doesn't mean it's the truth. It might not be a lie, but it's still not the truth.

It is told about Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel (the Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva zt"l) that when he had to sign on certain government papers to finalize a new yeshiva building, he refused to sign it, because he could not get himself to say that certain rooms were for children and that the *beis*

¹⁵ *Shemos* 23: 7

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midrash was really a gym. Although he could have found permission according to *Halacha* to write it anyway, he couldn't write it, because it was a deviation from the truth.

When he refused to sign it, the people involved said to him, "But everyone else does it. It's the only for us to get a grant from the government." He replied, "Yeshivos can be based on this, but Torah cannot."

There is definitely a lot of Torah in today's times, but there isn't that much truth.

One time I dealt with someone who lied to me. I wasn't aware that he lied to me at first, and after some time, I found out that he had lied to me. I asked him, "Why did you lie to me?"

He told me, "I lied to you *l'sheim shomayim* (for the sake of Heaven)."

I said to him, "For the sake of Heaven, I don't believe you. Maybe you won't go to *Gehinnom* for lying to me, but I'm never believing you again for anything, because you will probably just lie to me again for the sake of Heaven."

It's not an issue of if it's permitted or not. It is simple that if it's a lie, it's not permitted. But even if it's entirely permissible, it still goes against the truth. "*He speaks truth in his heart.*" There is a deep place in the soul which is the total truth; it is hidden deep down in the soul.

If a person doesn't experience such a place in his soul, he will not be able to derive vitality from the world of thought and wisdom.

Many people wonder why they aren't successful at trying to enter the world of thought. There can be many reasons for this, but along the lines of our discussion here, it is because people aren't truthful enough.

If we want to arrive at the truth, we need to purify ourselves and work on acquiring the truth – and only the truth.

Sometimes a person can start entering the truth only to become crooked a little bit afterwards. We can hear someone beginning to say something truthful, and then the next thing he says is something twisted.

This is because the person hasn't really worked to purify himself; even when he gets to the truth in something, it comes out in a crooked way.

There are people who can say very impressive *Chiddushei Torah*, but they aren't true. By contrast, there are those who just learn the simple meaning of a *sugya*, and even though it's not a *chiddush*, it is the truth; even when they do come up with a *chiddush*, the point is not the *chiddush* – the point is that their understanding is the true understanding.

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Purifying The Thoughts

Let us now make this more practical.

The power of constant thought is that a person is able to look for the truth in his thoughts, and examine if what he is thinking is true or not. (Obviously, one should not do this with every thought, but we are just saying the root point).

Ever since Adam sinned by eating from the Eitz haDa'as, everything in the world became a mixture of true and false. The only question is how much truth there is in something and how much falsity there is in something. Besides for the holy Torah, which is entirely true, everything else we know of is a mixture of true and false. It is our job to sift out the lies and find the truth in something. How can we do this?

We need to get used to constant thought. There are two steps to this. The first step is to start checking our thoughts. When a person thinks of a thought – whether it is a thought that comes to him in learning Torah, or a thought about anything about that is meaningful in life -- he should try to sift out something from the thought that doesn't seem true. A person should keep sifting out his thoughts, and slowly but surely, he will be able to arrive at the truth in something.

From a superficial understanding, this seems that a person needs to think more and wonder, “Is this okay according to everybody?” But it's really more than this. It is an inner test that takes place inside one's self, a self-examination to try and see what the truth is.

Just like a shochet (butcher) checks a knife to see if there is nick in it, so too when it comes to our mind we have to feel if something sounds right or not.

Even after we get used to checking our thoughts we will still have a tendency to be swayed toward things that aren't true, so we need to be concerned that this as well needs to go away.

Thinking Something Over – Again and Again

This kind of a life is what the Ramchal describes – that it is the way of Torah scholars to always be thinking. What are they always thinking about?

Constant thought does not mean that one learns 18 chapters of *Mishnayos*, and then he learns two chapters of *sefer Shemiras Halashon*, and then he learns Gemara for a set time every day. This is all wonderful, but this has nothing to do with constant thought.

To have constant thought means to think about the same thought - again and again.

The Ramchal compares this to a coal; just like the more you blow on a coal the more embers you create from it which weren't there before, the more a person thinks into the Torah, the more he brings out what is behind each word.

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This brings out another point to what we are saying. It is not enough to go from one thought to another; this will not get a person to arrive at inner wisdom. We don't mean to say that a person should spend his entire life learning only one *masechta*; we just mean that a person should get used to thinking about the same thing, again and again.

When you think about the same thing again and again, what do you think about? This consists of two steps. One part of it is to simply think about it, again and again. These were the words of the Ramchal, that the Torah is like a coal which the more you “blow” upon it with your thoughts, the more you bring out the wisdom in it.

The second part of it – which is the point that we are dealing with right now – is to constantly think about it and as a result, to come to purify the thought.

There are people who learn a lot, but their learning doesn't open up their soul. The real way to learn Torah is to always look for the truth in everything you learn. The more you try to get the truth, the more you reveal your soul in it, and you can keep doing this until you get to the innermost point in your soul.

This revelation usually does not happen right away. It can happen that it comes suddenly to a person, but generally speaking, it only comes the more and more a person learns how purifies the thoughts.

The Source Of Your Inner Thoughts

The generic term for what we have been describing in this chapter is a power of constant thought, but the depth of it is to think about the same thing again and again.

This gets a person to reveal his own unique source of thought, which is also the revelation of one's very self – his true “I.”

What is the truth for one person isn't always the truth for another person. Beis Hillel and Beis Shamai always had opposing views, yet both of them are correct – “*Their words and their words are the words of the living G-d.*” They each arrived at their own truth, which was not the truth for the other.

When a person purifies his thoughts through getting down to the truth, he gains in two ways: first of all, he is more accurate, and secondly, he reveals the truth that is **for him** and he begins to reveal his true self.

If a person just reads something in the Torah simply and doesn't think into it, he is probably not learning what's meant for him. The Torah is always true, but a person needs to find his unique share in the Torah.

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Two people can learn the same *sugya* and arrive at the same exact conclusion, but one of them got there in a superficial way, and the other got there based on his own inner thoughts; he got there from within his own self, and not from any external factor.

All of this is a way to get to one's innermost point in his soul. What happens when a person gets to that point? There, everything gets turned around. When a person gets to the innermost point, the inner thoughts will come to him naturally without any strain.

These are the words of Reb Meir that one becomes like a *maayan hanovea* – a “flowing wellspring.”

Chazal say that when a person begins to learn Torah, it is very difficult. It feels like using a rope to pull buckets of water out of a pit. But at a certain point a person can merit that the water rises up to meet him, just like by Yaakov Avinu.

1.4 | Applying Your Thoughts To Learning Torah

Living A Thinking Kind Of Life

In the previous chapters we have said that to live in a world of thought doesn't mean that we have to simply learn how to think, but that we need to live with thought. From there we can reach our inner source of thought, which our thoughts flow out from. We will continue, with the help of Hashem, and explain more parts to this discussion.

When a person learns Gemara, there are two parts to his learning. One is what he **learns**, and the other part is what he **thinks**. What is the difference?

What a person learns are the *sefarim* that he learns. When he gets up from the *sefer* -- that is what he is thinking. This is something else.

What is he thinking as he goes away from his *sefer*? That is the question.

If a person only learns -- but he doesn't think -- of him Chazal say, "The Torah is like torn pieces to him." When he is in front of the Gemara, he is only thinking because he is seeing the words, but when he isn't in front of his Gemara and he doesn't see the words, his thoughts wander around. Such a person "learns" -- sometimes, and sometimes not.

But the truth is that a person's learning shouldn't be limited to the time he is in learning in front of his Gemara. A person should always be thinking.

We will begin with the more simple way of how one can do this. First we will learn about how one can think more while he is in front of his Gemara, and then we will learn how to think even when we are not in front of the Gemara.

Part One: *Diyuk* – Knowing How To Read Gemara

When a person is learning, he has to read the Gemara and know exactly what he is reading. If he isn't exactly sure what he is reading, he will lack an understanding of the material.

If a child sits down to read a Gemara, he cannot read it because he can't pronounce the letters. Since he can't read the words, he cannot understand it either as a result. But even a grown, mature person who knows how to read a Gemara often just reads the Gemara and he doesn't know how to make a *diyuk* (to infer). *Diyuk* is not the same thing as reading the Gemara; it is more than reading, and it is very important.

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How can a person do this? First, a person must read the Gemara slowly. He must pay attention to the words, and then he must repeat them a few times. Then, he should begin to pay attention to each word and each letter, and surely every new *Halacha* that he comes across within the Gemara. He will see that the smallest change in even a letter can turn around the whole meaning of a word. The more a person gets used to thinking into each word he learns, the more he will notice things that the simple eye never saw.

This is the first part of one's learning, which is really the basis of all our words here: to read the Gemara and examine each thing you learn about, and especially to infer what the words of Chazal and the *Rishonim* are. (When reading words of *Acharonim*, usually less *diyuk* is required).

Diyuk requires a slow reading of the Gemara, as well as to review it over and over again. Slowly as a person does this, he will begin to notice things he never noticed before.

Part Two: Cheshbon – Thinking In Learning

The second part of learning is *cheshbon* – to think about what one has learned. This can be done while one is in front of his Gemara but it doesn't have to be. Even after a person has closed his Gemara and he is walking home, he is able to make a *cheshbon* of what he has just learned.

When a person makes a *cheshbon* of what he learned, he will be able to uncover two things: either he will realize that he didn't understand it the first time, or he will uncover contradictions and questions which were not dealt with by the commentaries. It is well-known that Reb Akiva Eiger used this method, *cheshbon*, and from this he was able to uncover many great questions.

(However, one should know that it is impossible for a person to think into all the details.)

We will give a simple example from the world to explain what we mean with *cheshbon*.

Let's say Reuven tells Shimon that at 2:00 AM he was in a certain place and did something there, and that at 2:45 he was in another place and did something else. If Shimon makes a quick calculation he will see that it doesn't make sense, because the time distance between the two places doesn't allow it. Shimon tells Reuven, "That's impossible." Reuven, when he hears this, realizes his mistake and says, "Oh, I guess I just didn't pay attention to what I was saying. Really, it wasn't 2:45, but at 3:15." Shimon was able to catch Reuven's mistake, but not all people would notice such a thing.

People hear stories all the time that are full of contradictions, and they don't pay attention to this.

We have chosen this example before we have explained what it means to make a *cheshbon* in the *sugya*, because when a person learns a *sugya* it is obvious that he has to make a

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cheshbon, but when it comes to practical daily life people don't make use of their *cheshbon* enough. Many times if you add up all the information in the same newspaper you will find contradicting facts.

A person can make a *cheshbon* of the *sugya* both when he is in front of the Gemara and when he is away from the Gemara. This is the second part of learning – *cheshbon*.

Part Three: Sevarah – Using Your Logic

The third part of learning is *sevarah* – the logic in the *sugya*.

There are people who learn a lot, and they think that “logic” means the first thoughts (*hashkafah rishonah*) that enters their mind when they begin to learn the *sugya*. This is erroneous. *Sevarah*/logic is that a person has to try to come up with at least two possible reasons to explain something he learns.

Upon doing this, a person might discover that one of the possibilities can't be true, either because it argues with the *Halacha* contained in the Gemara, or because it goes against the *cheshbon* he made. But the point is that a person should always come up with at least two possibilities to explain something (Sometimes a person can come up with three, four, five or even more possibilities).

Think if it first makes sense, and then see if it is fitting in to what the Gemara is saying, and if it fits into the *cheshbon* you have made on the *sugya*.

(This is not referring to the “*two dinim*” method of the school of Brisk, in which a person has to compare and to differentiate between two different concepts and why they are different. It is a more preliminary stage, in which a person has to come up with two different reasons to explain one concept).

Sometimes a person can find the *diyuk* from the *sevarah*, and sometimes a person finds the *sevarah* from the *diyuk*; either a person is able to read the Gemara better because of the logic he has come up with, or the other way around: he sees what the logic is because he has read the Gemara properly.

In the first way, a person puts his logic into the words, and in the second way, he deduces his logic from the words. The second way is more reliable, because in the first way, the person might force his logic into what the words mean, which isn't always an accurate reading of the Gemara. But the second way is more truthful, because you can't force out a logic from the words -- either the logic is coming from the meaning of the words, or it's not.

So a person should always come up with two different possibilities that make sense, and when a person does this he will see as he learns a *sugya* that each of the *Rishonim* holds like one way or the other way.

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As a person gets used to this, he will see that his entire way of thinking will change.

Thinking Into The Opposite

Included in this is that when you learn something, think of the opposite logic of it (*tzad hafoch*). When you have the *sevarah*, which is the straight logic in the *sugya* -- now think of what the opposite of the *sevarah* would be (When a person does this, he is really using the power of *Da'as*, which we will discuss later).

In order to really know something, you have to know what the opposite of it means also. If you don't understand the other side of the coin, then you don't really understand what you're learning about either. So when you come up with a *sevarah*, now think: what is the opposite of that?

Sometimes it seems that there is no opposite way here to think, but anyone who is used to learning in-depth knows that there is always an opposite to everything. Something that reflects this concept is how Reb Meir would find forty-nine ways to purify something and forty-nine ways to say how it's impure.

Even if the opposite logic isn't true for practical reasons, there still exists an opposite logic. We don't mean to come up with ludicrous ideas that don't make any sense; just try to think of the opposite of the facts when you learn something.

In addition to this, a person has to think: what *chiddush* (novelty) is contained over here? Why isn't the original understanding correct, and what is the reason for the *chiddush*? After a person understands the *chiddush* he should have two ways how to explain the *chiddush*.

This is otherwise known as the power of "*Da'as*" in a person – to understand something, based on knowing the opposite of the concept. A person uses his *Da'as* to give structure to a concept based on two opposing ways how to build it. It is also known as *panim b'achor* (see Chapter Eleven).

This is the depth behind the statement of our Sages that the school of Hilel merited to be accepted over the ruling of the school of Shamai, because the school of Hilel would always quote the words of Shamai first before stating their own ruling. Hilel would first try to understand what the opposite of his thinking was, and thus his understanding was greater and more complete.

Whatever you learn, think what was before and after the *chiddush*. Now that you have realized what the *chiddush* is, try to think of the opposite of it. This applies especially when you encounter an argument in the Gemara; try to understand each view in the disagreement.

When you get used to thinking into the opposite of what makes sense to you, you will see that you even understand your own logic better now.

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One time a *chassid* came to the Kotzker Rebbe and asked, “What am I supposed to think about all the time?”

The Kotzker asked him, “When you get up in the morning, what do you do first – eat or daven?”

The *chassid* said, “First I daven and then I eat.”

The Kotzker replied, “Think why you don’t do otherwise.”

Of course, we know it is prohibited to eat before davening, but if someone wants to live a more inner kind of life, he tries to understand the opposite of what is true.

One has to be careful with this and not get too confused. But someone who is a *bar Da’as* (capable of understanding) knows that the point here is not to change how you act, but just to learn how to think more, when you think about the opposite.

For example, I came here now to say a *shiur*. I have to think: Maybe I shouldn’t have come? I myself have to think why I should have come and then why I shouldn’t have. Of course, this doesn’t have to make me decide not to come! It is just that at first, I need to think about the other side of the coin.

Chiluk – Taking Apart Details

Another part of this is *chiluk* -- to take apart the details of a *sugya*, to see its *peratim* (details). Think of all the possibilities. Take apart the details of each thing you learn, and you will uncover a fantastic wisdom in each thing you learn.

For example, if you hear a story about how Reuven went somewhere and did something, think into the details that are in the story. You will discover many details when you think into the story.

Usually when a person just hears the story in a generic way, he doesn’t think about the details that went on in the story. This is why sometimes you can ask a person about a story he once heard but he won’t even remember that he heard it.

To explain this a bit more, usually when a person reviews a *shiur* on a tape, he understands it better than when he heard it the first time. Why?

There are many reasons for this, but the primary reason is because the first time a person hears something, he’s digesting the information and he hasn’t thought into it yet. Because of this, a person misses details the first time he heard the *shiur*, since he is busy digesting the information. When he reviews it a second time he can catch the details he missed, because now he is thinking into it and isn’t so busy trying to digest it like the first time.

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When a person learns, he should think: How many details are contained here? After a person gets used to this he will see that there are many details in the *sugya* which he never noticed before.

For example, we know that water is cold and moist. Think: is it possible to have water which is cold but not moist? Is it the cold in the water that makes it moist, or is the moisture in water independent of the coldness?

We can give thousands of examples, but the point is to notice details; then, see how all the details connect. In this way you will be able to reveal a lot that you never paid attention to before.

Let's say you are learning *Mishnayos*. Read the *Mishnah*, and then pay attention to each word. Write down for yourself all the details. You will immediately realize many details you missed the first time, and you will see if these details are not just on the side, but the whole reason of the *Halacha*! You will see that the *Halacha* contained in the *Mishnah* is comprised of a few details which are like pieces of a puzzle, and that if one of them is missing it changes around the *Halacha*.

To give an even more detailed example of this, a person learns the first *Mishna* in *Bava Metzia* – “*Shnayim Ochazin B'tallis*”, “Two people that are holding a garment...must split it.” A person can take apart the details and think: How are they holding it? Will the *Halacha* be different if they are holding it in a different place? What about if it's three people holding it, instead of two...?

Of course, you will not get all the details right away; you need to go through the entire Gemara and you will then discover all the details contained in the *Mishnah*. But the point is to pay attention to details even as you learn a *Mishnah*.

Chochmah and Binah

There are two abilities in our mind: *Chochmah* (Wisdom) and *Binah* (Contemplation). *Chochmah* is to see the *klal* – the general whole of something. *Binah* is to contemplate each *prat* – to see the details.

These two abilities are dependent on each other. If a person would only have *Chochmah*, he would have a general idea of something but he has nothing to think about. A person therefore also needs to have *Binah*, which can make a person uncover countless details.

The Torah is “longer than the land and wider than the sea”; the Torah has general information, such as the *Beraisa* of Rabbi Yishmael (which explains the logic of the Torah and Chazal), as well as countless details.

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When a person learns and uncovers details, he begins to think: What would be the case if one of these details wouldn't be here? What would happen if the details change? Thinking like this will make a person discover an endless wisdom in the Torah.

The more a person sees details and combines them together, the more he will see the vast and wide wisdom of the Torah. A person who learns in this way the words of all our commentaries will reach an endless flow of thought from within himself.

Before, we spoke of how to reach the inner flow of thought. Now we have revealed another way to reach this inner flow.

Chazal say that there are two kinds of learning: One who is "Sinai" (a reference to Sinai, where we received the Torah), and one who "uproots mountains and crushes them". What is the difference? When a person uses *Chochmah*, he is aware of all the knowledge and information of a *sugya*; that is why he is called "Sinai". When a person uses his *Binah*, he takes apart each detail of a *sugya*. He is like the one who uproots mountains and crushes them, because he is always taking apart the details.

Two Superficial Methods To Help One Think More

Now we will return to our original point and understand it better.

Until now we have actually said things that are simple and nothing new to anyone who is used to learning Torah in-depth. But all of this really serves an introduction to our topic, which is living in a world of thought.

How can a person always live in a world of thought? People complain when they hear that they need to live in a world of thought: "I tried to make myself think, but all this thinking is making my head hurt! What am I supposed to think about all the time?!"

There are different methods that people have in order to help themselves think more, and they are superficial methods. We will mention them and see how it is superficial.

One method people have is to review word-by-word. If a person learned 18 chapters of *Mishnayos*, he can try to get to know it all by heart, word for word. This can give a person a quantity of thoughts to keep himself occupied with. The point of this is to get a person to review, either verbally or mentally, the words he has learned. That is one method.

Another way is to simply read and review, again and again, verbally or mentally, the content of what one has learned; there is no emphasis here on memorizing each word, unlike in the first way. This is called *shinun* – to repeat the Gemara's *shakla v'tarya* (back-and-forth discussions).

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Both of these methods make a person concentrate, and it is possible for a person to get used to this and have an easier time with it. But the disadvantage to both of these methods is that they don't really get a person to think.

The first way, memorizing *Mishnayos* by heart and then repeating them word for word, doesn't get a person to think at all. There are children who also can memorize *Mishnayos* yet they don't have any understanding of what they are saying. It is more like a *segulah* (a charm) to enlighten one's soul, and it is definitely good for the soul, but it won't help for understanding. A person will just end up knowing what the words are and that's it.

The second way, which is to review the general content, can make a person think a little, because a person needs to make use of his mind when he goes over the discussions in the Gemara.

The Inner Method To Think More: Preparing Questions For Yourself

There is a more inner solution mentioned in the works of our wise Sages: that a person continues to think about the *sugya* even after he gets up from the Gemara. A person can prepare a question for himself to think about even when he's not in front of his Gemara, and then think into it when he's on the go.

We mean for a person to prepare an intriguing kind of question to think about when he is walking home. It can be more than one question. It is recommended to prepare for yourself questions rather than to think of a *sevarah*, because questions make you think much more than a *sevarah* alone (unless a person has an affinity toward *sevarah*). Usually, questions make you think much more than when you think of a *sevarah*.

This gets a person used to always thinking with depth, wherever he is. A person should keep thinking about the *sugya* even when he's not in front of his Gemara and keep taking apart all the details.

A person who gets used to this will discover that many times as he is walking in the street, he will suddenly come up with answers to his questions. He might want to take out a pen and paper and quickly write down his answer and use the pole as a surface to write on.

(Passerby might think this looks strange, but don't worry – there are people who do a lot of stranger things than this.) It is possible for a person to live this way!

Getting Used To Taking Apart Information

When a person gets used to taking apart information to uncover the details, he will be able to see that nothing is as simple as it would appear. Five lines of Gemara which appear to

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be a no-brainer to the undeveloped mind are viewed differently by someone who knows how to take apart details; he sees how it's not so simple.

Taking apart details makes our mind work. If someone is used to this, his whole life is a thinking kind of life.

Of course, there can always be disadvantages to such an inner kind of life, but right now we are talking about what is to be gained from this. It helps build the power of thought in a person. In this way a person is able to take a small piece of information and split it up into countless details.

Such a kind of life is like a paradise on this world! A person who has a thinking kind of life like this is cut off from materialism; he should be careful not to become so disconnected from this world. But we are saying that there is a tremendous gain for one to be cut off from this physical world (not to go overboard of course, but just to a certain extent to be cut off from this world).

Even in the physical world we can see how taking things apart are useful. When you're cleaning up the house and your spouse is thinking of throwing some things out, you might discover that although your broken cassette player should be discarded, you might enjoy first taking it apart just to see how it works inside.

There are people who love to take things apart and see what's going on the inside of something, and then they put it back together afterwards. This does not come from a destructive nature, but from a desire to see details.

Just like there can be a nature to take apart things in the physical world, so can a person develop a nature in which he takes apart a thought. When a person takes apart a thought, he will even be able to take apart physical things and see the thought that goes into it. There is nothing that can't be taken apart.

Such a life is a life of bliss, because like this a person always has what to think about, and nothing of this physical world seems more interesting than what he's thinking about right now.

Most people are pulled after materialistic desires, not just because they are materialistic, but because they are empty from thought. There is a famous statement of Chazal, "The pit is empty and it has no water – there is no water (Torah) in it, but there are snakes and scorpions in it." When a person is empty from thought, lusts overtake him.¹⁶

When a person always thinks – not because he is forced to do so, but because he has opened himself up – his evil passions decrease a lot, because he has an inner world for himself. He always has an inner source of thought.

¹⁶ Rambam, *Hilchos Issurei Biah*, perek 16

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Reviewing – Verbally Or Mentally

There is another way how a person can live in a world of thought. We mentioned it in the previous chapter and now we will elaborate on it.

The Ramchal writes¹⁷ that the Torah is like a fiery coal, and that the more you think into it, the more you blow on the coal and ignite it more. What this means for us is that when you think into the Torah, you reveal hidden meanings in its words and bring them out to their potential, just like when you bring forth the fire from a coal by blowing on it.

There are two ways to bring out a thought in Torah to its potential. One way we have already spoken about, which is to get used to constant thought. This can be done either verbally or mentally.

There is a disadvantage to reviewing verbally, because there is less thinking involved. But when a person reviews something mentally, he thinks into it. Thinking into something reveals a thought to its potential; it's like blowing on a coal that has a tiny flame more and more until a large flame is produced.

When you think into things, you will see that what you originally thought was simple and small is actually much more than that.

To illustrate, the Chazon Ish wrote that he doesn't know of anything small and simple, because everything is big to him. This was not simply because he knew how to attribute importance to something small (which is also true); it is because everything can be enlarged into a more complex thought. Like this, a person uncovers the depth behind information, in addition to his collected knowledge.

The Second Inner Method: Reviewing Calmly

There is a second method to arrive at constant thought, and it is more subtle. This is not from contemplating something, but from reviewing.

When a person reads the Gemara, either verbally or mentally, he isn't thinking into it yet. He might come up with questions and answers as he is learning by reviewing it, and this is the way of learning; "There is no *Beis Midrash* that does not have a *chiddush*."

This kind of reviewing is simple; the person reviews by repeating the words he has learned, and by going over them, he remembers them better and better each time. The more you go over a thought, the better you remember it. There is an ability in the mind to protect one's thoughts and remember them, and this is done the more a person thinks about it.

¹⁷ *Derech Eretz Chaim*

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But there is a deeper way to review. Usually when a person reviews simply for the sake of review, he is only using an outer kind of knowledge and applying it to his reviewing. But a person has in the innermost part of his soul a subtle ability to “run and retreat” back and forth (*rotzoi v’shov*). This is when a person reviews in a very calm manner; it gives the soul a new flow of thought.

For example, a person can take a short statement of Chazal, even a famous one, and go over it again and again, in a calm and quiet manner. The resulting enthusiasm from this can give a person a new kind of mind.

It is better to verbalize this, but you don’t have to say it out loud. It’s good for you to hear your own voice as you say it, but others don’t have to hear your voice! This is like by Channah, of whom it is written, “*Only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.*”

When a person reaches an inner silence, and from reaching this place in himself he reviews a statement of Chazal in a calm and relaxed manner – not a fiery kind of enthusiasm, but more like a cool and collected state – he reaches an inner flow of thought. This is another way how a person can live in a world of thought.

This is unlike the first method we spoke about before; the previous method was about building our mind, while this method taps into the source our mind; this is what is written, “*Wisdom is found in nothingness.*”

This is for one to simply become connected to Hashem, and from there a person can develop his mind. This is a more inner way to develop our mind: to constantly review, in a calm and relaxed manner, the words of Chazal. This brings a person to reach a constant inner flow of thought.

One who lives like this has an inner strength in his mind. He is able to reach a constant flow of thought from his inner silence, and when he has brought his thoughts to their potential he is able to return to a silence. He knows how to keep doing this, and in this way he experiences a constant vitality in his life, because he lives a life of constant thought and contemplation

1.5 | Two Stages of Understanding – Intellect & Picture

The Faculties of the Mind

To continue our discussion about the thoughts, we will give a basic introduction – the makeup of the human mind, as described by Chazal and our *sefarim hakedoshim*.

The Gemara¹⁸ describes the physical makeup of the brain. The Ramban¹⁹ writes that there are four compartments within the brain/mind: *machshavah* (thought), *zoicher* (memory), *binah* (contemplation) and *da'as* (knowledge).

Generally speaking, the mind is divided into three parts: *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*. These three functions of the mind are written explicitly in the Torah concerning Betzalel, when he made the Mishkan (Shemos 31:3), “*And I will fill him with a G-dly spirit, with wisdom, understanding and knowledge.*”

That is the general description of the mind.

To be even more specific, the Vilna Gaon²⁰ writes of seventy forces that describe more clearly the mind. He writes that there are actually five different parts to our thoughts: imagination (*medameh*), combining information (*markiv*), protecting the information (*shomer*), thinking (*choishev*) and memory (*zoicher*).

How does a person's thinking process work? Your imagination first pictures a concept. This information then gets combined together. Then it gets retained (“*shoimer*”), and then it is thought about. Finally it is remembered (“*zoicher*”). These are the five forces of the mind that make up the thinking process.

In addition to the actual thinking process, there are more factors that affect how one thinks. There are five senses which are part of the brain, and there are also “thirty-two pathways of wisdom” which come from the brain. In addition, to this, there are also seven pipes which come from the brain.²¹

This is the general description of the mind and its abilities, brought in the words of our *sefarim hakedoshim*. There are many more details, but we have said what the roots are.

¹⁸ *Chullin 45a*

¹⁹ *Derush HaChasunah, printed in Kisvei HaRamban.*

²⁰ *Gra on Yeshayahu 11:1*

²¹ *Raavad to Sefer Yetzirah.*

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The Difference Between Thought and Imagination

Let us return to the purpose of this discussion. The Vilna Gaon writes that there are five parts to the thinking process: *medameh*/imagination, *markiv*/combining the information, *shoimer*/protecting the information, *machshavah*/thought, and *zoicher*/memory.

Generally speaking, these five parts of our mind are split up into two general parts: our thoughts and our imagination. What is the difference between our real thoughts and what we imagine? That is what we must try to understand.

When a person learns, there are two possibilities how he understands something: either through his thoughts, which are coming from his intellect, or by picturing the information, which stems from the imagination. We will first speak about this in a simple way, and then we will deepen the discussion.

When a person learns, he reads letters. For example, when he reads the word *Beraishis*, he sees a word combined of six letters. He uses his intellect to understand that *Beraishis* means the beginning of creation.

How does one remember this? Does he remember what it means because he remembers the **letters**, or does he remember the letters by remembering what it **means**? What causes one to remember something?

Sometimes a person doesn't understand what he reads and thus he only remembers the letters of the words. For example, a child can be tested on *Mishmayos* by heart and repeat it word for word, even though he never learned it. He doesn't understand its content and only knows the words. How is he able to remember it? He obviously doesn't remember it based on his intellect, because he doesn't understand it. He only remembers it based on a certain picture he has formed in his head.

So we can see that there are two ways to remember something – either through really remembering it, or through “protecting” the information. They are not the same thing. A person uses his memory for something he understood, and a person uses his power to retain the information on something he pictured/imagined.

We are used to thinking that imagination is only when we have a dream at night, or in a more extreme case, to daydream. Actually, all of us daydream, and the only question is how much.

But on a more subtle understanding, imagination is also a way we perceive something. This is when we picture something. Without being able to picture something we wouldn't be able to imagine.

In our soul, there are two ways how we perceive something: either through intellectualizing it or picturing it.

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To give an example of this, Chazal²² give two meanings for the term “beautiful woman.” One meaning given is that she behaves beautifully, and the other meaning is that she is physically beautiful. The first meaning is through the lens of intellect, while the second meaning is through the lens of picture/imagination.

Another example is evil desires. All evil desires that a person has comes from his ability to picture something, and they do not come from one’s intellect. The intellect of a person can’t have a desire. Chazal say, “The eye sees, the heart desires, and the active tools in the body completes the act.” Sin begins with the eyes’ power of sight. What does the eye see? If the eyes would see intellectual information, the heart and the rest of the body would not follow suit. The eye sees a certain image and it remembers the image, with no intellectual information involved.

The intellect sees only wisdom, while the eyes see a picture. The real power of memory in a person is only what he has seen with his thoughts and intellect; the *Chovos HaLevovos* calls this “the eyes of the intellect.”

However, sometimes a person sees something through his intellect and is able to remember it based on the ability to picture it, and sometimes what a person sees with his physical eyes can be remembered through his intellect.

Beginning To Grasp Information Based On Intellect Or Picture

Whatever a person perceives, there are always one of these two ways how he perceives it: either through his imagination (which the mind is able to protect and hold on to), or through his thoughts (which are stored through one’s memory).

When a person sees something, it enters his mind as a picture. If a person just visualizes what he saw and thinks that this is the essence of what he is seeing, he is thinking about it through his imagination; he isn’t really thinking about the actual essence of what he sees, just how it appears. But when a person uses his real power of thought, he sees something in front of it in an intellectual way; he sees information here.

This brings out the difference between a Torah scholar and an ignoramus. A Torah scholar views through his eyes based on his intellect; what he sees in front of him is perceived through his actual thoughts. An ignoramus only sees something as it is, a picture; no intellect is involved in his perception.

This is the question we must ask ourselves: how do we first grasp information – through intellectualizing it, or through picturing it?

²² *Yalkut Shimeoni, Bamidbar 738.*

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If a person begins to grasp information by first picturing it, on one hand he receives information, but on the other hand, he is understanding it only superficially. But if a person first understands something using his intellect, he begins to understand it, slowly. Thought doesn't come so fast; ever since Adam sinned, a thought only comes slowly. But when the thought is understood, it is the real, deep perception of something

There are people who grasp things very quickly, but their understanding is superficial. By contrast, there are people who need more time to grasp something, but when they finally understand it, they have the inner perception.

So there are two inner forces in our understanding of anything we see: intellectualizing the information, or picturing the information. The question is, in our own learning, which of them do we use to learn with first? When a person is reading a *posuk* in Chumash, or a Mishnah or a Gemara, is he reading it based on his intellect and then picturing it – or he is first picturing the information and only afterwards thinking about it?

(Of course, it is possible that a person can go from his intellect to come to picture something, and he can also arrive at the intellectual understanding of it by picturing it.)

We are not speaking about someone who doesn't understand at all what he reads. We are speaking about someone who can understand; when he first learns it, how does he grasp it – through the power of intellect, or the power of picture? It is a very deep question that one has to ask himself, and there is a very big difference between the two kinds of perception.

A child tends to follow his imagination; a child doesn't naturally use his power of thought. The power of thought in a person is more subtle, while imagination is a more base kind of power. When a person is young and immature, he tends to be more materialistic, so he is closer to imagination than to thought. People are therefore naturally inclined to follow the understanding of their imagination – their ability to picture something – rather than to listen to their thoughts.

We can see this clearly from children. A child loves pictures. He wants something as soon as he sees it in front of him; he doesn't think into what's behind it, he just sees the picture in front of him and wants it.

People start out in their life using their imagination to understand something, and they do not naturally follow the intellect. What happens when a person gets older and he begins to learn Torah and enter the world of the intellect? Does he only know how to picture something in his mind, or does he ever think into what he sees?

We are not talking about someone who doesn't learn and never thinks deeply. We are speaking about who does learn in-depth; each to his own. In the beginning of the winter season in yeshiva, someone sits down to learn a *masechta*. Is he learning it through his intellect or though picturing it?

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To give an example, let's say a *yeshiva bochur* is sitting and learning, and sometimes he learns by himself and listens to a recorded *shiur*. When he listens to the *shiur*, he is just listening, but he isn't learning. When he is learning, he is reading the Gemara. When he reads the Gemara, he sees letters in front of him, but when he hears a *shiur*, he doesn't see anything in front of him; he is just receiving thoughts. The question he can ask himself is: What do I find easier – to read the Gemara (which involves the imagination, since you need to see the letters in order to learn it), or to listen to a *shiur* (which involves only the power of actual, non-visual thought)?

Another similar scenario: a person is sitting by a *shiur*. Is he looking at the *Rebbi* who is giving the *shiur*, or would he rather listen to the tape? Some people are stronger with their sense of vision and gain more from seeing the *Rebbi* give the *shiur*, while some are stronger in their sense of hearing and gain more from listening to the recording.

There are people who need to look at the person talking to them in order to concentrate on what the person is saying. What is the reason for this? It is really because such people have a hard time just using their intellect to grasp what they're hearing. They need to see the person talking, because this gives them some kind of "picture." They need a "picture" in order to understand something.

When a person understands something based on picturing it, he needs to have the page of Gemara in front of him in order to learn. But if a person uses his intellect to understand something, he doesn't need the Gemara to be in front of him in order to think, because he is able to enter the information wherever he is. Thus, a more thinking person would rather listen to a *shiur* than read a Gemara – but not because hearing the *shiur* clarifies the *sugya* more than when he reads the Gemara; even if he is able to repeat the Gemara word for word, he's rather hear about it then read it.

A different kind of person, by contrast, would rather read Gemara than listen to a *shiur* on it, because he feels that he remembers it better when he reads it. This is not because he verbalizes what he reads, but it is because seeing the actual words of the Gemara helps him remember it better than hearing a *shiur* on it. This is because he mainly understands something based on picturing it, which uses the power of *shoimer* (protecting the information).

So there are two kinds of ways how people understand something. People who need to give a concept a certain picture in order to understand it are the type to see someone walking by them and wonder, "This person looks like someone else I know." He looks at every person who walks by him and thinks how each person he sees is similar looking to someone else he knows. When he sees a baby, he will immediately analyze if the baby looks like his father or mother.

This is really because such a person bases his understanding on how he can picture something. He limits his intellect to whatever he can picture.

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Such a kind of person also combines different pictures in his mind in order to be able to understand something; this is called *markiv*, which is a power in the mind that combines one kind of imaginative thought to another kind of imaginative thought.

Let us repeat that it is impossible to have intellect without picture, or to have picture without intellect. These are two forces which we all need to make use of, and it is just that each person uses them in a different order. Some people first understand something intellectually and only after that give it a mental picture, while others first picture a concept and only after that do they think into what it implies.

The kind of thinking that we should want to achieve we is to first understand something based on our intellectual understanding, not on how well we can picture it.

On a deeper note, before the sin of Adam the natural perception was to have intellect before picture, and after the sin, this became altered, and now the natural perception is picture before intellect; we are trying to return to the pure state of thinking that existed before the sin, which is to first use our intellect in understanding something.

Real Memory Is Not Used For Imagination

There are two ways how one's mind holds onto information; one is called protection of the information (*shoimer*) and the other is remembering the information (*zoicher*). In the beginning of this chapter, we brought the words of the Vilna Gaon that a person's imagination is stored in his mind's ability to "protect" the information, while a person's thoughts are stored in one's memory. They are two different ways to hold onto information; the power of memory is not what holds onto imagination -- memory is only used to remember a person's real thoughts.

Only *zoicher*/memory can enable a person to become close to Hashem (as opposed to *shoimer*/retaining the imagination), because it stores the real thoughts of a person. A person who only perceives something by first picturing it in his mind is basing his perception of it on his imagination, which will not necessarily bring him close to Hashem.

How do we see this?

Before Adam sinned, a person would think of a fact and then remember it, and the thought was stored in the mind through the power of memory (*zoicher*). After the sin, the order changed: imagination precedes thought. This we can see from the fact that Chavah desired the tree because she "saw" that it was good; in other words, first she pictured it, and only after that did she think about it. This has become our natural state, unless we work to uproot the order: we first imagine a concept, and only after that do we think about it intellectually.

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The implications of this go even further. What happens when a person acts based upon a picture he saw? This can lead a person to commit a sin. We can see this from the story of the Golden Calf. The Jewish people only made the Calf because they saw a picture of Moshe's coffin in the sky. When a person's thinking is based on picture/imagination, such thinking is off-base, and it can result in erroneous outcomes.

These are two abilities we make use of in our soul: picturing something, which uses our power of *shoimer* (protection), and thought, which uses our power of *zoicher* (memory).

The ideal situation is to have both of these – “Remember (*zoicher*) and keep (*shoimer*) the *Shabbos*.” This will be the perfected level of the future, in which our intellect and picture will co-exist at the same time. In our times, though, this level cannot be reached, so we need to make sure that whatever we are picturing is based on our thoughts, and not on our imagination. We need to thus ask ourselves how we are thinking.

There are exceptions to this rule – there are some times when we can use our power of imagination to reach a real thought. We find this with *tzitzis*. Chazal say that seeing *tzitzis* (with *techeiles*) reminds a person of the blue color of the sky, which reminds a person of the *kisei hakavod*²³. Here a person uses the power to picture something to arrive at a certain reality that exists.

But with learning Torah, a person can't base his thinking on a mental picture of the information. To act based upon a picture is the kind of thinking that came after Adam's sin; if a person learns based on how he pictures a fact, he is connecting all his knowledge in Torah to that state. Such learning will hold back a person from really understanding the depth of the Torah.

When a person learns Torah based on his ability of picture, even if he thinks about the facts afterward in an intellectual way, it doesn't help. His whole thinking will be tied to the picture he thought of before, and the thinking becomes narrowed to fit the picture he has formed in his head.

But if a person gets used to first understanding something on an intellectual level, and only after that does he attempt to give it a mental picture, he will be able to reach the inner understanding of the Torah he learns.

Having Time To Think

Now that we have explained the roots of this discussion, we can give many simple examples that make this concept practical.

²³ *Sotah 17a*

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There are people who can always be seen with a *sefer* in their hand; wherever they go, they take a *sefer* with them and always learn from it diligently. This actually creates a disadvantage to a person. If a person always needs a *sefer* in order to learn, his thinking is based on his ability of *shoimer*, not on his ability of *zoicher*. He never makes use of his real memory, because such a person needs to always have something in front of him so he can picture it and be able to think. He limits his thinking to only what he can picture in front of him.

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l once remarked sharply, “Nothing comes from a *masmid*.” Why? The reason behind his statement is because if a person just reads Gemara a lot but he never thinks, he doesn’t grow in his learning.

By contrast, someone who thinks based on his ability of *zoicher* and not on his ability of *shoimer* doesn’t just read the Gemara; he thinks into it. This doesn’t mean he never reads any *sefarim*; he does, but he doesn’t base his thinking upon his ability to read. He is more concerned about seeing the intellect behind what he learns. His whole day revolves around real thinking.

Recently, new organizations have come up with Torah tapes to listen to whenever a person is on the go. When Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt”l heard about this, he remarked, “It used to be that people would think as they traveled, but now, no one will ever think again.”

We have just said two different points. The first kind of problem is when people always take a *sefer* with them in order to learn. He could have listened to a *shiur*, which would have made him think more. People think more when they listen than when they read, so by using a *sefer*, a person loses out on real thinking. Although listening to a *shiur* is better than reading the Gemara, listening to a *shiur* all the time doesn’t either get rid of this problem. If a person can only learn in his spare time by listening to a *shiur*, he also never thinks on his own.

It all boils down to this: Is a person always reading Torah, or does he have any time to himself to think and reflect on his own?

This is not an issue about how to act and what to “do”. We aren’t telling you here what to “do”. What we are saying is that it’s not enough to learn – a person has to think also.

In the words of this chapter, we are explaining how to think, in terms of two different abilities in our soul – *zoicher* and *shoimer*. When a person always reads *sefarim* but he never thinks, his thinking is based on his ability of *shoimer*; but if a person bases his thinking on *zoicher*, he finds time to think by himself.

Of course, a person can’t just think on his own without using something to stir on his thoughts. We aren’t philosophers, nor are we Avraham Avinu who was able to reflect and conclude on his own that there is a Creator. Obviously, we need to read something in order to think about it – we need to see the letters of a word, which are also a kind of picture. But we are just trying to describe an ability in a person in which not all his thinking comes from what he pictures.

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Reviewing By Heart Vs. Reviewing Shakla V'tarya

Throughout the generations, there were different methods to learn which have always been accepted and given over to us by our great teachers.

When learning *Mishnayos*, the traditional method is to remember the letters and words; for this reason, children are trained to memorize *Mishnayos* by heart. Gemara – Talmud Bavli – works differently.

With Gemara, the method used by our teachers, also brought in the name of the Vilna Gaon, is not to remember each word by heart, but rather to remember the *shakla v'tarya* – the back-and-forth discussions of the Gemara.

The *shakla v'tarya* is the basic content of the Gemara; the emphasis here is not on memorizing each word by heart.

From a superficial attitude, memorizing *Mishnayos* is beneficial for thinking, because “letters enlighten the mind”, while learning Gemara is meant just to focus on the intellect of the discussion, because it's too hard to see and remember all the letters of Gemara, which are broader discussions than *Mishnayos*.

But on a deeper note, these two different learning methods are the two different abilities in our mind, *zoicher* and *shoimer*. When a person memorizes the words of *Mishnayos* by heart, he is using his ability of *shoimer*, because he is thinking based on picturing the letters.

When a person repeats over the *shakla v'tarya* of the Gemara, he is using *zoicher*, and although he needs to first see the actual letters of the Gemara in order to think about it, his grasp of the material is based on intellectualizing it.

A person thus needs to examine his thinking and see how he thinks: is he first using *zoicher* or *shoimer*?

Diyuk and Sevarah

In the previous chapter, we listed three methods how to think when we learn: *sevarah*, *diyuk* and *cheshbon*. A person needs to figure out which of these three abilities he is the strongest in. Which is the strongest of these three? Each person is stronger in one area than in another.

Some people's strong point is in their ability of *diyuk*. They analyze the letters and words of the Gemara very well and from this, they form their understanding. Others excel more when it comes to *sevarah*; they need to make sure that their logic also fits into the words, and on a more subtle note, they know how to produce a *sevarah* from a *diyuk*. But the point is that such people excel in their ability of *sevarah*.

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The power of *sevarah* is the strongest way to think; this is where one can think from his soul. We can find this hinted to in the statement of the Gemara that says, “Why do I need a *possuk* (verse in the Torah)? It’s a *sevarah* (logic).” When the understanding is based on a *possuk*, it’s being based on picture, which is *diyuk*. The *diyuk* can come and show what the *sevarah* is. But if it can be deduced by *sevarah*, then it comes from the intellect of the matter, and this is stronger than the *diyuk*.

These are different abilities in our soul – we must be aware which one we use more. Of course, when you are a child, you think of something based on picturing it; a child’s thinking is based on his ability of *shoimer*, not *zoicher*. The question is when we are adults: has our thinking changed since how we thought as children?

There is a story told about the Brisker Rov ז”ל that once a father and son came to him. The Rov was learning in a room and there were barely any *sefarim* on his shelves. The child whispered to his father, “Why doesn’t the Gadol have any *sefarim*?”

The Brisker Rov, who was known to be a very truthful person, overheard the child’s question and turned to the child and said, “A person’s greatness is not measured by how many *sefarim* he has in his house.”

This is a whole new take about life. *Sevarah* is rooted in *sevarah yesharah* (straight logic), which was the kind of straight thinking that existed before Adam sinned.

Intellect Cannot Uproot The Picture

A deep point is hidden here. Until now, with the help of Hashem, we have elaborated on two distinct abilities of the mind – the power of thought, which uses *zoicher*/memory, and the power of imagination/picture, which uses *shoimer*/protection. Let us now bring out the difference.

If a person sees a crooked building that is about to fall, what picture does he have in his mind when he sees it? He protects the image in his mind, and that is how he sees the crooked building.

What happens if a person hears a crooked kind of logic? The mind cannot accept it. Why not? It is because the mind is made up of three parts: *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da’as*. What are these abilities? The Ramchal (in *sefer Derech Tevunos*) explains that *Chochmah* is what a person thinks, *Binah* is what a person produces from the thoughts, and *Da’as* is that a person decides to accept it or not.

Our thinking process thus involves the three abilities of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da’as*. The *Chochmah* is the knowledge that a person receives from others, the *Binah* is what a person thinks on his own (based on that knowledge) and the *Da’as* is what a person decides – if he decides to accept what he had heard or not.

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Daas, the power to decide, is only possible with the real intellect of the mind. The ability to picture something does not involve any deciding – you don't decide if you accept the image or not. A picture is a picture – it is imprinted on the mind, and you cannot change what you have seen.

This is a deep point about our soul: a picture-based thinking cannot be uprooted, even by a real thought.

To illustrate the concept, women by nature are more easygoing, and they believe others' thinking more readily than men do. What is the reason for this? It is really because women first make use of their ability to picture the facts before they comprehend it intellectually. Because a woman's thinking is based on her picture/imagination, women are less examining of the information they receive. A woman's thinking doesn't pass through the scrutinizing lens of the *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*. A woman naturally follows the image in her head and doesn't question that the picture in her head is a picture.

When a person's thinking is based on what he has pictured, the thoughts cannot uproot the picture, because the picture has already been imprinted onto the mind. What, then, can a person do to get rid of the picture he has formed in his head?

The only way is to change the thinking patterns. The person has to change the way he thinks; he has to realize that he must not base his thinking on what he has pictured. This is the only way to remove the image that has been imprinted onto the mind.

But if a person just tries to use his thoughts to think over the image and try to take away its effect, he won't succeed in uprooting what he has seen, because the image has already been carved into his mind.

Correcting Mistakes In Learning

When it comes to learning Torah, this discussion has big implications. Chazal²⁴ say that once a mistake enters the mind, it stays there. When a person makes a mistake, it is because he has used his ability of *shoimer* instead of *zoicher* – he has formed his thinking based on a certain picture he has in his head.

Many times a person gets a certain picture in his head about something, and he isn't even aware that he is being misled. Even when he realizes that he is mistaken, he continues to think mistakenly, because once he got this picture in his head, it is carved into his mind and difficult for him to ignore it.

When a person learns a piece of information based on how well he first pictures it, he thinks superficially, and all his thinking afterward will be based on that picture in his head.

²⁴ *Pesachim 112a*

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Even if he hears from someone else that there is a different way to explain the material which makes more sense than how he originally thought – or even if he does think afterward in the right kind of way and he gets it right the second time around -- the whole structure of his thinking is superficial, and all his thinking will be based on superficiality. He will still have an inaccurate understanding of what he's learning.

Even if a person thinks it through afterward and realizes he made a mistake, and even if he remembers his mistake the second time around when he learns it again, his thinking will still be mistaken! Many times he remembers that he was mistaken, but he doesn't remember what the correct approach was, and because he can't remember the real solution, he just goes back to his original misguided thinking. Even if a person isn't aware of this, that is how his mind thinks – as long as he hasn't uprooted his erroneous thinking patterns.

By contrast, if a person first makes sure to intellectualize the information before he pictures it, his thinking is based on his real mind. He will be able to disagree strongly with someone who says something that doesn't make sense to him. His thinking has *yashrus* (integrity) to it.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner zt"l wrote that “The entire praise of the earlier generations was that they had *sevara yeshara* (straight logic).” What is the depth to this matter?

If one has straight logic, his thinking is based on his real mind, not on his imagination. When a person bases his thinking on how he pictures it, his thinking doesn't come from logic, and it definitely doesn't come from a straight way of thinking. Such a person always has to make corrections to how he thought, because he has accepted whatever he pictured.

Chazal say that when a person learns Torah, he should be like one who writes on a new piece of paper, not like one who writes on an old piece of paper. This is the difference between one who understands based on picture to one who understands based on intellect. A person who understands something based on what he has pictured is like someone who keeps using the same old piece of paper; if he wants to write on it, he will have to keep erasing what he has written...but if someone understands something based upon his intellect, he is able to have a new kind of thinking each time, like a fresh new piece of paper.

Learning Something The Second Time

Having understood this, we can sharpen the discussion even more.

Let's say a person, for example, learned *Maseches Kiddushin* before and now he sits down to learn it for the second time. How is he now approaching it? Is he learning it based on how he remembers it from last time, or he is starting fresh, as if he never learned it before?

When a person learns it now based on how he remembers it from last time, he is starting now from the original way he thought. If he's starting now based on the original picture he

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had in head from the *sugya*, his whole thinking will definitely have to fit the picture in his head. But even if he learns it now based on how he originally **remembers** it, he limits his thinking. Don't be limited to how your originally thought – your thoughts instead are supposed to become more true. Begin to learn the *sugya* again anew – it should be a new beginning.

When a person learns based on how he pictures it, then even if he refines his intellect as he goes on, the picture in his head still remains the same picture, and all he is doing is adding onto the old picture he formed last time. But if a person begins to learn again now based on thinking, then the way he thinks now is different than how he thought last time. It is a pitiful situation if a person still thinks in the same way now as he thought last time! Your thinking is supposed to have changed since a while ago.

There is a difference between the very first time you learn something with the second time you learn it; we will explain the difference.

The first time you learn something, you need to make use of your ability to picture the facts; the only question is if you are mainly using your picture, or if you are mainly using your intellect.

But the second time you learn something (and you knew it already from the first time you learned it), you already have a certain picture in your head about it. On one hand, you will be inclined to follow the picture in your head, because it has been retained in your mind through the power of *shoimer*. On the other hand, you already have the picture in your head on it, so all you have to do now is think of the material on an intellectual level.

The first time you learn a *sugya*, forgetting the material is normal, and it is impossible to start thinking first about the *sugya* through your intellect; you have to first make use of your ability to picture the information. But the second time you learn it, how do you start learning it? A person who thinks superficially only learns it based on how he remembers it from the last time. He remembers how he concluded, and now he just checks his previous conclusions. But the correct approach which we are describing is that when one learns it again, he should start fresh, as if he is learning it for the first time.

The Higher Kind of Memory

To complete this discussion, let us add on another point.

There are two ways how we remember something. To give a simple example, if it is night time and you ask someone if it is night or day, he answers, "It is night." How does he know it is the night? He sees it with his eyes, but who told him that being dark is called nighttime? The answer to this is because ever since he was a child, he was told that when it's dark outside it means that it is night time. Slowly this fact became imprinted onto his mind, and that is how he knows that darkness means nighttime.

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But if let's say you ask someone about the *sugya* he learned today, and he remembers it well, is that the same kind of memory as the person who remembers nighttime? It's not the same kind of memory as the previous example.

What's the difference? Remembering if it is night or day has to do with your consciousness and your sub-conscious (this was explained by Reb Yisrael Salanter). These are simple facts which do not use our mind, because they are so well-known. But there are some things which we remember that are a whole different kind of memory. These are things which we definitely remember, but they involve the use of memory, as opposed to our sub-conscious which does not utilize our memory.

The sub-conscious facts stored in our mind are really a deeper kind of memory. They are imprinted onto the mind; we will explain this more.

When a person uses memory, his memory is powered by the thoughts. When a person retains an image in his mind, this is something else – this doesn't pass through the faculty of thought. It is an image. The sub-conscious is also a picture in our mind, but it is above the regular kind of picture in the mind. It is a kind of thought that has become a part of who we are.

The subconscious is really a higher kind of memory. The lower kind of memory is when we just remember all kinds of things, such as remembering all the numbers. Anyone can feel that there is a huge difference between remembering why nighttime is nighttime to how he remembers the sixteen digits on his credit card – they are being remembered from two totally different places within himself. When you remember that when it's dark outside it means that it is nighttime, that is in your sub-conscious. It is a much deeper kind of memory than memorizing your credit card number.

Sometimes this kind of memory has evil outcomes, like "*sins which become imprinted onto a person's bones*"²⁵. But in its holy use, we find this by how the words of the Torah became imprinted onto the Jewish people when they stood at Sinai. This isn't just memory – it is an imprint upon our souls.

In this chapter, we discussed the abilities of *shoimer* and *zoicher*, and how a person must grow from the level of *shoimer* to the level of *zoicher*. Now we have concluded the discussion by describing a power even higher than *zoicher* – the higher kind of *zoicher*, which is the kind of knowledge that is imprinted onto our subconscious.

If someone reaches this kind of thought in his learning, he is in essence on the level of standing at Sinai to receive the Torah. Such a level is impossible to reach perfectly, but everyone can reach it somewhat, each to his own. There, a person will find that Hashem, the Torah and the Jewish people are one.

²⁵ *Yechezkel* 32: 27

1.6 | The Higher & Lower Modes of Thought

Chochmah, Binah and Da'as

In the previous chapter, we brought the words of the Vilna Gaon who lists five faculties of our mind.

There are others who describe our mind differently, and they instead break up the mind into three parts: *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*. This is taken from the possuk about Betzalel, of whom it is written, “*And I will fill him with the spirit of G-d, with Chochmah, Tevunah and Da'as.*” We also ask in davening that Hashem “*bestow upon us Chochmah, Binah and Da'as.*”

This doesn't contradict the Vilna Gaon's description of our mind, who says that there are five parts to the mind. The Vilna Gaon is describing the lower part of our soul – the *nefesh habehamis*, the animalistic layer of our soul. This description can even apply to an animal's brain, which does not possess any *Da'as*. Only a person is called a “*bar da'as*” (someone capable of *Da'as*). The Vilna Gaon lists the abilities of thought, memory, imagination, combination and protection – which are all abilities that an animal is capable of. But *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as* are exclusive to humans.

Sometimes we can find certain animals that have *Chochmah* and *Binah*, but never *Da'as*. A rooster is blessed with *Binah* to differentiate between night and day. But no animal is capable of *Da'as*; only a person can have *Da'as*.

We will now go through the faculties of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*. Generally speaking, there are two methods how to understand these three parts to our mind. First we will give a little introduction that is the foundation of both methods, and after that, with the help of Hashem, we will try to get down to the depth of these matters.

Mochin D'Gadlus and Mochin D'Katnus

A well-known concept brought in the works of our teachers is that in a person's mind, there are two different modes of thought. There is a higher mode of thought, which is called *mochin d'gadlus*, and there is a lower mode of thought, which is called *mochin d'katnus*. In each of them, a person is able to make use of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*.

To give a generic difference, *mochin d'katnus* is a child's mind, who does not possess *Da'as*, while *mochin d'gadlus* is an adult's mind, who has *da'as*. But such a definition of *mochin d'katnus* is really describing a much lower kind of thinking, the kind of thinking

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which the Vilna Gaon lists as one of the seventy forces of the soul – abilities which exist even by animals.

Mochin d'katnus of our discussion here is not that kind of primitive thinking. It is a lower mode of our thoughts, but it's not that simple.

We are discussing a mature adult, who is a *bar da'as*. The adult mind is comprised of three parts: *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*. In these three abilities of our mind, we have times in which our mind is in a higher state (*mochin d'gadlus*) and times in which our mind enters a lower state (*mochin d'katnus*).

What is the difference between the two modes of thought?

A simple understanding of the difference is that *mochin d'katnus* is when a person's understanding is simple without any depth to it, while *mochin d'gadlus* is to think with a more expanded kind of mind, such as being aware of conflicting opinions. This all true, but it doesn't really bring out the concept. There is much more to it.

Mochin d'gadlus and *mochin d'katnus* are really two totally different ways to think – they are two different systems of thought.

In the lower mode of thought, *mochin d'katnus*, we make use of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as* as follows. *Chochmah* is what a person has learned from his teachers, *Binah* is when a person understands something else based upon the information, and *Da'as* is when a person decides to accept the information or not.

In the higher mode of thought, *mochin d'gadlus*, it is different. When a person uses *Chochmah* in the higher frame of mind, he sees something and sees the wisdom contained in it (like it is written, “*My heart sees much wisdom*”). When a person uses the higher *Binah*, he understands something based on what he sees, and when he uses the higher *Da'as*, he connects to the information; this does not involve deciding upon something, which is the lower kind of *Da'as*.

Connecting to the information, the higher kind of *Da'as*, is not the same thing as deciding, which is the lower kind of *Da'as*. A simple example of this is that a thirteen-year-old boy's marriage is valid, but his marital union is invalid. This is really because a child lacks the power to connect – he is missing the higher kind of *Da'as*. In order to really be married, a person needs to be able to connect – the kind of *Da'as* that connects. “*And Adam knew Chavah.*”

These are two different uses of our *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as* – a higher mode, and a lower mode. Altogether we listed six different functions of our thinking (higher *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*, and lower *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*), and later we will add on another function of *Da'as*, which is called *Da'as d'havdalah* – the ability to separate information.

We will now attempt to understand these two modes of thought.

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The Higher and Lower Chochmah

When a person is in the state of *mochin d'katnus*, the lower mode of thought, he uses his *Chochmah* to receive his way of thinking. He can't think on his own, so from where does he know anything? From his teacher.

With *mochin d'katnus*, a person isn't really thinking – he is just receiving his thinking. But with *mochin d'gadlus*, the person has matured into a state in which he is actually thinking.

Let's say a father is learning with his son; there are two ways how he can be teaching him. If he lowers himself to the level of his son and that is how he teaches him, this is the state of *mochin d'katnus*. But if the father raises the academic level of his son to his own level, he teaches him with *mochin d'gadlus*. Really, the point of teaching Torah to one's children is to bring him to a higher level of learning; the point is not that the father lowers himself to the level of his son.

The first kind of father only brings his son to the level of *mochin d'katnus*. The child never really thinks this way – he just receives knowledge. The second kind of father teaches his son and brings him to his very level; the son's learning will be *mochin d'gadlus*, because he sees the facts for himself.

We can compare this to a couple that leaves their family to go on a vacation to see the Swiss Alps. Their children, who were left home, have no idea what the Swiss Alps looks like, and they need their parents to describe it to them. The parents, though, don't have a need to tell about it for their own sake, because they don't have to – they were there already.

Mochin d'gadlus is to really see the information. When a person is actually in the wisdom, he sees it. When someone isn't in that place, he needs to be told of it in order to know about it – that is *mochin d'katnus* of *Chochmah*.

We have explained the higher *Chochmah* and the lower *Chochmah*, and the difference between them is vast. With the lower *Chochmah*, a person receives wisdom, but he isn't there. With the higher *Chochmah*, the person is actually there.

The Higher and Lower Binah

Now we will describe lower *Binah* and higher *Binah*.

The lower kind of *Binah* is when a person understands something based on understanding another piece of information; he produces new information from what he has learned.

With *Chochmah*, a person just receives the actual information as it is; the *Binah* comes and produces from it new information.

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In the higher kind of *Binah*, a person understands what he actually sees.

There is a big difference between lower *Binah* and higher *Binah*. In the lower *Binah*, a person is able to produce new information from what he understands, but he doesn't actually come into contact with the information. Only with the higher *Binah* does a person really get a feel on the information.

This is when a person is able to see or hear something and either agree with it or disagree with it; the lower *Binah* isn't capable of this.

Here is a big difference between the higher state of mind and the lower state of mind. In the lower state of mind, *Chochmah* is the knowledge that a person receives from his teachers, and it is unquestioned. "Whoever questions his teacher is like one who questions the *Shechinah*²⁶." The lower *Binah* is able to produce new information from the *Chochmah*, but it is basically expanding the already existing information – it isn't anything really new. In the lower state of mind, a person is just receiving information; he doesn't really get in touch with the information. He merely expands it; the *Chochmah* remains untouched, and all *Binah* does is give it a picture.

In the higher mode of thought, it's the opposite: the *Binah* processes the information of the *Chochmah* and actually produces information from it. *Binah* is therefore considered by some to be a higher power than *Chochmah*, because the *Chochmah* is only what a person sees and pictures, while *Binah* is the actual information he produces from what he has seen²⁷.

The Higher and Lower Da'as

In the previous chapter we explained about two different abilities in our mind – to picture information, or to see it as intellectual knowledge. We learned that one must turn the picture into actual knowledge.

Now we will elaborate more on this concept. With the lower state of mind, a person first receives the knowledge on an intellectual level, and then he can give it a picture. But with the higher state of mind, a person receives the knowledge as a picture, and after that he intellectualizes it.

What this means is that in the lower mode of thought, although it seems as if the picture is coming before the knowledge, really the knowledge is preceding the picture. It just seems to be the other way around. In the higher mode of thought, though, it's not simply a picture – it is more of a mental kind of vision. This is known as "eyes of the intellect"²⁸.

²⁶ *Sanhedrin 110a*

²⁷ *Eitz Chaim, Shaar 19.*

²⁸ *Chovos HaLevovos*

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The difference between them comes to play as follows. In the lower mode of thought, *Chochmah* is what a person receives from his teachers, *Binah* is to picture that, and *Da'as* is to decide if the picture is correct or not. But in the higher mode of thought, *Chochmah* is to see the information, *Binah* is to understand the root of the information, and *Da'as* is to connect to the information. When a person uses the higher *Da'as*, he essentially connects to the *Chochmah*.

When a person is at the lower mode of thought, his *da'as* simply weighs out the information of the *Chochmah* and *Binah*, but there is no actual connection of the person to the information. It just spreads out the information more. Here, the person doesn't connect to the actual information – he just creates more information.

But in the higher mode of thought, a person really sees the information at its root. He understands it on his own, and thus he really connects to the information.

In the lower mode of thought, a person just hears the information, but he doesn't actually see it. He is able to understand what he hears and even add onto this, but his connection to it will be only to what he has formulated. He doesn't connect to the actual *Chochmah* he received – only to what he has produced from the information.

The higher mode of thought is when a person really sees the information, and thus he is able to really connect to it. We can see clearly that when people see something, they are able to connect to it better than when they just hear about it. When a person adds on his own understanding to what he actually sees, he is able to truly connect to the information.

This is the entire concept of the higher mode of thought, *mochin d'gadlus*. It is to actually live the *Chochmah*. The person sees the *Chochmah* – because he is there. He understands the root of the information, and he is thus able to connect to it in a deep way.

Someone who lives with the higher mode of thought has a whole different kind of thinking than one who is still at the lower mode of thought. When a person lives in the higher mode of thought, of him it can be said, “*Say to wisdom, She is my sister*²⁹.”

When a person connects to the information this way, he perceives the information as a very actual reality. He uses both a mental kind of vision as well as his own understanding, and from there he can come to have the higher *Da'as*, a total connection to the information.

When a person just sees the information but he doesn't understand it, he can only connect to it from his desires, which is a very low kind of recognition. “*The eye sees, the heart desires, and the rest of the body completes the act.*”³⁰ With desire, a person sees something, but there is no understanding involved. A person's desire isn't interested in understanding something – the desires just look for something tantalizing to the eyes to look at. When a person sees a picture with no understanding in it, he connects to it through his desire –

²⁹ *Mishlei* 7: 4

³⁰ *Rashi, Bamidbar* 15: 39

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which is a false kind of connection. But when a person has an understanding in what he has seen, he is able to truly connect to the information – this is the higher kind of *da'as*.

“If the matter is as clear to you in the same way that you know that your sister is prohibited to you, you may say it, and if not, you may not say it.”³¹ When you are totally clear about what you know and see, you are able to connect to the knowledge.

In more simple words, the most perfect kind of mind we can achieve is to have a clear picture and a clear understanding of the knowledge. This enables a person to truly connect to the knowledge.

Real Pictures Vs. Imaginary Pictures

With the higher *Da'as*, a person doesn't just see something as a picture, but he sees it as information. In this way, he is able to connect to the information. With the higher *Da'as*, a person also sees a picture, but he doesn't see it through his imagination; he is actually **there**.

There is a very big difference between seeing a picture through imagination to when a person actually sees the picture. Let us make this very clear.

In the lower mode of thought, the *Chochmah* is the knowledge that one receives from his teacher. The person receives a small kernel of thought, and from that the person is able to give it a more complete picture. How does a person do this? He compares one thing to another. When a person compares, he is really using imagination; *medameh*, which is to compare, also means imagination. When a person pictures information using his ability to compare this and that, he is forming a picture through his imagination.

But with the higher mode of thought, a person pictures reality, not an imagined picture.

This gives us a more subtle understanding to the concept we have been describing until now.

There are two ways to picture something in one's mind: through one's imagination, and through one's intellect. When it comes to physical sights, we all know what this is – sometimes we actually see something, and sometimes it was just in our imagination. Right now we are talking about how this can happen with our mind as well – there are things which we really see through our thoughts, and there are things which we aren't really thinking about, just imagining. This really brings out the difference between the higher and lower modes of thought.

When a person uses his imagination to picture something, he is only using the lower part of his soul (the *nefesh habehamis*), which only has in it the lower mode of thought (*mochin d'katnus*). Such abilities are found even in animals; the Vilna Gaon lists five abilities that are

³¹ *Shabbos 145b*

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found in both people and animals, and two of these abilities are the abilities to think and imagine. Obviously, these are lower kinds of thoughts.

But a person can picture something through his actual power of vision contained in his soul; this is the higher mode of thought. When a person sees something this way, he sees the reality as it is.

These are both two very deep powers in our soul.

The Torah is described in the *possuk* as “black fire on white fire.” What this implies is that the Torah is really the source of all pictures in Creation. In other words, there is a real kind of picture which is not being pictured by our imagination, but it is rather a picture of reality. This is the higher mode of thought – to be able to get a picture of reality.

Let us again stress the fact that we are speaking about the higher mode of thought, which is to see a real, existing picture. The lower mode of thought only sees an imaginary picture – the imagination is capable of coming up with all sorts of ideas that do not exist.

The imagination is made up of three abilities: *medameh* (imagination), *markiv* (combining different imaginative thoughts) and *shoimer* (protecting and retaining the imaginative thoughts). *Markiv* can come and combine two pictures that one has imagined in his mind, and it can also combine two different imagined ideas that do not exist at all. Both of these are abilities that our lower mode of thought uses.

But the higher mode of thoughts sees a picture by actually seeing it. It is a more intellectual kind of a picture. This kind of picturing is rooted in the Torah, the root of all intellect – which was given in “black fire on white fire.”

Of course, with the higher mode of thought a person can still see many different kinds of things, because there are many kinds of pictures. “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” Creation is full of many different pictures that are holy. But the root of all holy pictures is contained in the “black fire on white fire” of the Torah. Chazal say that seeing letters of the Torah make one wise; there is a place in our soul in which we can actually see a holy kind of picture. This is the higher mode of thought in us.

There is an additional point which is very important to know. *Chochmah* and *Binah* are called “two friends that never separate from each other.” These two abilities are always connected. However, this is only true with the higher mode of thought, and not in the lower mode of thought. In the lower mode of thought, *Chochmah* and *Binah* are not always connected – a simple example of this is that we can see that a person doesn’t immediately understand what his teacher has taught him.

But in the higher mode of thought, *Binah* is a direct result of *Chochmah*, because the person actually sees the knowledge, and thus he naturally thinks into it and understands it. In this way, the person lives the knowledge contained in his *Chochmah*. That is why in the higher mode of thought, *Chochmah* and *Binah* are always connected to each other. In the

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higher state of mind, a person naturally understands the *Chochmah*; since he really sees it, he is naturally inclined to think into it, and thus he comes to understand it. The *Chochmah* and the *Binah* here come simultaneously.

As we said before, this only applies to pictures that exist, not things that one imagines. Only through picturing something that exists can a person come to understand what he sees.

Unifying Imagination With Intellect

A person is called *adam*, which comes from the word *adameh* – “I will resemble”, which is referring to how we must strive to resemble the Creator. This is when we make use of our higher mode of thought. In the lower mode of thought, man is instead *medameh* – imagination.

In the higher mode of thought, a person is called *adameh*, because he resembles the Creator in that everything he pictures are for holiness.

We can see this very simply: a person can be sitting and imagining something, and afterwards he remembers that twenty years ago, he one time saw what he imagined, and it remained somewhere in his memory until now.

Really, it's not imagination, because it is something he actually saw one time, and it was retained in his mind (due to the mind's ability of *shoimer*). It just came to him through the imagination, but really it is a thought, because he actually saw it before. This kind of imagination is really the kind of imagination which we want to achieve more often – to imagine the facts.

We established that there are two ways to picture something – either through imagining it (which is through the lower mode of thought) or to see it through our actual intellect. **It is our mission now to unify these two abilities – we need to unify the imagination with our intellectual vision.**

Fixing The Lower Mode Of Thought

Let's say a person has succeeded in revealing his higher mode of thought. What happens to his lower mode of thought? Usually, it has been tucked away and has been pushed deep into the lowest point of the soul.

We can see people who are very smart and mature, and they are far removed from imagination. Then the grandchildren come over to play – and the proud grandfather gets down onto the floor and plays with them. What happens when a person does this?

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He knows that the child is living in imagination, so he wants to make him happy by getting involved in the child's imaginary world of playtime. He is well-meaning in doing so – he just wants to make his grandchild happy. But as soon as he plays with his grandchild, he returns back to his own inner child. He brings out his imagination again, which was long ago buried underneath him – and he returns to imagination.

Such a person hasn't really fixed yet his lower mode of thought. He has succeeded in overpowering it for a long time, by revealing his higher mode of thought – but we can compare this to a torch which blots out the light of a candle. When a torch is present, you can't see the light of a candle, but it's not because the candle is gone. If you blow out the torch, the candle will once again light up the room.

The point of what we are saying here is that many times, a person has indeed left his imagination, but it's only because he just buries it underneath him. It can always come back one day – it hasn't yet been removed. We want to achieve something higher than this. What we want to do is fix the imagination totally, so that it doesn't come back again one day long after we have left it. In order to do this, we need to fix it up.

We have to fix our lower mode of thought by using our higher mode of thought – in other words, we need to unify the imagination with a more intellectual kind of vision.

This is a description of an inner kind of life.

Da'as – The Connecting Force

Da'as is able to connect what is above to what is below.

About Betzalel, it is written, “*And I will fill him with the spirit of G-d, with Chochmah, Tevunah and Da'as.*” *Chochmah* is the knowledge, *Tevunah* is the imagination of the lower mode of thought, and *Da'as* is what connects the *Chochmah* and the *Tevunah*. There is *Da'as* which connects *Chochmah* and *Binah*, and there is also *Da'as* which connects *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*.

The higher *Da'as*, which connects *Chochmah* and *Binah*, is that a person sees and thinks into something on an intellectual level, and then he connects to it on a deep level. But then there is a lower kind of connection of the *Da'as*, and that is when the *Da'as* connects *Chochmah* with *Tevunah*. Here, the *Da'as* only connects the information only for the sake of leading to action, in the same way that Betzalel was blessed with special mental abilities to be able to do anything for the Mishkan. To build the Mishkan, it was enough to use the lower kind of *Da'as* – which connects *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*.

There is a higher ability of picture, and there is a lower ability to picture. The lower ability to picture is rooted in imagination, and it uses the lower *Binah*. The possuk calls this “*Tevunah*”, which is another term for the lower *Binah*.

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The higher kind of picture is the higher *Chochmah*, which is to see a picture of the reality. It is an intellectual kind of vision – it is not a regular kind of imagery.

The lower *Binah*, which is called *Tevunah*, is essentially imagination. The lower *Da'as* comes and connects the higher *Chochmah* and the *Tevunah* and turns the information into practical use.

The higher *Chochmah* is the real picture. This is the “black fire on white fire” of the Torah – a picture of what the reality is. *Tevunah*, though, is just imagination.

If we want to make all this information practical in our life, we need to connect it all together.

If we just use imagination to do things, then we lower our power of *Binah* to mere actions. On the other hand, if we only use the higher power to picture, which is the higher *Chochmah*, this will be impossible to implement, because this earth we live on is called *adamah*, which has the same root as *medameh* – imagination. This shows us that we need to make use of our imagination also if we are to be practical. How, then, can we get things done on this world, in a practical way?

What we need to do is to shine our higher power to picture things onto the lower ability to picture things; we need to illuminate our *Tevunah* with the higher *Chochmah*. In this way, our imagination will receive a higher ability to picture things, and it will be able to affect our practical actions in a positive way.

Our Mission – To Make Our Imagination Holy

This concept is actually the secret that lies behind “holy imagination.” The prophets were able to give envision a picture of Hashem. How did this work?

They would take the image they saw and give it a higher kind of picture. They did this by using the higher mode of thought – *mochin d'gadlus*.

When Hashem created man, He said, “*Let us make man, in our image (tzelem) and in our form (demus).*” This shows that a person has two ways to think: he has a *tzelem*, a form, which enables him to think in a higher mode; he also has a *demus* (image), which is the lower mode of thought – the imagination. A person when is born is naturally using *Tevunah*, and it is upon the person to “resemble Hashem” – *hevay domeh lo*. In other words, a person has to get his lower mode of thought to resemble the higher mode of thought – he has to get his simple imagination to have a real, intellectual kind of picture.

It is our mission here to ***synthesize*** these two abilities – the power to see something from our higher mode of thought, and the power to picture something from our lower mode of thought – and through this, we can solve our problem, the imagination. Through doing this,

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we can elevate our imagination and make it holy, and thus elevate ourselves from the level of *nefesh habehamis* (the animalistic part of our soul) to the higher part of ourselves.

Above The Mind

In order to complete the “picture” here, we will mention a point in the mind which is even higher than the higher mode of thought.

Both modes of thought are somewhat materialistic and physical, but there is a higher power than this; it is even higher than the higher mode of thought. This is an ability which is above the power to see something.

It is written, “*And wisdom is found in Ayin (nothing)*”³². The higher mode of thought uses our mental power of vision, but there is a deeper source to this. Our mental vision isn’t the beginning. There is something that goes even above our mental vision. This is called *Ayin* – the point of “nothingness”, a point in us that is beyond the thoughts.³³

We aren’t discussing how to access *Ayin*, but in order to complete the discussion, we should know about it. To give somewhat of a description of it, sometimes a person has to shut his eyes from seeing something bad. This is also an ability in our soul – the ability to withhold our vision. Even deeper than this is an ability in a person to shut his eyes simply for the sake of getting used to not seeing anything.

Here, a person doesn’t see with his mind. There is a certain flow of information here that gets poured down to the person from above the mind; this is the source of the state of prophecy, in which the prophet saw a certain picture of the information.

Another way how a person can experience it is through the intellect, and from the intellect the person can arrive at a picture of the information. This is a different point: if the information is a picture based on the intellect, or if it is intellect based on a picture. But we are not discussing this.

³² *Iyov 28: 13*

³³ *This will be explained in the next chapter, and it is also explained at length in the seventh Hebrew volume of Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh.*

1.7 | In & Above the Thoughts

Entering The Reality Of One's Thoughts

In the previous chapter, we learned that there is a higher *Chochmah* and a lower *Chochmah*. The lower *Chochmah* is the knowledge that one receives from his teacher, and the higher *Chochmah* is to actually see the knowledge; this is like what is written, “*My heart has seen much wisdom*”.

But there is another fundamental difference between the higher and lower *Chochmah*.

The higher *Chochmah* is when a person really **enters** the information he is thinking about. The Baal Shem Tov says that when Hashem told Noach to enter the Ark, it was a hint that a person needs to enter into what he says and thinks.

When a person has a real, inner kind of thought, it's really a way of entering the thought. The thought surrounds his whole essence, and it is like he is found inside his thoughts.

If a person thinks something but he is elsewhere, he isn't really connected to the thoughts. “*With his mouth and lips he honors Me, but his heart is far from Me.*”³⁴ It's possible that a person is talking about something, but his heart isn't into it; he isn't there. Not only can people be disconnected from what they say, but there is also disconnection from the thoughts – when people think of something, but they aren't really there.

The Ramban and the Baal Shem Tov both wrote that a person is entirely found where his thoughts are. This is because a person enters his thoughts, and that is why he is found there. The thoughts are like our home which contains our essence. Where we think is thus where we are.

This is only true when a person sees thought as a real, existing entity. If a person doesn't consider thoughts to be reality, he is merely thinking about a thought, but he doesn't enter his thoughts. A person who doesn't see the reality of thoughts isn't really in his thoughts, because he doesn't view his thoughts to be his real place.

The Vilna Gaon writes that there are five parts to our speech: *ratzon* (will), *machshavah* (real thought), *hirhur* (passing thought), *kol* (voice) and *dibbur* (speech). *Hirhur* is a passing thought that is not part of our real thoughts, which are *machshavah*.

Hirhur is when a person just happens to be thinking, but it isn't a real thought. It is a superficial kind of thought. Most of the thoughts of people are at this lower level of *hirhur*, and perhaps even at a level lower than this.

³⁴ *Yeshayahu 29: 13*

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If a person learns Torah all day, but he isn't connected to it – when he doesn't think into it – his learning is not using his real thoughts, but instead just passing, fleeting thoughts (*hirhur*); he hasn't entered his thoughts when he learns.

A true thought is the kind of thought in which a person enters the matter; this is the most basic level of real thought. If the person isn't really in the thought, then it's just a passing thought that isn't real – *hirhur*.

The Disadvantage To Entering The Thoughts

However, that is only the lower definition of our thoughts. According to this definition, being outside of a thought means that you're not in the thought, and thus you don't consider the thought to be real.

But there is a higher way to define thoughts, and according to this approach, being outside a thought is actually a good thing.

The higher approach to thought is that when a person is really thinking, he is in a different place entirely than where he is now. Since this is so, it is not always true that one has to be in the thoughts. We will explain what we mean.

In the basic definition we have given until now - that superficial thoughts are just *hirhur* - the thoughts can actually be detrimental to a person's spiritual level. It is written, "*From afar Hashem appears to me.*"³⁵ When a person thinks about a level that is too lofty for him, he is far from there. Such thinking is *hirhur*.

But if we go with the higher definition to thoughts – that a real thought means to be there in that place of thought, while a superficial thoughts is to remain outside the thought – then not being in a thought is sometimes preferred. We can explain why.

Any thought that a person thinks of has certain rules and boundaries. Thoughts are based upon reality. We can compare thoughts to clothing, which has to be the right size to wear. If a person tries to wear clothing that is too small on him, either he won't fit or into it, or it will tear if he wears it. Thoughts are limited in the same way; they have to fit the rules of reality.

If a person is really thinking and involved in a certain thought, he enters it, and as a result, he limits himself to what he's thinking. Even if he's thinking about something very lofty, if his soul is at a higher level than what he's thinking about, he limits himself to the thought. What happens with this? The person lowers the level of his soul.

When a person thinks about something that is way above his understanding, he also isn't in that place where his thinking. That is not what we are discussing. We are talking about

³⁵ *Yirmiyahu* 31: 2

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thinking of something which a person does understand; entering these thoughts can sometimes lower the level of the soul's understanding.

We can compare this to someone who gets on a flight that will last for ten hours. During the ten hours, he is limited to the airplane's boundaries, and he can't leave it. Although an airplane can fly way above the ground, the person inside it is very limited, because he is confined to the plane for ten hours.

When we realize that our thoughts are very real and not just like birds that fly in the sky, which are only passing – and we enter them as well – although there is an advantage of being able to enter the thoughts (since we consider them to be real), there is also a disadvantage, because we are then limiting ourselves to our thoughts. When this happens, most of our thoughts are not thoughts that come from our soul. These thoughts constrict us to what we're thinking about, and thus they limit our perception of the matter.

When we become limited, this bothers our soul. Just like a person can have palpable *emunah* (faith), so can a person have palpable thoughts and feelings. When a person has palpable thoughts and he enters them, he limits himself to what he has entered, and this causes one's soul to be bothered by the fact that it is confined.

If a person doesn't anyway consider his thoughts to be palpable and real, he doesn't see how thoughts make him limited. But when a person knows what real thoughts are, he feels how confined he is to his thoughts, and he feels a need to escape the confinement. We can compare this to someone who can't wait to get out of prison. When the soul of a person is bigger than the thoughts, the soul feels confined, as if it's in a prison.

Two Kinds Of Thinking

What do we do about this problem? What is the true way to use our thoughts?

Generally speaking, there are two ways how to really use our thoughts – there is a kind of thinking which is to be “in” the thoughts, such as when we think deeply and concentrate about a particular thing, and there is a deeper kind of thought – a kind of thought that you don't “think” about, but rather a perspective you reach, which is to see your thoughts from above. We will begin by explaining the first kind of thought – which is to think deeply into a thought.

There are five layers in our soul: the *Nefesh*, the *Ruach*, the *Neshamah*, the *Chayah*, and the *Yechidah*.³⁶ The parts in our soul which we use to think are the *Neshamah* and the *Chayah*. Our *Nefesh* is what we use for actions, and our *Ruach* is the source of our feelings. Our *Neshamah* and *Chayah* are used to think. The lower mode of thinking is through our *Neshamah*, while the higher mode of thinking is through our *Chayah*.

³⁶ *Devorim Rabbah* 2: 37

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We will not discuss here what our *Yechidah* is. The *Yechidah* is above our thoughts. We are speaking about our power of thought, which has two parts to it: our *Neshamah*, and our *Chayah*.

The lower kind of thinking, *Neshamah*, is when we are actually thinking; here, we limit ourselves to what we are thinking. The higher kind of thinking, *Chayah*, is when we are able to be outside of our thoughts – when we give ourselves a sort of space where we can escape outward from the thoughts.

The General Picture and the Details

We will make this matter clear in more simple words.

In every thought, there is the thought itself, as well as the source of thought. The thoughts are meant to be entered deeply, while the actual source of thought itself needs to be left alone; you can think about it, but you shouldn't go deep into it.

We can compare this to a river or a stream, which also has a source from where it flows out from. A person can enter the actual thoughts, but to try to enter the source of thought is like stuffing it up. If a person tries to enter the source of thoughts, he limits it, and it blocks up the source, similar to how a well gets stuffed.

In other words, the source of the thoughts – the point in you that is the source of your very thoughts, and thus above your thoughts – are not to become limited to what a person is thinking about. The source of the thoughts is a kind of thought in which a person thinks, but he is like someone standing on the side of a room and looking into it, as opposed to actually going into the room and exploring it. If a person tries to enter into the actual source of thoughts, he harms this ability of being above thought, because the point that is above thought is not meant to be entered. It's like stuffing up the source of the stream.

There is a way to see something from its inside, as well as a way to see from outside of it. When a person sees from the outside, this can be from either one of two reasons: either he is indeed very far from the matter -- or because he is above it. The ability in which a person sees above the thoughts should absolutely not become limited to what a person is thinking – and when you enter it deeply, you are confining it to the limits of regular thinking, which defeats its whole purpose.

The kind of thoughts that a person must enter into totally are the lower thoughts, which are the thoughts of the *Neshamah*. Such thoughts require a total immersion on the person's part, just like how a person has to be totally in the *mikvah*.

But the inner thoughts, which are the source of the thoughts, are not thoughts which you enter – they are thoughts which you see from above. Entering them only harms this power in our mind.

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We need both abilities of thought – the outer thoughts (which are to be inside the actual thoughts), which is the regular kind of thinking (albeit deeper than when we normally think), and the inner thoughts, which are really above the thoughts and cannot be “thought” about in the regular sense. Let us explain why we need both abilities.

If a person only knows how to be “above” the thoughts, he won’t understand what’s going on “inside” the thoughts. We can compare this to taking a picture from an aerial view – such a picture doesn’t get all the details; instead, he gets a general, undetailed picture. By contrast, if someone only knows how to be “in” the thoughts, but he doesn’t know how to be above them, he sees the details better -- but he doesn’t get the full picture.

When someone acquires both abilities of thought, he can see every last detail (each person according to his own level of understanding), and he also gets a general picture of what’s going on.

Thus, the inner thoughts – the source of thought, which is above the thoughts – see details, while the outer thoughts see the general picture. If a person totally enters into the inner thoughts, he loses the inner thoughts and instead only receives the outer thoughts; he loses his very source of thought in doing so.

How To “Think” When You Learn Gemara

This has implications for our learning as well.

When a person learns Torah, there are two abilities we need to make use of: one ability is to enter the thoughts, and the other ability we need to use is to be above it -- at the same time. Let us explain how one can do this.

We can see this concept on a daily basis. A person is thinking about the Gemara, and he comes across a difficulty. He stops for a moment to think, and he looks at the Gemara from outside, and then after thinking like this, he returns to entering into the thoughts contained in the Gemara.

When a person learns a *sugya* in *Gemara* and he doesn’t understand the many details, he goes back to the beginning and reviews it from the beginning. Why? A person knows that by going back to the beginning, he can start fresh and get a new understanding.

This ability in a person is essentially to return to our inner source of thought. The source of the thoughts is capable of giving us a new understanding of a matter. When our soul returns to this higher place, a new flow of thought is revealed, and through this a person is able to understand that which he didn’t understand until now.

If a person is learning the *sugya* and he feels very lost in all the details, he feels like he can’t think anymore. What is the solution for this? He should return again to the beginning of the *sugya* and start from there. This will give him a more general view of the *sugya*, and from

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there he can start again fresh to think into it. Slowly, more and more, he can reach his innermost point of thinking.

But what happens usually? Most people, as soon as they go back to the beginning, immediately attempt to think very deeply into the details of the *sugya*. (Whatever details they don't think into is not because they are using the inner source of thought, but because they are simply lazy to think deeply.) When people do this, they are only thinking in order to enter deep into the thoughts – and they lose the ability to be above thought.

This is how many people learn: they think into the details, again and again. When they feel like they can't think anymore, they go back to the beginning and immediately think deeply again.

This is the kind of learning which is very common, even among those who have merited to learn with tremendous dedication. Even if people aren't totally aware that this how they are learning, it is still taking place.

Don't Lose The General Picture

There is a deeper solution which can help one understand the *sugya*, and that is for a person to leave his thinking alone sometimes.

This is a very subtle point in our soul, because usually when people choose not to think into something, they end up spacing out. In fact, this is what happens to most people – when they are learning, they are not really applying most of their thinking, and they are thinking about all kinds of thoughts that have nothing to do with the Gemara. Their thoughts wander to all kinds of areas. One second a person is learning the *Tosafos*, and a second later he's thinking about something else totally unrelated....

We don't mean to discuss the problem of thinking extraneous thoughts. We are describing a power in our soul to be above the thoughts, for a good purpose – a kind of thought which surrounds one's essence. We are saying that as a person enters his thoughts, there is a part in his soul which at the same can be above the thoughts and have a whole different view.

This ability in the soul is very subtle, and it is dangerous for someone to use if he isn't there. If someone isn't there, and he tries to use this ability, his thoughts will just wander to all kinds of wrong places.

But if a person does reach this ability to be above thought, the fact that he doesn't think will actually give his thoughts room to expand. With the first ability of thought – to be deeply immersed into the thoughts – the whole concept of it is to be totally in it, and to leave the thoughts here is essentially spacing out. But with the second ability of thought –

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being above the thoughts – the person is outside the thoughts, and he doesn't enter into the thoughts.

The ability to be above thoughts is found by every person, each to his own level. We will give an example.

There are people who, as soon as they begin to learn the *sugya* and they read one line of Gemara, immediately begin to think in-depth. Then they proceed to read the next line of Gemara, seeing if it fits into what they just discussed – and they find that it doesn't fit in to what they just thought about. This is a simple kind of mistake that people make, but we aren't discussing this kind of mistake. We are discussing a deeper kind of mistake.

A sensible person first learns the *sugya* on a basic level, and he doesn't get into any questions or answers he has. He gets the general picture of what is going on in the *sugya*, and after that he goes back to the beginning and now thinks into it. This is like what Chazal say, "Learn it and then explain it."³⁷ He first amasses the general information and is aware that it is only the beginning, and only afterwards does he begin to think. He uses all the information in front of him as a tool to get to the details that he uncovers through his thinking.

This is the lower ability in the soul to amass information, and it is revealed by almost everyone. Everyone clearly recognizes what this is.

What happens when a person enters into the details? He has built the details upon the general information, but does he remain with the general view on the *sugya* (which is above the details)? Usually not; this makes a person lose his source of thought.

What can a person do about this?

There is a more inner method to learn with, which is more truthful. This is to use both abilities at the same time: a person at the same time can be on the outside and on the inside of the *sugya*.

To illustrate this idea, there was a story with the *Baal HaTanya*³⁸, that one time he was learning with his son, and a baby in the house started to cry. The *Baal HaTanya* heard the baby crying and ran to go take care of him, while his son was so immersed in learning that he didn't even hear the baby crying. When the *Baal HaTanya* returned, he gave his son rebuke for not noticing that the baby was crying; he told his son that such behavior comes from *mochin d'katnus*, an immature state of mind.

³⁷ *Shabbos 63a*

³⁸ *Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad Chassidus*

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What lesson was he trying to teach him? What is wrong with being so immersed in learning?

The *Baal HaTanya* was also immersed in learning, but he wasn't too immersed. He was able to be a little above the thoughts also as he learned, and thus he was able to hear what's going on the outside. The *Baal HaTanya* therefore rebuked his son for being too immersed in learning, because he felt that if you don't hear a baby crying because you are learning, it must be that you have lost your inner source of thought by being too involved in your thoughts.

There are two abilities in us to think – thinking of our *Neshamah*, which is to enter into the details, and thinking of our *Chayah*, which is to remain above the thoughts, the general picture of the information. (Most people would hear a baby crying as they're learning, because they're anyways not so immersed in thought...) Even when a person is immersed in his thoughts, he has to still be aware of what's going on in his surroundings – not in the simple sense, but rather because he has to make sure he doesn't lose his source of thought.

When a person learns Torah, he must make sure that his thinking isn't being confined too much to what he's thinking about. His thinking has to also come from his inner source of thought, which is to be able to see the general view of the *sugya*, like he's on top of it and seeing it all from above. Although a person has to think into the details as well, at the same time one has to make sure that it isn't affecting his senses and his ability to be above the details.

The Difference Between Higher Chochmah and Lower Chochmah

This inner source of thought, seeing the general picture of the information, is the perfected kind of *Chochmah* which we spoke about in the beginning of this chapter.

We explained that the lower part of the mind uses lower *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as*, while the higher part of our mind uses higher *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*. Lower *Chochmah* is the knowledge one receives from his teachers. With lower *Chochmah*, a person doesn't uncover the information from within himself; he has not yet arrived at his inner source of thought. He only has what he has heard from his teacher, and in that he immerses himself.

But the higher *Chochmah*, which is to actually see the wisdom, comes from an inner source. “*Wisdom comes from ayin (nothingness).*” Since this is so, if a person constricts himself to what he is thinking, he loses his source of thought.

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This is really the huge difference between lower *Chochmah* and higher *Chochmah*, and now what we spoke about in the beginning take on greater clarity.

Higher *Chochmah* sees the actual information. If a person constricts his higher *Chochmah* to what he's thinking, he loses the inner source of thought. Lower *Chochmah* does not come from the source of the thoughts, so it doesn't constrict the soul when a person is immersed in it.

Allowing The Thoughts To Expand

These two abilities – the inner thoughts and the outer thoughts – are supposed to give us a whole different way of living.

For example, there are people who always learn Torah whenever possible, but only from a *sefer*. Such a life limits a person to only think when he has a *sefer* in front of him. This is a total confinement to the soul.

There is a better way to learn, and that is if a person gets used to thinking even when there is no *sefer* in front of him (and even when he has a *sefer* in front of him, he should also learn to think outside the *sefer*), and then his thinking isn't limited to the words he sees in the *sefer*. But the person still has a disadvantage, because he is still using his memory to remember what he has learned, and this still limits his thinking to the words he saw. Even if he's not limiting himself to the actual words he read, he is still limited to whatever details he gathered until now.

But there is a deeper way to learn: a person should allow his thoughts to expand, by giving his thoughts some space – in other words, not to think at all about any details, and instead just to remain focused on the general, undetailed view of the information.

This method is dangerous for someone who isn't involved in learning Torah, which are deep thoughts. If a person doesn't think about matters that have to do with Torah, who knows where his thoughts will wander off to? But if a person lives deeply with the Torah and he wants to make sure his thinking isn't becoming limited, he has to allow his thoughts some space to expand.

When a person accesses this inner source of thought, he will slowly begin to see all the details more and more, in a whole different manner than before. The view from above the thoughts can shed a whole new light on the details.

Emotions Muddle The Thoughts

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We can give another example of how a person limits his thinking and thus comes to bring down his soul level.

Intense emotions can be another way how our thoughts become limited. For example, two friends meet each other by a wedding. If they are really close to each other, they might hug and kiss. What happens when they kiss?

They become so full of emotion, and as a result, each of them becomes so focused on the other that their thoughts become narrowed. It seems like a harmless act, and that they have merely lost their ability to think for few moments because they have become so emotional and filled with love for each other.

But really they are each losing their ability to think properly when they do this. If a person reaches a situation in which he can't think properly, he loses his inner source of thought.

The same thing can happen if two people are learning with each other. They become enthusiastic in the learning with the “heat of Torah”, and they feel intense closeness to each other as a result. But this closeness can actually limit each of their thinking and constrict their thoughts. We have to be aware of this, and not let our intense feelings muddle our thinking.

Of course, we have to “wage war” in learning Torah, but everything has its place and its rules. We must make sure that we never lose our source of thinking.

The Two Parts To The Neshamah

The book *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that part of our *Neshamah* resides in our brain, and part of it is on top of the brain. The main part of the *Neshamah* is on top of the brain – it is not inside the brain. The radiance that comes out of the *Neshamah* is what is found inside the brain.

A person is able to make use of the higher part of the *Neshamah*, which is above his mind, and use it to be able to see details, even though he's not actually straining his mind to think into the details.

It is a much more inner kind of view on things, even though it is a view from the outside of the mind. It is not that the person is seeing it from the outside in the superficial sense.

It is instead that a person can get a better view to what's going on the inside of the thoughts by viewing them from the outside.

Sometimes a person is learning and he comes to a question which he cannot answer. What can he do? He should leave the thoughts and go above the thoughts – the source of the thoughts. In other words, he should leave his deep thinking into the details of the *sugya* and

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instead return to the general, undetailed outlook he has on the *sugya* – and from there, he might even come to finally see the details.

Using Both Abilities At Once

All the time, we need to make use of both abilities at once – to be immersed in the thoughts, but to be outside of them at the same time. We need to be “in” the *sugya*, as well as to be on the “outside” of the *sugya*. Each of these two views gives us advantages that the other doesn’t have.

One of the Sages said, “I have seen those who ascend, but they are few.”³⁹ Those who truly grow high in their service to Hashem have in them a first floor and an upper floor, so to speak. A person, through his thoughts, is able to live in both at the same time.

Usually we think that those who “ascend” in service of Hashem are people who strive always to grow higher spiritually, and this is true. But there is more depth to it. Spiritual growth is really to use the two abilities of thought at the same time. On one hand, a person explores the details of something, but on the other hand, a person can live in on an “upper floor” in his mind and see from above.

These two abilities – deep thoughts, and above the thoughts -- are two different ways to look at everything.

With these two abilities, a person is able to view the Jewish people as a general whole, as well as in detail. They need to be balanced, and the balance between the two views depends with each person, but the point is that we have both of these abilities.

Coming Out of Your “Private” Existence

When a person lives like this, he will find that he doesn’t want to become “limited” to his private life.

For example, the world will last for six thousand years. Most people only think about their own private lives. How can a person think about the Jewish people as a whole, and about our six thousand year world?

On one hand, there is a well-known statement of the Vilna Gaon that when a person learns Torah, he must think that there is nothing else in his world except today, right now, and the page of Gemara he is looking at. This is really describing the lower power of thought in our soul, in which a person can become totally immersed in thought.

³⁹ *Sukkah* 45b

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But on the other hand, there are higher thoughts which we must uncover. This is the meaning of realizing how this world will last for six thousand years – we must realize that besides for the page of Gemara in front of us, there is a “six thousand year world” – in other words, we should recognize that the Torah is very vast and goes beyond the current moment.

These are two opposite forces within us: higher thought and lower thought. If a person only uses the higher thoughts, he usually will lose the power of lower thought, which was the kind of thought that the Vilna Gaon described. A person who is truly involved in spiritual growth knows how to use both abilities at once. This is essentially the two different kinds of *Chochmah* which we spoke about earlier: on one hand, a person is able to be very immersed in the details, but a second later he is able to live in the general view which is not detailed.

These are two places in the soul. Even in the details, a person is able to find a place in the soul where he can see the details from the outside. These two abilities need to be balanced -- in life in general, and specifically, in learning the Torah. Each person is different in how much balance between them is needed (as we said before).

When a person learns Torah, first he gathers together all the details. We can find people who are very bright in their Torah knowledge, and they know how to connect together different parts of Torah, which at first glance seem to be unconnected. From where does this ability in people come from?

If a person only sees details, he only knows how to compare information, but he doesn't know how to connect them. But when a person reaches the view from the inner source of thought – the ability to be “above” thought -- he can connect all the details in the Torah.

Living With the Inner Source of Thought

The words here are not close to home by many people, and this is because most people are not thinking enough about Torah thoughts. But we should know that the whole essence of a “Torah life” is to think about Torah.

If a person isn't involved in learning Torah and he attempts to become a more thinking person, he will fail!

But if a person takes his thinking and brings it into the world of Torah, he will eventually be able to uncover a new kind thinking – the inner source of thoughts, which is above the thoughts. These inner thoughts will penetrate into his regular thinking, and it will be like a revival of the dead. Just like Hashem will revive the dead in the future with dew, so is there a spiritual dew in our souls which can revive us – the thoughts of Torah.

Only through first thinking in Torah can it become possible for a person to build up his world of thought and uncover a constant inner source of thought.

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Inner Silence

Now we will come to complete this discussion and see the whole “picture” here.

There is a rule known as “*klal, perat and kelal*” – general rule, exception, and general rule.” First, there is a general rule that leads us to a specific thought, and from there we can arrive at a higher kind of general idea.

In our soul, a person can reach this when he finds within himself a place that is above thought. Chazal call this “a time of desolation”. It is a place in a person in which he reaches a total inner silence. From this inner silence, a person is able to arrive at a greater view of something, and from there he can enter even more inward. It’s not something you think about, because by definition, it is above thought. It is a perspective that comes to you the more you have learned how to avoid getting too involved in the details, and you instead remain focused on the general picture of what’s going on.

This is the goal of building up our minds. “*Wisdom is found in ayin (nothingness).*” *Ayin* is when there is “nothing” going on. On a more basic level, *ayin* is when a person first sees the general picture of something without the detail, just its basic rules. Even lower than this level is when a person goes into the details, all the way until the last detail.

To give the complete picture, the lowest level of our thoughts are to think about the details; higher than this is to think into the general picture. Both of these are the lower kinds of thoughts. Higher than this is the point of *ayin* in the soul, which are the “inner thoughts” that are above the thoughts. These are the kind of thoughts which you don’t think about, because they are an inner perspective that can come to you. We have mainly been describing this in this chapter.

Higher than the inner thoughts (*ayin*) is our actual *d’veykus* (attachment) with Hashem.

That is the complete structure to our minds – not just regarding our mind itself, but even above the mind – all the way to the innermost source of the mind.

Sensing The Reality Of One’s Thoughts

The concepts here can only work for a person and affect him if he is aware of the world of thought, in a palpable sense.

When a person has palpable thought, he lives with clarity of what he is thinking. This is when a person realizes that just like he can leave one room and enter into another, so are there different rooms in his thoughts in which he enters and leaves.

The description we have been describing until now is essentially about leaving one kind of thought in our minds and entering a different kind of thought, all the way until the place in

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our soul that is above our thoughts. These are not merely intellectual discussions, but something which we can experience, as real as can be.

Rav Chaim Vital (in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*) points out that a person shouldn't disregard his various thoughts as nothing important, because thoughts are the way that a person travels on to become close to Hashem. Thought has to be a palpable reality to a person. This goes so far to the point that there are even certain birds that can become born just by looking at their eggs and thinking about them.

We need to absorb this concept: thought is something that is a very palpable reality. After knowing this, we can actually begin to see the movement of our thoughts and where they are going.

It's two steps. First we need to realize that thoughts are a reality, and then we need to realize how to direct them and work with them. Just because we have the first step doesn't mean we have the second step, just like a person can know that he has a machine, yet he doesn't mean he necessarily know how it works.

It is absolutely necessary for us to consider thoughts a palpable reality if we are to understand any of the concepts here. Only after digesting this basic fact can we proceed to work on actually directing our thoughts in the ways we have described in this chapter.

Resting the Thoughts

Thoughts move. Just like a person has no rest if he wanders from place to place, so does constant thought disturb one's peace of mind. Our minds need some rest. What we have been describing until now is not only about how to move our thoughts, but also how to bring them to rest as well. That is really the goal over here – to arrive at inner peace.

How do we put our mind to “rest”? When we think into details, we rest the mind by thinking about the general, undetailed picture. When we think about the general picture, we rest the mind by not thinking at all, which is our ability of *ayin*. Finally, we put our *ayin* of the mind to rest when we get to the goal, which is to connect to the Creator.

All of this is an inner language which cannot be expressed verbally to its full impact. These are heart matters, which cannot really be described by mouth. But these matters are absolutely real, no less real than the world we see. In fact, they are even more real than the physical world we see. When a person realizes this, he can use his thoughts to achieve utter calmness, and from there he can connect to Hashem.

1.8 | Connecting To Your Decisions

Summary: We have begun to discuss the two modes of thinking – mochin d'gadlus and mochin d'katnus.

In mochin d'gadlus, the higher mode of thought, a person is able to use three different abilities: Chochmah, Binah and Da'as. The higher kind of Chochmah is when one sees the wisdom in something. The higher kind of Binah is when one understands what he sees. The higher kind of Da'as is when one connects himself to this information.

In mochin d'katnus, the lower mode of thought, the abilities of Chochmah, Binah and Da'as are lower. The lower Chochmah is the knowledge that one receives from his teachers, the lower Binah is to understand something based on another thing (which even children can do), and the lower kind of Da'as is to weigh out the information.

The Two Kinds of Da'as

The lower kind of *Da'as* is to weigh out the information and decide what to do. This is essentially to use one's imagination by comparing information, and then deciding what to do. This is when a person makes a mental decision in his mind what the information means; he doesn't necessarily connect to it.

But when a person uses the higher *Da'as*, he actually connects to the information.

The higher kind of *Da'as* really comes from the state that existed before Adam sinned. Before the sin, *Da'as* was used to connect, like we find by Adam and Chavah, "And Adam knew (*yeda*, from the word *Da'as*) Chavah." Rashi explains that over here, to "know" means conjugal relations; in other words, *Da'as*, to know, is to connect.

In order for a person to know how to use his higher *Da'as*, he first has to make use of his lower *Da'as*. If a person tries to jump to the higher kind of *Da'as* before he develops his lower *Da'as*, he will harm his mind. This is because he doesn't know how to connect properly, and he won't know how to avoid connecting to what is evil.

Therefore, first we must learn how to use lower *Da'as*, which is to weigh the information. We need to sift out the bad from the good in the information we encounter, and after that we can use our higher *Da'as* to be able to connect to the good in the information.

The lower kind of *Da'as* is to be able to weigh out information and decide what it is. Just like a manager of a company makes accepts certain decisions about the company, so does a

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person have an ability to decide about matters in his own life. The person doesn't connect to the information; it isn't yet a part of him. He simply decides what it is. Just like he decides for himself, he is also able to decide for others.

When a person reaches the higher kind of *Da'as*, he actually lives by each decision he makes – they are not just decisions he is aware of, but something he connects to. Someone who lives with his higher kind of *Da'as* is connected to what he learns; his learning emanates from his essence, and the knowledge that he has is what he is. His knowledge in Torah becomes a natural part of him.

As we said before, there is a great danger to using higher *Da'as*, and that is if a person never yet developed his lower *Da'as*. If a person doesn't know how to sift out the “bad” from the “good” in something he encounters, and he connects to this knowledge as it is, then he is apt to connect to something evil. But if a person first develops his lower *Da'as* and then his higher *Da'as*, he is able to connect in the proper way.

The discussion here mainly is mainly about building up how we think when it comes to learning the Torah, and this is the root of the matter. But the goal of all this is to affect our whole life in general.

For now, we will focus on how lower and higher *Da'as* affects our learning.

When a person only lives with the lower kinds of *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as*, he isn't really connected to what he does. It could be that he knows how to weigh out all the information very well and come to decisions, but his learning isn't a part of him; it's all happenstance. His decisions are only superficial – he is outside of them.

But when a person lives with the higher thoughts – *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*, then his *Da'as* is higher, because he uses his *Da'as* to connect to what he knows. He is able to transform whatever he learns into a part of his essence, like Chazal⁴⁰ say, “At first, the Torah is called by the name of Hashem, but in the end, it is called by the person's name, for it is written, *“The Torah of Hashem is his desire, and in his Torah he thinks about day and night.”*”

With the higher *Da'as*, a person connects to what he knows, and the Torah he learns goes from being Hashem's Torah to become *his* Torah, so to speak.

Constant Thought Makes Use of our Higher *Da'as*

Before, we spoke about the ability to have constant thought. Now this concept takes on greater clarity.

If a person is still at the lower mode of thought, what does he think about? He is all the time weighing out information and deciding. It seems like he's always thinking, but if you

⁴⁰ *Avodah Zarah 19a*

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think about it, he's not really thinking – he's trying to have constant thought, but in actuality he's not.

The ability of constant thought can only be with one whose thinking is part of his essence. If it's not part of who he is, it's just happenstance, and even if he does always think, it's just by chance. It doesn't come from his real self.

When a person learns Torah and he remains at the lower mode of thought, he is not connected yet to his learning. He might know how to make decisions with the options in front of him, but he isn't yet connected to the power of constant thought. Even if he thinks all the time, it's just that he's forcing his brain against its nature in order to think. The brain by nature isn't able to always think, so if anyone is attempting to always be in a constant frame of thinking, he's straining his mind beyond its limits. (The truth is that there is such a concept that one must strain his mind beyond its normal capacity to think, and this is the whole meaning of self-sacrifice for the Torah....but this is probably not the case of one who is straining his mind to think all the time.)

Constant thought can only come from being in the higher mode of thinking, which is connection to one's knowledge. It is not possible with the lower mode of thinking, in which the *Da'as* just decides of the information but doesn't connect to it.

If someone is at the lower mode of thought and he attempts to have constant thought, there are two possibilities that will happen: either he will greatly purify his mind, or he will fail miserably, because it is impossible for him at this point to have constant thought.

Constant thought is only possible when a person lives and feels what he sees. Constant thought comes natural to the higher mode of thought, in which the *Chochmah* really sees the information, the *Binah* reflects into it and the *Da'as* connects the person to the knowledge.

Without the higher *Da'as* of knowing how to connect to one's knowledge, constant thought is impossible, and when one attempts to have constant thought without higher *Da'as*, he takes kind of takes this ability prisoner. Such constant thought won't be of any help to him. Only when the constant thought is coming from a higher place in the mind can a person use it to always be connected to his learning.

The only way to really connect to one's Torah learning is through the higher mode of thought; this is how the Torah becomes a "*Torah Ohr*" – a "Torah of Light" to a person; one's Torah learning becomes natural to him when he makes use of his higher mode of thinking.

A person must "accept the burden of Torah," but it will only be a burden upon him when he is at the lower mode of thought. Once a person has the higher mode of thought, he connects to his learning, and it is no longer a burden upon him.

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The Lower *Da'as*: Deciding Without Connecting

Until now we have discussed how lower and higher *Da'as* applies to our learning. Now we will try to broaden this concept to all areas of life, but the root of the matter stays the same; it's the same exact idea.

With the lower kind of *Da'as*, the power of decision, a person just decides, but the information is all on the outside of him; the information isn't a part of him.

It's even possible that a person learns Torah all day and is even a *posek* (a recognized authority who renders Halachic decisions to others), yet this isn't *who he is*; he is just being an intellectual with the Torah, and he isn't really connected to the Torah. He might very well just know it is as information in his head, and he can even quote all the opinions – but his learning is not yet a part of his essence.

But when a person has the higher *Da'as*, all knowledge in his life becomes a part of his essence.

A person at the lower mode of thought will often decide about things that are way above his level. He can listen to, he can analyze, and he can weigh out all the knowledge – and then he immediately decides what's correct. He is deciding about concepts that he hasn't really understood yet, and this is because

he is not really connected to the knowledge at hand. He is deciding according to how he understands.

Such a person thinks that he can decide on just about anything, (unless he knows with certainty that he doesn't know something). In his mind, he is able to decide about anything he has learned about or touched upon.

But with the higher mode of thought, a person is able to take his decisions and actually connect to them. When he has to decide something, he doesn't just decide about it – he connects to his decision. As a result, he won't decide on something he doesn't understand. He will also realize that even things which he can understand that he doesn't always understand them fully, and thus he knows that he can't connect yet to his decisions.

If a person arrives at the decision from his *connection* to what he knows, only then can his decision be coming from a true place in himself. It is a whole different kind of decision.

With the immature kind of deciding that a person does using his lower *Da'as*, the person decides simply if he should do something or not. With the higher *Da'as*, there is also a decision involved, but the decision is viewed more like a garment that over the essence of the decision, which is the connection to the decision. The higher kind of deciding is that a person decides if he should *connect* to the decision or not.

To give an example from the physical world that explains the concept, if a person wants a hot cup of tea, first he tastes a little bit to see if it's too hot or not to drink. This seems like

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the basic kind of deciding, which is lower *Da'as*. But really, it is similar to the higher *Da'as*, because it is a decision if the person will connect to the decision or not. He's not deciding merely if he should do it or not – he's deciding if it's worth it for him to connect or not to what he has decided. It's a whole different kind of decision.

"My Hearts Tells Me So"

We can give many more examples of the concept.

Many times Rashi writes, "My heart tells this to me." The Rambam writes, "It appears to me so." With our great teachers like Rashi and the Rambam, they only said something if they felt connected to it. It wasn't a regular kind of decision.

Even more than this, it could be that a person's intellect tells him one thing, while the heart is saying something else entirely. A person's intellect might tell him that something is okay, but the heart feels that something just isn't right over here. This is a higher kind of decision – when one decides if he should connect or not to the knowledge.

When a person just decides using his lower *Da'as*, it's only an issue of well his decision makes sense or not. It's a decision and nothing more. But the higher *Da'as* is when a person decides from a higher place within himself; here, the whole issue is if I will connect myself to what I have decided, or not.

To give another example, it is possible that a person decides what the *Halacha* is, and he clarifies to himself if it is just a stringency, or if it's actual *Halacha* – and then, astonishingly, he just doesn't act upon what he has learned. If you ask such a person, "Why aren't you practicing what you preach?" he will be unable to answer why not. He tells other to do like what he decided, but he himself doesn't do it. What is his problem? He lacks the ability to connect to his decisions.

In previous generations, it would happen that when a great Jewish leader was in middle of writing a conclusion about a certain religious issue, the pen would shake as he were writing it, and then he would discontinue what he was writing. Later it was found that the truth was different from what he was about to write. This was because although the great figure had come to a decision, he found that in the end, he couldn't connect himself to what he was about to write down. This was the ability to be able to decide if he should connect or not to the decision.

Deciding To Connect

All of us go through countless decisions each day; are we simply deciding things, or are we connecting to our decisions as well? Usually, people are just deciding and weighing out

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information, but to *act* upon it is a different story. We will give several examples of how we can see this.

A person wants to buy an apartment; he checks it out from all angles, considers the pros and cons of it, weighs all the information he has on it and then decides to buy it. But this kind of decision is still only the lower *Da'as*. Really, what he should do is to also imagine what it's like to live there, and then he might discover afterwards that it's not so simple to take the apartment.

This doesn't mean that a person has to always go against his initial decision. Even if he ends up buying the apartment, the point is that he needs to think about possibilities that will bother him about it, and to know how to deal with those nuisances. The point is that a person shouldn't just decide so rashly, and instead to see what it's like when you think about if you should connect to your decision.

Some parents force their children to eat what they don't like, and their attitude is: "What's the difference if my child doesn't like this kind of food? This is what he has to eat, and it's healthy." Although it is true that children must eat healthy food, and that no one should just give his children just what they love to eat, still, in being so rigid like this, the parent is denying the child his power to connect to his own decisions.

People often feel that it's wrong to go after what you like, because they think this is considered gluttonous. But really, what we desire is something to consider. Obviously, we should not indulge in our desires, but to a certain extent, the things we like must play a role in our decisions. It is impossible to give an exact decision to how much outlet we should give to what we desire, but it is a point that has to be brought up and considered. Usually, to give up on what we like takes away our inner peace, and we don't feel good inside when we deny ourselves what we desire, because when we suffocate our desires, we are acting way above our level.

Balancing Our Self-Control With Our Ability To Connect

Many times, people disdain their very power to connect to their decisions (and thus they don't trust their own decisions), because they know that their will to connect comes from a place in themselves that hasn't been purified yet.

This is a truthful point. Chazal indeed say that one should only learn Torah in place "where his heart desires". Chazal⁴¹ indeed say that a person should learn Torah where he likes, but that doesn't mean that he should learn in the street if he feels like learning there. One's power to connect needs to come from the right place in the soul; it is not simply a desire.

⁴¹ *Avodah Zarah 19a*

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Anyone who is capable of thinking at least a little knows that we can't listen to every inner feeling we have for something. If a person feels very strongly about something, it could be that he is mentally bribed, and the solution for this is to weigh out the information well and then decide. If his soul is more purified from personal interests, he will be able to come to a true decision, and he will be able to ignore his desire to connect to something.

This is all true, and it is commendable to do so. We cannot base our lives on what we want and what we like, or else we will destroy ourselves. But although this is true, it can also present a problem, in that we might come to always ignore our power to connect to our decisions, in situation when we really should.

The more materialistic a person is, the more personal desires (*negios*) are going on inside him. If a person is on that level, then he needs to *decide* more than to learn how to *connect*.

But if he has purified his soul more of personal interests, then his decisions will mainly be about if he wants to *connect* or not to the decision.

We Cannot Trust Our Feelings

It is indeed a difficulty that a person needs to solve: If one does have a will to act upon his decision, does this come from the right place in his soul? How can we know this?

Obviously, a person should not decide simply because he *wants* to connect to what he has thought about. That would be a recipe for failure. What then is the solution?

Let us repeat and stress again that if a person hasn't yet cleansed his soul of personal interests (*negios*), then he cannot even decide properly on a basic level, and he definitely will act incorrectly in trying to connect to his decisions.

A person needs a pure heart in order to connect to what he decides; if he has purified his heart, then his will to connect to what he decides is coming from the right place in himself. Without purifying the heart, a person is in danger if he acts upon his decisions; he will live life based on whatever he feels, and he might come to transgress the whole Torah with the excuse of, "This is how I feel..."

When a person comes up with two possible options about something and he is trying to decide what to do, he needs to figure out if his will is coming from a pure place in his soul or not. We cannot trust our feelings.

To give a dramatic example, there are people who murder, and when they are caught, they defend themselves by saying: "What have I done wrong? The world is a better place without this person." That's how murderers justify themselves: "This is what I felt like doing. I felt I was right for killing him."

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When we go through life based solely upon our feelings, without weighing out the information – in other words, when we let our feelings run our decisions – then there will be a sure disaster to our minds.

How Can We Know How To Decide?

The question is: how do we reveal our power to connect to decisions, while making sure that this is truly coming from what we have decided? There are two possible methods how we can do this.

One way is that *after* deciding, only then can you allow your emotions to play a role.

This doesn't mean, however, that you shouldn't do it at all if you feel in your heart that you don't want to connect to the decision, because in the end of the day, you have still decided from your feelings if you should do it or not. So what do we mean?

What we mean by this is that if you decided not to do something, then just because your heart feels that you want to connect to the decision, it is not a reason for you to listen to your heart. You have decided no, and that's final; don't allow your heart to tell you otherwise. But if you decided to do something, you can let your heart *connect* to what you want to do, and then, see what you feel about it.

However, there is a danger to this method, and that is because there might still exist personal interests in you which will hamper your ability to decide properly. Even if your decision is correct, your heart's desire to connect to the decision may be coming from the wrong place in your soul which has some personal interests that are impure. Your mind can know very well what the truth is, but the problem is that the way you are connected to it is coming from an unclean place in the soul.

There is thus a second possible method that is better to use, and that is to make for yourself *two equally possible options* in front of you, and then you decide.

For example, you are not sure if you should live here or there, or you are not sure if you should learn in one yeshiva or a different yeshiva. Let's say you weigh each option, and you see that they are both equal options to consider. What should you do now? Now, you should allow your emotions to play a role. See where your heart's feelings are pulling you towards, and based upon what you feel, you can now truly decide.

However, there is a problem in this method as well, because a person has a *yetzer hora* (evil inclination), and it resides in our heart. The *Chovos HaLevovos*⁴² writes that the *yetzer hora* is enmeshed in our heart and advises us falsely from our own heart. Therefore, there is always a danger in trusting our emotions.

⁴² *Sha'ar 5, Perek 5*

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Here, we have a subtle inner work to do. We need to try and discern if what our heart is telling us comes from a pure place within that is free from personal interests, or not.

If one discovers that his motives are coming from an unrefined place in the soul, then the results would not be so catastrophic, because it also came from the power to decide, and that gives it credibility. The more we refine our souls and free ourselves from personal interests, the more we can decide based on what our heart is telling us (after the initial basic decision, which was the first step in the process). So if we make sure to cleanse ourselves from *negios*, we can then trust our feelings when we decide upon things.

For example, someone might keep many stringencies in *Halacha* that are not required, but he's doing it all for the sake of pride and honor. He might even ask questions to a Halachic authority and always do what he is told, but it's all because he is haughty and seeks attention from others. Such a person connects to information, but his will to connect comes from an unrefined motive of the soul. Even the answers he gets from the person he is asking may be coming from just the lower *Da'as* of who he is asking, and not from the higher *Da'as*.

Our mission is to fuse our higher *Da'as* with our lower *Da'as* – we must learn how to become more connected to our decisions. Our connections to the decision must come after we have the initial decision – first, we must decide on a basic level, and then, we can connect to the decision.

Connection Is Not Based On Feelings, But On *Da'as*

Now we will try to explain in simpler terms what higher *Da'as* is.

Daas is about connection, but there are levels to how strong the connection to the knowledge is. For example, there are two different ways of connecting to others. One way how people connect is through a feeling of love for another person, but there is a deeper way to connect to someone else - through *Da'as*. Love itself is an emotion, while *Da'as* is an awareness that comes from our mind. These are two different kinds of connections to others – either through our emotions, or through our mind.

This *sefer* is not about *middos* and emotions – it is about our mind. When we speak about having a connection through our *Da'as*, we are thus not speaking about the emotion of love, but about an entirely different kind of connection -- a connection we accomplish through our mind.

Most people do not know what connection of the mind is. People usually think that in order to have a connection to something, it must be an emotional kind of connection. For example, a person tastes something to see if he likes it or not, and if he likes it, he eats it; the senses, which are part of our emotions, are how taste food.

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Da'as is not an emotional connection to something or to someone; it is rather a power of the mind to connect with something or someone, and it is a separate component than the emotions. It is a connection that can be *sensed* as well by the emotions, but what we are describing here is a connection formed by the actual *Da'as* itself, not the emotional aspect of it.

We will give an example to explain it.

When a person becomes engaged to get married, he feels a certain love in his heart. If he wouldn't feel this love, he wouldn't want to get married. What are his thoughts when he is engaged to be married? He is bound up with love toward his future spouse. Is this a feeling, or a thought? Does he feel an emotional connection with his future wife, or does he feel a mental connection with her? It is really both at once. The mental connection he has with her is the power of higher *daas*. Although he's feeling an emotion of love at the same time, the emotional aspect here is only the external layer. The inner layer here is a connection of the mind, which is *daas* – the higher *daas*.

What usually happens by most people, though, is that when they feel love, their *Da'as* becomes limited to the emotions. They get so caught up in the emotional aspect of the love that they don't really access *daas*, and they are only involved in the external aspect of the relationship. As a result, people usually experience love only through the emotional aspect of it, and not through their *daas*.

But if someone lives in the world of thought, he attributes the source of his connection to the other through his *da'as*, and not merely to his emotion of love. Of course, *da'as* can create a resulting feeling of love as well which can be sensed, but the very source of the connection is the *da'as*.

In the words of the Ramchal⁴³, this is called “intellect that has a longing to know.” The Vilna Gaon describes it as “desire of the intellect.” It is a kind of connection with someone/something that comes from one's mind. “*And my eyes and my heart were there all those days.*”⁴⁴

Only a relationship out of *da'as* is a real connection to another person; we will explain why.

Let's say a person thinks he loves someone else, and he has fantasies of love if about that person. This is a sign that all the love here is a mere emotion, and it isn't yet a real connection to the other person. It will not either be a love which will cause a real connection.

But when a person uses *da'as* - the higher kind of *Da'as*, which is the ability to connect - he is using his mind to connect to the other person, and it is not just an emotion of love, but an *actual connection* to the person.

⁴³ Introduction to Derech Hashem

⁴⁴ Melachim I, 9: 3

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To illustrate this, a parent has a certain feeling of love for his child. Why does he feel a love? It is not merely an emotion of love that he is feeling. It is because his feelings – love, in this case – are connected with his mind.

When an emotion becomes connected to the thoughts, the feeling then becomes real. A parent doesn't love his child merely because he has feelings of love to him, but because he is aware of his real thoughts – the thoughts which are coming from his higher *Da'as*.

Although there is an emotional connection here in the relationship, the emotion of love is not the reason for the love; the emotion of love is rather like a garment covering over the love itself. The actual love itself is the very connection to another person, which is through one's *da'as*.

Only *da'as* can cause a true connection with anything. It is a thought that one can sense; it is not just a natural emotion of love that one feels. It is a connection through one's power of thought – a connection through *Da'as*.

Such a connection is only experienced by one who considers his thoughts to be palpable. If one doesn't consider his thoughts to be that real, then all he can feel is his emotions, and he only knows how to connect to others through his emotions. But when the thoughts are real to a person, he can even feel his thoughts, and he knows how to connect to others using his thoughts, which is a deeper kind of connection than a mere emotional one.

When a person is still at the level in which his *da'as* is limited to his emotions, then if you ask him if he likes a certain food and he answers yes, he might be answering from his *da'as*, but it is a *da'as* limited by the emotions. He isn't answering from his true *da'as*, but from *da'as* that has passed through the emotions; it is just that his *da'as* is aware of what he has felt.

The Heart's Desire

Chazal say that a person should only learn “what his heart desires.”

If you ask a person, “What do you want to learn?” and he answers “I want to learn the entire *Tehillim* all day”, why does he desire to do this? Such a person feels that way because he lacks a willpower to use his *Da'as* and intellect, and all he has is just a little bit of emotions.

To learn what one's “heart desires” means that one has to learn what his *Da'as* desires, and it does not mean for a person to follow his natural emotions. The natural emotions of a person usually don't want to learn Torah, and are inclined to take an easy and comfortable path. With emotions, a person just follows what's interesting to him, and that is what he will desire.

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To learn where your “heart desires” means to *feel what your Da’as wants*. It is *da’as* that can be felt – it is *Da’as* of the heart. Just like a person knows if he wants to eat something when it’s cold or hot, so can a person know what’s good for him or not, when he uses this palpable kind of *Da’as*.

Connection Requires Purity of Heart

Anyone can identify with the idea of using his *Da’as* to connect.

For example, when a person learns in the Gemara about a certain argument, he is able to use his *Da’as* to figure out which opinion he feels more connected to.

We should emphasize that this does not mean for a person to figure out which opinion in the Gemara is the correct one, G-d forbid. No one can argue with the Gemara. It is just about how connected one feels to a certain opinion in the Gemara – to feel which opinion in the Gemara is more truthful to you.

If a person is dealing with something that he is at the same level on with, he can decide on it. This is the time to use lower *da’as*.

But if a person is dealing with something he is not able to decide upon, due to his inferiority, then he must make use of the higher kind of *da’as* – he must decide if he will connect or not to the information.

This ability exists by every person, and it has already been revealed to some extent by all of us, and with every person it differs.

An Inner Kind of Life Is Based On Higher Da’as

We have given many examples of the concept, but the point must be clear: lower *da’as* is when we weigh out the information and decide, and higher *da’as* is to connect to the information.

When a person learns Gemara and he sees the many opinions of the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, and he sees how it’s all true even though there are many disagreements going on, then everything he sees in front of him is good to connect to. When a person has such an attitude, he doesn’t need to sift out any bad information, because all he sees is good information; he realizes how it is all true.

But if a person is learning Gemara and he comes across a difference of opinion, and one of them doesn’t make sense to him, then now it is time to make use of his ability to connect to his decisions. He can decide between them and choose which of the opinions is more truthful.

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This is the ideal kind of life we should live – connecting to what we decide. It is not enough to be able to make decisions. If a person just makes decisions and we don't connect to them, he is a person who just lives with cold calculations.

Sometimes we do need to listen to just our intellect, and not to our feelings, but it is impossible to live based *just* on intellect. A person can be smart, intellectually gifted and very bright – but that alone isn't enough to be considered life. Our life is about being connected – to connect to our decisions.

When a person uses his *Da'as* to connect, his whole learning and his whole life in general will change. He will find himself reviewing his many decisions he has made while learning the Gemara, because since he is connected to his decisions, it is always going through his mind. This is an inner kind of connection to the Torah that comes from within oneself.

When a person is connected to his learning, he will see growth in his learning. Either he will discover that he is always reviewing it, or he will find that he is constantly reflecting on it. It might come in the form of verbal review or mental review, but whatever the case, he will see that he has grown and developed in his learning.

When higher *Da'as* is accessed, a person is constantly reviewing his *Chochmah* facts, and he is always thinking into his *Binah* facts, again and again.

One who is still at the lower mode of thought, though, will find reviewing what he has learned to be very bland, because of its simplicity. He knows he must review the material, but he finds it too hard to go over it simply. He will only review it if he reflects on it and thinks into it a lot, or if he decides (using his lower *Da'as*) that he needs to review because he has to remember it. But such review won't come from his essence – it is just a superficial kind of decision to review.

But with upon accessing higher *da'as*, a person's whole learning will change. He will always find new satisfaction in his learning, whether he is having thoughts of *chochmah* or thoughts of *binah*. He is connected to what he learns in a very simple sense. By using the higher *da'as*, a person connects to his knowledge and builds a way to live by. Such a person can be considered to be truly alive.

1.9 | Taking Apart Details

Binah and Tevunah

We have said that there are two systems in our mind: a lower mode of thought, and a higher mode of thought. The lower mode of thought is *Chochmah*, ***Tevunah***, and *Da'as*. The higher mode of thought is *Chochmah*, ***Binah*** and *Da'as*.

At first we spoke about lower *Chochmah* and higher *Chochmah*. Lower *Chochmah* is the knowledge one receives from his teachers. Higher *Chochmah* is when a person really sees the knowledge.

Then, we spoke about lower *Da'as* and higher *Da'as*. Lower *Da'as* is *da'as d'havdalah* (to separate information) and *da'as d'hachraah* (to decide between the information). Higher *Da'as* is to connect to the information (*Da'as hamechaberes*).

Now we will discuss the two kinds of *Binah*: the higher kind of *Binah*, and the lower kind of *Binah* (which is called *Tevunah*). We spoke about it before a little, but now we will elaborate on it.

As we mentioned before, the higher *Binah* and the lower *Binah*, *Tevunah*, are different. *Tevunah* is to compare one thing to another. When a person compares, he is able to expand the information. *Binah*, which is in the higher mode of thought, is to reflect into the information and take apart its details.

Chazal⁴⁵ say that women are blessed with “extra *Binah*”, and for this reason a girl is obligated in *mitzvos* earlier than a boy is. This is because women have a unique understanding – an extra “*Binah*.”

Although *Binah* is the faculty of the mind used more by women, we aren't only referring to women when we discuss *Binah*. In every soul, there is a male aspect and a female aspect. So when we say “women” here, we are really referring to the feminine aspect of every soul (but it is just that the feminine aspect of the soul is usually revealed more by women, and the masculine aspect of the soul is more revealed by men).

The feminine aspect in the soul consists of *Binah* and *Tevunah*.

Binah is a kind of intuitive understanding. Women are blessed with extra *Binah*, in that they can recognize better the spiritual stature of their guests.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Niddah* 45b

⁴⁶ *Berachos* 10b

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Tevunah is essentially the power of *medameh*, which is to either compare or use the imagination. This we can see clearly by women, who often use their imagination.

Binah is a higher use of the mind, while *Tevunah* is a lower use of the mind.

This seems to be a contradiction inside a woman (as well as in the female aspect of every soul). If the feminine nature is more prone to imagination, why doesn't her extra *Binah* cancel it out and show her the real understanding?

But the reason for this is because these are two different systems going on in the mind. In the higher mode of thought, we use *Binah*, and in the lower mode of thought, we use *Tevunah*. *Binah* gives a woman an advantage over a man's thinking, while *Tevunah* creates for her a disadvantage. It depends on which mode of thought a person is at.

Binah is only accessed through using the higher mode of thought. Chazal say that women have "extra *Binah*", and this is not coming to say that women have less understanding, the opposite is true. Women have greater understanding in certain areas, and in fact, this is why a girl has to start keeping the *mitzvos* earlier than a boy has to. In the department of *Binah*, women have an advantage over men, and they are thus greater in their power of *Binah*.

But the power of *Tevunah*, which is the imagination, is from the lower mode of thought. This is not an advantage in a woman's thinking over a man's thinking – it is a disadvantage.

Of course, the lower mode of thought can still remain in a girl even after she matures and is obligated in *mitzvos*. The point of what we are saying here is that there are two abilities in our mind. There is a higher power, *Binah*, which women excel at more than men (and in terms of every soul – men and woman alike -- the feminine part of the soul, *Binah*, has an advantage over *Chochmah*). There is a lower power, *Tevunah*, which is the power of imagination, also part of the feminine nature; this is a disadvantage to a man's thinking (as well as to the male aspect of every soul).

We will try, with the help of Hashem, to expand this discussion. We will try to see the contrast between *Binah* and *Tevunah* and how they relate, and then we will see the flip side of these matters. We will open up this discussion by discussing *Tevunah*, which is the power of imagination.

The Way Imagination Works

The lower kind of *Binah* is called *Tevunah*, when a person compares one piece of information to another piece of information. This is essentially the imagination, and the Vilna Gaon lists it as one of the seventy forces in the soul. Imagination is a power which expands the information.

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When a person uses imagination, he is able to come to compare one thing to another. But the imagination, at its root, causes one to picture in his mind that he has the *general understanding* of the information, as opposed to the *details*.

If a person would really look at the details, he wouldn't make a total comparison between one thing and other. He would notice some similarities, but this would not make him conclude that it's the same. He would see how each detail is unique and can't really be compared to something else. Why do people compare? It is because they usually see a general view of the situation, without entering into the details. When a person just focuses on the general outlook of a situation, it creates imagination.

The whole idea of a comparison is to take two things that are different from each other and see how they are similar. But in reality, nothing can ever really be compared. Something might be similar somewhat to another thing, but it's only a little similar, and not more than that. One species of bird might look the same as another bird, but in reality each species is a whole different species of bird, and no two species are the same. They share some similarities and that's it; they are not the same.

Why is it, then, that we often compare things? It is because usually, a person focuses just on the *similarities*, and not on the *differences*. A person sees one detail that is similar to another thing, and because of this, he thinks that the two things are really the same. Comparing makes a person leave the details and instead just focus on the general outlook of something, all because of a particular detail.

Even more so, when imagination is in control, a person doesn't even notice how the details are really very different from each other. Imagination causes one to connect all the information together that *in reality has no resemblance*. Seeing details is fine, but when a person takes a particular detail and expands it to be "*more*" over here, the details go from being "details" to becoming "everything", and this is an inaccurate perception.

With imagination, a person doesn't really enter the information – he just *pictures* it. Imagination takes the details out of the general picture as a whole, and blows up the details. This is why when a person imagines something, it seems to him that he has uncovered more information. But really, it is because the details have been blown up, so it appears to look like more information; really, there aren't more details here. If a person would really see the details as they are, he would be able to leave most of his imagination.

When a child imagines something, his imagination shows him how one particular detail forms everything, and from there the imagination continues to expand. If a person would *really enter the details*, his power of *Binah* would take him out of the imagination and return him to the way things really *are*, not the way things *seem*.

When a person is at the lower mode of thought, his *Chochmah* is that he receives knowledge from his teachers. When someone is taught by his teacher, does the teacher tell him all of the Torah he knows? No, he only teaches him some specific details. The student,

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who is at the lower mode of thought, thinks that the particular details he was taught is the whole picture. In other words, he creates his general outlook of the knowledge from the details he knows about.

In the lower mode of thought, a person has *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*; his *Chochmah* is a specific detail, while *Tevunah* creates the general view from this. But this creates an erroneous view. Although it is possible for a person to arrive at the general view from the details, that is only if the person is revealing the details *within* the general view, and he is aware that details are just details that make up *a greater picture*. But this is not the same attitude as a person using imagination. With imagination, a person takes certain details and considers it to be the whole thing – the person exaggerates.

When a person compares things, he uses the imagination, which is in the lower mode of thought. When people compare, they compare as long as there is some similarity. Although there is only one detail worth comparing, a person is convinced that the two things are totally similar, just because there is one detail that makes them similar. He's not really focused on the details themselves – it is rather because of certain details, he is focused on forming the general picture from them, which is an inaccurate view on the situation.

There is one of our human weaknesses, unless we work to uproot it: we are too quick to make comparisons. Chazal also had to explain to us that certain matters are not the same, even though they seem similar because of one particular detail. If not for what they said, we would mistakenly conclude that two things are similar because of a certain detail they both share.

This is the mistake which imagination causes. With imagination, a person compares one thing to another because they seem so similar. This is the definition of *Tevunah*, which is to compare. *Tevunah* is when a person is viewing his *Chochmah* through the lens of imagination.

But upon some reflection, a person can use his *Binah* to see how it's only similar in one particular detail, and not as a whole. Really, none of these details can be connected. Each detail is full of many differences that contradict the other details, and thus no detail is similar to another. They cannot be connected, and we need to learn how see this.

It seems simply that imagination is rooted in *Binah*, because with *Binah* a person also compares the information of the *Chochmah*. But that is only in the higher mode of thought. In the lower mode of thought, the very *Chochmah* is being seen through the imagination, which is a false view.

We can see this all the time. People look at something and see how it's like something else, and they think it's the same thing. A person sees one particular detail and thinks it's the whole thing.

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That is the depth to imagination. *If a person takes a look at reality, he will find that he has concocted his own reality, and that it is not the real reality.* This is the implication of imagination – the lower part of the mind, which uses *Tevunah*.

How Men Think and How Women Think

This point is essentially the difference between the thinking of men and women. With the lower mode of thought, a man sees details as just details, and he is aware that the details are just details and nothing more. A woman, though, sees the details as *everything*.

Women by nature see the details more, and they also have a nature to see details as the whole picture. A woman doesn't just look at details as details – she looks at the details as everything. This thinking stems from her *Tevunah*, which is the imagination. (Soon, we will see how *Binah*, which is in the higher mode of thought, is the opposite of this, and can give a woman an advantage over a man's thinking).

There is a deep reason behind this. The first woman, Chavah, was created while Adam was asleep. When people sleep, imagination takes over. If we put together these two facts, it implies to us that a woman was created from a time in which there was imagination. For this reason, Chazal⁴⁷ state that one should not teach Torah to his daughter, and if he does, it is as if he taught her foolishness. This is because a woman, using her lower mode of thought, can only perceive *Chochmah* through her imagination, which is an incorrect understanding of the *Chochmah* contained in the Torah.

The difference between men and women is very apparent and can be seen clearly. A man thinks about one thought at a time, while a woman often jumps from one subject to another in almost the blink of an eye. There is a deep reason for this. It is really because according to a woman's natural understanding, one thing appears similar to another thing. This is coming from her imagination. A woman uses her imagination more to connect various different things to each other and make it all into one.

By contrast, a man breaks down the details. As a result, he sees the details as something that makes up a bigger picture; he knows that the details are not all there is to it, but that each detail is a detail to itself that makes up a greater whole. But women, who make use of their imagination more, immediately compare this detail to that detail, and because of this they come to connect all the details. If she would really see what's in the details, she would see how they are all very different, and she wouldn't come to connect them all together.

It's not simply that she just jumps from one detail to another very quickly. It is that she connects them all, using her imagination. As a result, she thinks she's dealing with the same thing. If she would be able to differentiate between the facts, she would go back to the details

⁴⁷ *Sotah 20b*

and see that they cannot really be connected. (As we said before, “man” and “woman” here are general terms and are not specifically about men and women – “man” refers to the male aspect of the soul, which has its way of thinking, and “woman” refers to the feminine aspect of the soul, which has its other way of thinking).

So in the lower mode of thought, *Chochmah* focuses on the details as they are, while *Tevunah* sees the details as the whole picture.

The Higher Chochmah and Binah

Using the higher mode of thought, everything we have just said gets turned around. It is only in the lower mode of thought that *Tevunah* is not as accurate as *Chochmah*. In the higher mode of thought, *Tevunah* becomes *Binah*, and it is a better view than the *Chochmah*.

Higher *Chochmah* is when one sees the information. This is to see a general view of the situation, without getting into the details. By contrast, higher *Binah* sees the details, and sees how all the details connect to form a complete picture. This is why it is called *Binah*, from the word *binyan* (to build).

Binah, which women are blessed with more than men, is the ability to see details; this is what it means that women are blessed with extra *Binah*, because women know how to get down to the most miniscule details of something. Chazal say that a woman can recognize the spiritual level of her guests better than her husband can, because she can notice these details, unlike her husband, who only sees the general view. When you see the details, it’s a whole different viewpoint – you see much more going on.

In the higher mode of thought, there is *Chochmah* and *Binah*. Here, the *Chochmah* is more than just the knowledge one received from his teacher; it is to really see the knowledge. With lower *Chochmah*, a person receives certain details from his teacher – detail upon detail. The lower *Chochmah* is about details. But the higher *Chochmah* is to actually “see” it. This is when a person has a general view of the situation that is all-inclusive. It resembles somewhat the level we were on at Har Sinai, when the Torah was given over in its entirety. This ability in a person is to see the general outlook on a situation. It also resembles the ability of Adam who was able to see from one end of the world to the other.⁴⁸

The more a person accesses his higher mode of thought, the more he can see this general view. The highest level of this was reached by Adam, who was able to see all the way from one side of the world to the other, because he saw how all the details were all part of one picture.

This is also the quality possessed by leaders. A leader sees the general view. Although a person needs to see the details also, the power to lead the public comes from the ability to see

⁴⁸ *Chagigah 12a*

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the general view. That is why Moshe Rabbeinu is praised for having a “good eye”⁴⁹; because he had the general view, he was able to lead.

However, there is a disadvantage to the general outlook. Although there is a benefit of seeing the general picture of what’s going on, it can hamper one’s perception of how he sees details.

With higher *Binah*, though, a person enters the details. Chazal say that there are “Fifty Gates of *Binah*.” These are many details which add up to become a general picture.

To summarize, in the lower mode of thought, the *Chochmah* sees details, while *Tevunah* sees the general outlook. Lower *Chochmah* is thus a more accurate perception than *Tevunah*. But in the higher mode of thought, the *Chochmah* sees the general outlook, while the *Binah* sees the details – so *Binah* is more accurate than higher *Chochmah*.

For this reason, a man sometimes misses the details in something, because he is used to seeing only from his general view on a situation. A woman often sees the small details, and thus she can recognize the level of her guests better.

Higher Binah and Lower Chochmah

Now we can see a difference between higher *Binah*, which sees details, to lower *Chochmah*, which also sees details. They are two different ways to see details.

To illustrate, if you give a child a penny, he thinks that the penny is everything, since this is what he has in his hand. An adult knows that a penny is part of a much larger whole.

Higher *Binah* sees details as part of a greater whole, while lower *Chochmah* sees details as the whole thing. The *Tevunah* comes and sees the details as the whole thing, but the problem really started before, in the very *Chochmah*. The *Chochmah* saw the detail as everything.

We can see people who have very little knowledge about the Torah, yet they think they know the entire Torah. A person knows a few stories in the Torah, like what happened with Pharaoh and what happened with Bilaam, and from this little knowledge a person might fool himself that he knows the whole Torah. Why are there people who think this way?

It is because they have a problem in which they see details as everything. They are still at the lower mode of thought. Any comparisons they make will be to blow up these details into everything. Even the *Chochmah* they have learned from their teachers, which were just details, are perceived by them to be everything.

But upon accessing the higher mode of thought, a person sees details, yet he knows that the details are part of a greater whole.

⁴⁹ *Nedarim 38a*

Havdalah – The Power To Separate Information

We will now discuss two different ways how to differentiate between information --- one way is through our *da'as*, and the other way is through our *Binah*.

Chazal say that if there is no *da'as*, there cannot be *havdalah* (separation).⁵⁰ Here we see that our power *da'as* comes to separate and split up information. On the other hand, every day we make a morning blessing, “*He who gives the rooster Binah to differentiate between day and night.*” This implies that we use *Binah* to separate information. Which ability do we use to separate information – *Da'as*, or *Binah*?

A person is called a “*bar da'as*”, someone capable of *Da'as* – not a “*bar Binah*”. A rooster might be a *bar binah*, but it is not a *bar da'as*. Although the terms of *Binah* and *Da'as* are frequently used by our Sages in their works when they discuss how to differentiate information, we must determine if it is our *Da'as* which we are using to separate the information, or if it is our *Binah* which we are using for this.

It depends on which mode of thought we are at. In the lower mode of thought, *Da'as* comes to separate between the information and decide. But in the higher mode of thought, *Da'as* is connection to the general outlook seen by the *Chochmah* and the details seen by the *Binah*. This is how *Binah* can be involved with separating information.

There is a huge difference between these two kinds of separation. It is clear and simple according to what we have explained.

Firstly, to give a very general description, the higher mode of thought sees everything as unified, while the lower mode of thought sees everything as separate. A simple example of this is that a child cannot give birth, and this reflects how a child is immature and cannot connect; a child's whole being is to be separate and to himself. The younger a child is, the more he lives for himself, as we can see at the lowest level, when he is a baby and he doesn't see anyone else other than himself. The more a person lives in the higher mode of thought, the more he lives with unity, and the more a person is at the lower mode of thought, the more he lives a separate kind of existence. That is a clear-cut fact which is very simple.

Now we can understand as follows. In the lower mode of thought, when a person separates information, he is totally separate from the information. In the higher mode of thought, when a person separates information, he is grasping onto both of the two ends together, although they are separate.

The lower mode of thought is the kind of thinking that stems from the evil *eitz hada'as*, which had in it good and evil knowledge. Thus, the work of the lower mode of thought is to differentiate between what is good and what is evil. But the higher mode of thought is the knowledge contained in the *eitz hachaim*. Here, the only issue was to choose between one

50 *Berachos 5a*

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kind of good and another kind of good. That is what we do in our higher mode of thought – we are differentiating between two kinds of good.

When a person has to differentiate between good and good, he's holding onto both sides at once. *"From this and from this, do not remove your hand."* He doesn't mix them together, but he holds onto both. But when a person has to use his lower mode of thought and differentiate between good and evil, he has to decide what is good and throw away the bad.

In the lower mode of thought, a person uses *Da'as d'hachraah* (to decide) and *Da'as d'havdalah* (to separate the information) in order to come out with one side. Such separation is for the sake of separation. The decision comes to seal this separation, but the separation remains.

But in the higher mode of thought, a person separates information in the same way that a rooster separates between day and night. A rooster knows of both, and holds onto both even though it has to differentiate between them. If day and night would be mixed together, that would be twilight. The rooster is only separating night and day for now – it is holding onto both.

This is a huge difference between the two different kinds of separating. Lower *Da'as* separates and decides like one way, while higher *Binah* separates but continues to hold onto both of the sides.

Clarity Is Only Through The Higher Mode of Thought

We will describe this in more simple language.

When a person learns something using his lower mode of thought, he decides like one way, because that is the way he understands. But with the higher mode of thought, a person differentiates between all the information in front of him, and he is grasping and understanding all of the details. We will explain this.

When a person is holding onto a piece of information and he is at the lower mode of thought, his *Da'as* is being used simply to invalidate the rest of the information and thus come to understand whatever is remaining. Lower *Chochmah* is the knowledge one received from his teacher, and lower *Tevunah* is to make comparisons in the information. When a person makes the comparison, confusion gets created, and for this a person can use his *Da'as* to clarify and separate the confusion.

Tevunah has in it the words *ben* and *bas* – son and daughter. In other words, there is a son and a daughter going on at once in the information. *Tevunah* creates confusion. Why? It is because when we compare, we compare things that really aren't similar at all. They might have one specific similarity they share, but that's not enough of a reason to make a total comparison and say, "These two things are totally similar." When a person thinks that two

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things are totally similar, he has really caused a lot of confusion to a matter, and everything gets all mixed up.

Chochmah looks at details not like details, but as the general idea. That is the first point. The second point is the *Tevunah*, which is aware that the details are the details, and thinks they are connected, so it compares. It leaves its understanding of the details, which was fine, but then it makes various comparisons which are erroneous. It comes and connects the information when really there is no connection. *Tevunah*, which is in the lower mode of thought, causes confusion and a lack of clarity.

Now, a person has to use his *Da'as* and go back to see the details, and after that to decide again. What the lower *Da'as* is essentially doing is to remove the confusion caused by *Tevunah*.

By contrast, the higher mode of thought is clean from this. It is like what one of the Sages said, "I see a clear world." All of the information here is in its place.

In the higher mode of thought, the *Chochmah* sees all the information in its place. The only threat here to the thinking is that a person might diverge from his general outlook on the information and come to make mistakes. For this, the *Binah* comes and shows all the details, and how each detail is in its place. The *Da'as* comes and connects them all together. As we said before, it connects all the information to the general outlook of the information, as well as to notice the differences between the details. It doesn't come to connect all the details to show any one particular detail; it is coming to show how all the details are different. *Da'as* connects it all. It connects the view of the general outlook to the view of the details together.

Arranging Information In Order Vs. Taking Apart Its Details

Now we can understand better the difference between higher *Binah* and lower *Da'as*, which seem to be the same thing. Higher *Binah* is when one separates the information and takes apart the details, which is like deciding between good and good. Lower *Da'as* is when one separates the information and decides, which is deciding between good and bad. They are two different ways of deciding.

In the higher mode of thought, a person's *Chochmah* has all the information arranged properly, but he only sees the general idea as a whole, and he doesn't see how it connects all the details together. The higher *Binah* comes and arranges all the details as details, so that the person can see how all the details add up to form the general idea. In either of these two abilities, the person sees the details, and the only difference between the two abilities here is how the person sees the details.

But in the lower mode of thought, a person is confused when he sees the information, because it's all mixed up. In the lower mode of thought, *Binah* is *Tevunah*, and *Tevunah*

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creates confusion by comparing the details to the general view, mixing them up. What happens as a result? When a person uses his *Da'as* to try to differentiate between the information, he doesn't have the properly arranged details, because everything got all mixed up. Here, the work of the person is to use his *Da'as* to go back and see all the details.

Da'as D'Havdalah

Let us make these words even more clear. In the higher mode of thought, the details are clear as they are. In the lower mode of thought, a person uses *Tevunah*, which is to see a mixture of different facts, and the person doesn't even see what the information consists of.

To give a simple example, a young newlywed decides to buy a house. He thinks, "What's the big deal to buy a house? You just make a phone call and that's it." But when he starts getting down to the details of buying the house, suddenly it becomes very complicating. He sees that there are many factors going on at once to consider. He has to install the right kind of windows. He has to find a new school for his kids. He will have to deal with new taxes. He sees that there are many details which he never fathomed at first. It was only his superficial kind of vision which made him think that it's so simple to buy a house.

Here, the work of the *Da'as* in a person is different than what he has to do with the higher *Binah*. With higher *Binah*, he saw all the details at once, and all he has to do is arrange all the information and give it order.

But with lower *Binah* – *Tevunah* – the information is all mixed up, and it's more than just an issue of how to make order of the information. Here a person has to use his *Da'as* to take each detail of the information and break it up into even more details, so that he can see what the matter is made up of.

Let's say a new *Rebbi* (teacher) walks into his third grade classroom on the first day of school. If he has a superficial outlook, he sees thirty ten-year olds sitting in front of him. But the real way he needs to see them is to see thirty different souls in front of him, and that each of them is vastly different from each other.

Each child is a different reality unto himself, and it is the job of the teacher to break down this reality into all its details.

Whatever a person encounters, he first needs to see what his initial outlook is on the matter. When he sees that the general information is really all one specific detail, he then should break it down to all its details, and see what it is made up of. There is no end to how much a person can break down the details of a situation; everything on this world is endless.

But we need to keep breaking down the details and discover more factors that affect a situation, and each person can do this according to his abilities as much as he can.

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Don't Skip This Step

Our discussion here about the power of *Da'as d'havdalah* is a very important matter that is relevant to most people.

Most people skip *Da'as d'havdalah*, and quickly go straight to *Da'as d'hachraah*. What results from this? The person decides between two possibilities, but he doesn't even know what the difference between the two possibilities are.

If you think about it, most people have never really accessed their true free will. Free will is exercised by our lower *Da'as*. The higher *Da'as* is not our free will; it is a connection to what one knows, and it is the kind of knowledge contained in the *etz hachaim* (Tree of Life), but it is not our actual decision. The lower *Da'as*, our ability to decide, is a kind of thinking which came as a result from eating from the *etz hada'as* (Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) - a mixture of good and evil.

Before we can arrive at the higher knowledge, which is connection to the knowledge, we need to first go through a preliminary stage, in which we sift out the bad knowledge from the good knowledge. After we have made this differentiation – by taking apart all the details – can we truly decide between the options.

But usually, people only know of lower *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*. People usually only have a superficial kind of knowledge that comes from how others think, and they make various comparisons between one thing and another that aren't accurate.

For example, a person goes to a store to buy something. The storeowner shows him different items to buy, and the person hears out the pros and cons of each item. That is lower *Chochmah*, because he is getting his knowledge based on other's thinking. Then he starts making certain comparisons: "My neighbor bought something similar to this item and was satisfied with it, so it makes sense for me to buy this." This is a use of *Tevunah*. Upon this thinking, the person goes ahead and decides to buy the item.

This is something which most people do, and it is an immature kind of thinking. Most of the *Chochmah* in a person is information which he heard from others, and the kind of *Tevunah* we use is when we compare two things that in reality bear no resemblance at all.

Most people, when they decide to buy something, do so because they compare the item to something else they know of. It's a very subtle matter about how our minds work, but this is the reality of how people usually are. A person doesn't usually buy something unless he compares it to something else he bought that he was happy with.

But when a person makes such a comparison, it's a distortion of reality. People skip over differentiating between their options and go straight to make a decision, and there is almost nothing to decide about! After all, the person's comparison has already decided for him that it's the same thing anyway, so why should he decide...

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A person says to himself, “Yesterday I did such and such, so today I will do the same. I don’t need to decide about it again. Why should I think about it again? It has already been decided yesterday.” But the truth is that many times a person hasn’t really decided – he only compared this fact and that fact and came up with some erroneous conclusion based on that. When *Da’as d’havdalah* is missing, the *Da’as d’hachraah* isn’t a true decision.

Most people actually do not know how to really decide, and they have never really come to a true decision in their life! It is because they don’t know how to differentiate between their options; they don’t know how to make use of their *Da’as d’havdalah*.

With *Da’as d’havdalah*, a person can see the reality of the details. It is the beginning step to have actual clarity. The final step of having clarity is when a person has the connection to his *Chochmah* and *Binah*, but the beginning and initial step to make is to at least notice differences.

Let’s say a person is given two closed packages, and he is asked which one to choose. He chooses the package on the right, thinking, “Well, Chazal say that when in doubt, always take the right, not the left.” Such thinking is superficial, because he doesn’t weigh his options. Although Chazal say to always take the right path when in doubt, the person still isn’t thinking. He isn’t thinking from a true place in himself. His decision in such an example is a very weak one.

It’s scary. If a person really examines himself he will discover that he never really came to a true decision in his life!



[Editor’s Note: The previous eight chapters before this one dealt with analyzing our minds, and most people will not find them practical because these are lofty matters. But this chapter, which has dealt with *Da’as d’havdalah*, differentiating between information and taking apart details – is very practical for everyone. We have explained here that a person must be aware of all the details in whatever he encounters.

The power of *Da’as d’havdalah* applies both to learning a *sugya* in Gemara as well in our practical, daily life. Many times a person regrets what he did and complains afterwards, “I should’ve known...” But if a person uses *Da’as d’havdalah*, he is able to check himself and see what his motivations are, and with this he will eventually see success in his life.]

1.10 | Three Uses Of Our Thinking

Three Ways How We Use Our Thoughts

If a person is still at the lower mode of thought (*Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as*), then he only thinks in order to be practical; otherwise, he sees no use in thinking.

The higher mode of thought (*Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*) isn't about any action; it is all about thought. The higher mode of thought are kinds of thoughts which don't necessarily lead to action, and its purpose is to learn how think, for the sake of thinking.

An example of this what the Gemara says that although a *ben sorer u'moreh* (a wayward child who meets certain rebellious conditions, who must be sentenced to death) will never happen, we should learn about it anyway and receive reward for learning about it. Usually, the rule is that "Learning Torah is great, for it brings one to action", but *ben sorer u'moreh* is the exception to this rule; here, a person learns about it even though it won't lead to anything practical. This is an example of higher thinking, which is a thinking that isn't about something that will practically happen, but just to be purely immersed in the thinking about it.

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

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

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

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

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

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The Lower Thinking Is All About Actions

We will now expand upon this discussion.

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

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

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

This is because a person's mind matures, and it is no longer bound to just thinking about action. When the mind matures, a person learns that there are thoughts which lead to practicality, and there are thoughts which don't. For this reason, a person eventually realizes that he has to pause a little before he does something and think before he does it, and that not every thought has to lead to acting upon it.

A person discovers with this that there are two steps to thought – first comes the thought alone, and then comes the thought which leads to action (or not).

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

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

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

Thought Is Not Just A Tool To Get By With

However, even as people mature, they still don't always think enough.

Although people realize that not every thought leads to an action, they only think about to "do" something or not. People usually view thoughts as a tool to know just "what to do" and "what not to do".

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

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

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

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

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

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

But even such thinking is still only using the thoughts to get actions done. This attitude still will not help a person reach the true level of thought.

To summarize, there are three ways how we use our thoughts. One kind of thought is when we think into what we're doing. A second use of our thoughts is when we think in

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order to do something. A third use of our thoughts is when a person thinks only for the sake of thinking. Now we will sharpen this discussion.

The Lowest Level: Focusing On What You Are Doing

What we are getting at from all of this is that while a person is doing any action, the question is where his thoughts are. There are three possibilities:

- A) Is he thinking totally *about* what he is doing? (This is the elementary level.)
- B) Is he thinking about the *purpose* of what he is doing? (This is a more developed level.)
- C) Or are his thoughts *a little above* what he is doing, even as he does it? (This is the highest level.)

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

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

Although it there is a holy power in the soul to be calm and to not think about what will be – the power of *menuchah* (serenity) - this power is evil when a person is at the immature state of mind, because then he becomes too laid back.

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

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

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

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The Middle Level: Thinking About The Goal

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

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

The Highest Level: Thinking For The Sake of Thinking

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

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

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

The simple meaning of the curse was that we were cursed with having to work to make a living, but the depth of the curse was that our mind became lowered to the level of action. After the sin of Adam, a person only thinks only if he should do something or if he shouldn't (unless he develops his mind more in the way we will describe).

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

The Perfect Way To Act

There are three levels of thinking whenever we do something. One kind of person does an action, and as he does it, he is thinking totally into it. This is basic, elementary thinking.

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

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

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

(On a more subtle note, the last kind of thought means to be *connected to the upper realms* as you do something...)

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

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

The middle level of thought is when a person is aware of the purpose of the *mitzvah* as he does it. Such awareness enables a person to connect everything he does into one collective unit – he is connecting all of Creation. Of him it can be said, “The *mitzvos* were not given except to connect all creations⁵¹.”

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

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

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

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

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

51 *Beraishis Rabbah* 44:1

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must know what the definition of the *mitzvah* is, to know its many details. Finally, a person must know the root reason of the *mitzvah*.

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

Wisdom Gives You Vitality If You Are Above The Thoughts

Another way of describing what we mean is as follows.

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

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

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

The higher thoughts are what is written in the possuk, "*Wisdom sustains its owner*⁵²." When a person has thought, he is sustained, but if he has lowered his thoughts to the level of thinking only for action, it is like death.

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

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

⁵² *Koheles 7: 12*

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The Basics of Focusing

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

That is a clear rule, but it only applies to a person who is still at the lower mode of thought *mochin d'katnus*, you can't think two different thoughts at once about what you're doing – and if a person does, he is totally disconnected.

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

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

After this a person must learn how to think about the goal of what he's doing. The final step is to know the reasons behind what you do. In different terms: there are thoughts about our goal, and there are also the reasons behind why we're doing it.

Two Kinds of Comparisons

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

In the lower thoughts, there is no *Binah*, just “*Tevunah*.” There are two levels in this: higher *Tevunah*, and lower *Tevunah*.

In the lower level, a person has *Chochmah* and *Tevunah* only in order to **do** something, and his *Da'as* decides if he should **do** it or not.

In the higher thoughts, a person uses *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as* as a means to think about something even though it has nothing to do with any actions – it is rather about achieving a certain comprehension.

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

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

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

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

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

In an extreme case, a person will copy his teacher's behavior as of he's a parrot, and he never thinks for himself. If he sees his *Rebbi* going somewhere, he just follows him... It can get to the point that he is doing blind acts of loyalty, nothing that involves any thinking whatsoever. But with the higher *Chochmah*, a person thinks into what his teacher does, and if he understands it, only then does he act like him.

We can give an example that brings out the difference between the two. Two people are listening to a *shiur* (Torah class). One closes his eyes and listens deeply, because he is focusing on the wisdom contained in the *shiur* of his *rebbi*. The other person looks at his *rebbi* giving the *shiur* and focuses on how his *rebbi* looks as he gives the *shiur*...

Such a person won't be able to hear the tape afterwards, because he needs to see his *rebbi* speaking; it is not enough for him that he is hearing the *shiur*. He never really thinks. He is the type of person to want his *rebbi* to always explain to him exactly what to do in every situation, because he doesn't want to think on his own.

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

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

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

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

Higher than this is the kind of *Da'as* in which a person connects to the Creator.

1.11 | Mental Vision

"Panim" and "Achor"

We have so far explained three ways how a person sees something (and a fourth way which is more subtle). There is the higher *Chochmah*, which is when one makes use of his intellect's vision. There is *Tevunah*, which is to see based upon comparisons. Then there is the lower *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*, which are both physical ways we see with our eyes.

To understand more what our mental vision is, we can find the root of this in the Torah. Moshe Rabbeinu asked Hashem, "*Show me Your glory.*" Hashem responded, "*You can see My back, but My face you shall not see.*"⁵³

This shows us that there are different levels of how we can see. One kind of viewpoint is *panim* ("face"), in which we see directly. This is when we see the actual wisdom as it is – we see its "face". The other kind of viewpoint is *achor* ("back"), which is to see only the "back" of the wisdom.

It is upon us to understand what *panim* is, and what *achor* is.

To give a superficial definition, *panim* is when one sees the wisdom in a more revealed way, while *achor* is to only see the outer layer of the wisdom.

In different terms, though, *panim* is the essence of the wisdom, while *achor* is only to see something in terms of how it relates to something else. *Achor* has the same letters as the word *acher* ("other"); this shows us that when a person sees only through *achor*, he only sees it in terms of "others" – he doesn't see what it actually is, but he just sees how it looks in the eyes of others.

When a person sees through *achor*, it's not about what he's seeing – it's about the one seeing it. He sees something, but instead of seeing the actual thing, he sees himself in it. By contrast, when a person sees through *panim*, he sees the essence of what he's looking at.

A person naturally grows up seeing through *achor*, and he never sees the essence of something. In other words, usually when a person sees something, he doesn't really see it! He sees himself in something – he sees his own reflection in everything he sees, but he never actually sees what is really in front of him.

Three Kinds of Viewpoints

53 (*Shemos 33: 18*)

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There are altogether three different kinds of mental vision: *panim b'panim*, “seeing face-to-face”; *panim b'achor*, “seeing the face from the back”; and *achor b'achor*, “seeing the back from the back.”

When a person sees *panim b'panim*, he sees “face to face”. In other words, he sees the actual essence of the person or whatever he is looking at. This is the highest kind of vision, and it resembles what is written, “*Face to face Hashem spoke with them.*”

The middle level is *panim b'achor*, which is an indirect kind of vision. This is to see another person or another thing as your own reflection; here, you are seeing yourself in someone else. That is why it is called *panim b'achor*, because you are seeing your face in another person’s back. Sometimes a person isn’t aware of himself so well, but from seeing another person’s personality, he is able to recognize himself better. This kind of seeing yourself in someone else is *panim b'achor*.

The lowest kind of vision is *achor b'achor*, in which a person sees neither himself, nor the other person – his whole vision here is based upon how others are seeing. He is only thinking about what others are thinking about him.

The highest perception to view another is *panim b'panim*, which is that when I look at someone, I see his actual essence.

The middle level is *panim b'achor*, which is when I use someone else as a mirror of who I am. (A simple example of this is a mirror, which shows a person his reflection. When a person looks in a mirror, he doesn’t see the mirror – he sees himself).

The lowest perception is *achor b'achor*, which is when a person sees in a totally superficial way; when he looks at someone and only sees the superficial layer of the person. *Achor b'achor* also can mean “another in another” – it is just “another” person seeing “another” person. The person here isn’t seeing the other person or even himself in the other person.

Achor b'achor is really just imagination – it is nothing substantial. When I think about what another thinks about me, or when I think that another person is thinking like how I think of him – such kinds of thoughts are all in my imagination.

If I think what another is actually thinking about me, then I am thinking about something that is real. But if I think what another is thinking about simply because I am thinking about him, this isn’t real – it is purely being imagined.

Two Levels of Chochmah and Tevunah

There is also a deeper way of describing these concepts.

The highest kind of mental vision, *panim b'panim*, is really another way of describing higher *Chochmah* and higher *Binah*. The middle level, *panim b'achor*, uses the higher

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Chochmah and the higher *Tevunah*. The lowest level, *achor b'achor*, uses the lower *Chochmah* and lower *Tevunah*, which is really imagination.

These are accepted facts, but we must clarify them to ourselves.

Chochmah and *Binah* is that a person really sees what the other person truly is. It is to see the reality of another person. This is essentially *panim b'panim*. Here, a person absorbs what his teacher really said, as it is. The *Chochmah* is to see the actual general information, while the *Binah* is to see the actual details; both are seeing the information as it is. All the details are really hidden in the *Chochmah* – and all of the *Chochmah* is hidden as well in all the details. This is *panim b'panim* – that all of the actual information of the *Chochmah* is revealed through the information of the *Binah*, and vice versa. All of the information is contained through either one of them.

Although the information is revealed differently depending on if it is *Chochmah* or *Binah*, still, all of the information is all here, and each of them reveals what is really in the other.

But with *panim b'achor*, a person doesn't see the other person in front of him; he sees himself in the person. Although he isn't really seeing the other person, at least he is clearly seeing his own reflection in the other person, so he is still seeing something substantial. He gets to understand himself better when he sees himself in another person.

Panim b'achor uses the higher *Chochmah* and higher *Tevunah*. The *Chochmah* here is the actual information that one received from his teacher, but the *Tevunah* here is just to compare information. When a person compares information, he uses his memory to remember well what his teacher said, but he's revealing the information based upon his own understanding, not upon the actual understanding of his teacher.

That is *panim b'achor*, the middle level. Here, the person doesn't see the actual information his teacher gave over – he only sees the “back” of the wisdom here, not the “face” of the wisdom.

But *achor b'achor* uses the lower kinds of *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*. Here the person doesn't even see at all what his teacher said – he only sees what is being produced from the information. He deduces information from which his teacher taught, or he sees something his teacher did and makes certain conclusions from this. He's not really using real thought here – he's just copying pictures into his head.

The person here doesn't understand what his teacher did. Even if he does what his teacher did, he is just copying him. He is not being himself.

With *panim b'achor*, a person at least reveals what he has received from his teachers. He might be a little off, but at least he has understood his teacher on his own level. But with *achor b'achor*, a person is totally off. He does not understand at all what his teacher has taught or done, and he is just imitating him.

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When a person copies someone else's act, there is a way to do it sensibly. This is if he realizes the thoughts that are behind the action, and he uses his intellect to compare the facts. This is the higher kind of *Chochmah* and *Tevunah* which we addressed earlier.

But when a person just compares actions alone, and thus he just copies whatever his teacher did, he's not acting like his teacher, and neither is he acting like himself. He is essentially doing new things which his teacher never did. This is the very source of a person's downfall – when he makes things up.

Of course, it's definitely better for a person to try to learn from his teacher's actions than from his own actions, but we cannot remain at that level.

So far, we have given a general definition of these concepts.

The True Way to See is to Know that You Cannot See the End

Now we will try to explain how all of this applies to our soul.

When it comes to the physical, this is clearly understood: seeing someone from behind is not the same as seeing someone face-to-face. But in our own soul, we must try to understand what it means to see directly, *panim*, and what it means to see indirectly – *achor*.

Panim, “face”, can also mean to turn to someone (*poneh*). The face of the information shows where the information is turning to, where it is going. *Achor*, by contrast, is to go away from something.

How can a person see the *panim* of something? This is for a person to understand that he can only see the beginning of something, and that we cannot see the end. When a person thinks he has the complete understanding of something, he is only focused on the back of the information, not on the beginning of the information. He is only seeing through *achor*, not *panim*. Sometimes a person really does get to the end of a matter, and this is a refined kind of *achor*. But when a person thinks he understands something in its entirety and really he doesn't, he is seeing through an inaccurate lens – *achor*.

On a very subtle note, we must see how everything is endless, because everything is really connected to Hashem, who is endless. So really, *achor* is always an inaccurate way to see. This is the depth of what it means to see “*panim b'panim*” – face to face.

The beginning of any information shows where the information is leading to. A beginning by definition is something which connotes continuation. By contrast, *achor* is to see how the information has ended. And end is something by its very definition has no continuation.

In terms of our mind's vision, *achor* is to think that we have reached the end of understanding something, while *panim* is to see where the knowledge is leading up to.

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For example, when a person is learning a *sugya*, there are different things going on his mind. If he is learning it the whole time because he wants to get down to the *halacha* that comes out of the *sugya*, and when he finally gets there he thinks that now he has understood the *sugya* – he is only seeing the *achor* of the wisdom, because he thinks he has reached the end. But if a person begins to learn the *sugya* and he thinks where he is going with this, he is seeing the *panim* of the wisdom.

This is a brief and simple definition of *panim* and *achor*.

Applying This To Learning Torah

Let us see how this concept applies to learning, which is our discussion – the power of wisdom and thought in a person.

When a person learns Torah, he has a certain picture in his mind about what he's learning. If he thinks that he's at the end of understanding it, this is *achor*. When a person understands that with each time he learns he discovers something new, this is *panim*.

Let us sharpen this discussion a bit more. *Achor b'achor* is the lowest way to see, because the person isn't seeing what's really in front of him, nor is he even seeing himself in it. When it comes to learning Torah, there is also *achor b'achor*. This can be, for example, if a person learns a few *Halachos* pertaining to a certain area, and then attempts to arrive at the conclusions. If it's written in the *sefer*, he does it.

A higher way to see than this is *panim b'achor*. With *panim b'achor*, a person sees only himself in the information – what happens from this? He thinks that only his understanding is the way to understand something. He only sees how he is reflected in the information, so only his understanding is correct – according to his thinking. Such a person learns the *sugya* of Gemara in front of him and makes everything fit into how he understands it, and he limits his understanding by doing so.

It could be that he really is right in the way he understands it. But what is wrong here is that he thinks that only his understanding is the right one. Such an attitude is incorrect, because Chazal say that “Just as all faces are not the same, so is every opinion not the same.” There are many ways to understand a *sugya* – there is no one way that is the only way.

The highest way to see is *panim b'panim*. Such a person knows that the way he understands something is only one of the possible ways to understand it, and he realizes that others have their own way of understanding.

Panim B'panim – Chochmah and Binah

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Before we discussed *Chochmah* and *Binah*; we have said that *Chochmah* and *Binah* can see everything. The difference between them is that *Chochmah* is to see the information in general terms, while *Binah* is to see it all as detail after detail.

With lower *Tevunah*, a person only sees the details and doesn't connect them. *Binah* is that a person is aware that all the details eventually add up to something and reveal the actual wisdom. *Binah* is thus essentially *panim b'panim*.

The *Chochmah* sees all the information at once. This is the perfected state that a human being can reach; Adam was able to see everything all at once, before the sin. What does this mean? How do you see everything all at once? It is because he saw how everything connects into one picture. This is the perfected level of *Chochmah*.

With *Binah*, a person sees detail upon detail. He sees how every detail is another facet that completes the picture. In our own learning, we use *Chochmah* and *Binah* as follows. *Chochmah* is when we see how every part of the Torah which we learn is all one face. It is to see many "faces" that are all really part of one face, because they all have one root. When a person perfects his *Chochmah*, he is able to see the big picture of it all.

Moshe Rabbeinu was shown every Torah thought that each Jew will formulate⁵⁴. The depth of this matter was that he saw how the many faces of wisdom all connect to be one-faced. *Binah* is when one sees details as they are, but he is aware that eventually they all add up to be one. He knows that what he sees is not the end, and that there are always new facets of wisdom being revealed with each piece of information he comes across.

The world was created with "Fifty Gates of Understanding." Our *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that when we reach the fiftieth gate, we begin again from the forty-nine gates; this cycle keeps being repeated. The depth of this matter is that we never get to the end – we are instead always revealing greater depth each time to what he had previously.

Chochmah and *Binah* are thus *panim b'panim*. *Chochmah* is to see the general information as a whole, while *Binah* is to see details. But even when a person only sees details, it is still *panim b'panim*, because the person is able to keep revealing a new face to the information each time. On a more subtle note, a person is able to reveal a whole new depth each time to the old information.

Panim B'achor – Chochmah and Tevunah

By contrast, the lower *Chochmah* and *Tevunah* is like *panim b'achor*.

Panim b'achor uses lower *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*. *Tevunah* doesn't show a person the essence of a matter that he has received from his teacher. *Chochmah* can show a person

⁵⁴ *Vayikra Rabbah* 22:1

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everything, because it is the actual wisdom that has been imparted from the teacher. The teacher has all the correct information, but the teacher also is aware that his student isn't really receiving what he is saying – he is receiving what he has heard.

The student thinks that he has gotten what his teacher said, and that he has gotten to the depth of what he has heard. In doing so, he is really taking his teacher's information and limiting it to his own understanding.

This is *panim b'achor*. The teacher is revealing the face of the wisdom, but the student only sees the back of it. In other words, the student thinks that he has arrived at the end of the understanding. The teacher is giving it over through *panim*, but the student is receiving the wisdom only through *achor*.

Imagination Is The Incorrect Way To See

When a person only sees information through *achor*, it is basically imagination. Why?

Let's think about a simple example from the physical world. If Shimon sees Reuven in front of him, he doesn't have to imagine how Reuven looks, because he sees him up close. But if he only sees Reuven from behind, and he thinks to himself, "That is Reuven", he will naturally imagine how Reuven's face looks.

Whenever a person sees something indirectly and from behind it, he begins to imagine what it looks like. When a person imagines someone else's looks, is it the same as when you're actually seeing him face to face? It is not the same thing. It is not as accurate as seeing him for real. When a person imagines how something or someone else looks (because he only sees from *achor*), there are two disadvantages. First of all, he limits his understanding to what he has imagined. Secondly – and this is a deeper problem – his whole understanding here is based on his imagination.

By contrast, when a person sees through *panim b'panim*, he really sees what he's looking at, so there is no need to imagine it. It is only when a person can't see something that he imagines it. I can't see it, but my imagination can give me some picture of it. If I do see it, I don't need to imagine it – I might need to remember it, but I don't need to imagine it.

When I see someone from behind, I am only seeing him indirectly. What I am seeing here is just what I am imagining.

Anytime we picture something in our minds, it's all imagination. Whatever we have never seen, we attempt to imagine what it must look like. Our whole understanding of such things is limited to what we imagine. Whenever a person sees something in an unclear way, he makes use of his imagination to try to picture what it looks like – and it is inaccurate.

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Our Goal is to Achieve the Clearest Viewpoint

During the day we see more, but by night where we can't really see, our imagination is more commonly in use. This is clear and well-known. To give a simple example, we know that Moshe Rabbeinu's prophecy was on a higher level than other prophets. Moshe saw through *panim*, while the other prophets only saw through *achor*, and they had to use their imagination in order to understand the vision.

When it comes to our relationship with Hashem, there is no one who has *panim b'panim* with Hashem. There is always some *achor* involved, because we can't actually picture Hashem. On a very subtle note, *achor* is preferred over *panim* when it comes to how we relate to Hashem, because we are not allowed to imagine what it's like to be face-to-face with Hashem; it is just that with *achor*, a person has to be cautious that he shouldn't imagine the *panim* of Hashem.

But we are discussing here how to understand our soul, and we are not discussing here the deeper aspects of our relationship with Hashem.⁵⁵ There are three levels which can be revealed in our soul, and we will now illustrate them in terms of teacher and student.

The lowest level is *achor b'achor*. Here, the student does not see his teacher or even himself in the knowledge being imparted; he is just seeing actions. Here, the student thinks that the knowledge is not being taught to me – my teacher is just telling me what “to do.” The teacher as well is imparting the knowledge not in order to teach the student, but simply to tell him what to do. The student sees what his teacher does and imitates him. The teacher and student aren't “facing” each other here – there is no *panim*, just *achor*. The problem here is with the teacher – the one giving over the knowledge.

Panim b'achor is when the teacher “faces” his student. He is giving over the knowledge to his student to teach him, but he knows that the student isn't really receiving the actual knowledge. He knows that the student is only hearing what he has understood on his own level. Here, the problem is with the student – the receiver.

Panim b'panim is when a person sees the actual information. With each additional facet of information he sees, he knows that it only leads to more. If a person merits this understanding, he becomes like a *maayan hamisgaber* (mighty wellspring), because each piece of knowledge to him is another face of many faces. May the Creator merit us to reach the level of *panim b'panim* – “Face to face Hashem spoke with them.”

⁵⁵ Deepening our relationship with Hashem is the subject of the “Bilvavi” series, most notably the seventh, eighth and ninth volumes of *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*.

1.12 | How Thoughts Affect Behavior

Thoughts Affect Our Feelings and Actions

A person either uses his mind for the purpose of using the mind, or he uses his mind in order to do something.

The highest purpose our mind serves is to think in the Torah. When a person learns Torah, he is using *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as* for the sake of using the mind. The Rosh⁵⁶ writes that learning *Torah lishmah* (for its own sake) means that one learns Torah simply for the sake of learning. That is one usage of our mind.

Another usage of our mind, which is a lower purpose, is what the Torah brings you to do. In this there are also different uses.

The Vilna Gaon writes that there are three parts to the mind: thoughts, speech and actions. Thoughts are when a person thinks and analyzes. Speech of the mind is when a person thinks what he will say; “*Da'as* is hidden in the lips.” Actions of the mind are when a person puts thought into what he does.

To give a more general definition of the mind's uses, our thoughts can affect either our *middos*/emotions or how we act.

Our head contains our mind, our heart contains our *middos* and our body contains our actions (which is the lowest part of our soul). The thoughts, which are the highest part of our soul, must be able to affect even the lower parts of our soul, which are our *middos* and our actions; it is not enough to use our mind just to think. Our thoughts are supposed to affect our entire being – our heart, our *middos*, and our simple actions.

First, we will explain how the thoughts are supposed to affect our *middos*.

A Child's Mind Has No Da'as

There are seven root emotions in the soul: love, fear, pride, victory, admitting, connection, and lowliness. Let us use love as an example to explain the roots of this discussion.

⁵⁶ An early commentator

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When a person loves something, does this come from his *middos*/emotions, or from his mind? Naturally, love is rooted in our emotions, and to be more specific, it is rooted in the faculty of *ratzon* (will).

A young child is able to love. A child's mind is at the level of *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*, but he has no *Da'as*. The highest level of *Da'as* is *ruach hakodesh*⁵⁷, and this can be experienced in some small way when a person uses his *Da'as* to connect to his decisions (*Da'as hamechaberes*). The lower levels of *Da'as* are *Da'as d'havdalah* and *Da'as d'hachraah* – a child does not have any of this, because he can't decide.

Before we explained that the lower *Chochmah* is to see a physical image, while *Tevunah* is to compare and act upon that comparison. These are both abilities which even a baby can do. Of course, a baby or a child can't decide to use his *Tevunah* or not, but he naturally uses his imagination anyway. An adult, by contrast, is capable of deciding if the comparison he made is correct or not. An adult continues to grow up with his imagination, but slowly he gains more and more *Da'as*, and he is able to figure out if what he's imagining is true or not.

The point here is that a child, who only has *Chochmah* and *Tevunah* but no *Da'as*, is still able to love and have other emotions.

A Child's Emotions Are Not Connected To His Mind

When a person is a child, he has only two parts functioning in his mind – *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*. He also has *middos*, which are the emotions.

Are his emotions and mind connected? No. A child's mind is one part of himself, while the emotions are a separate part of himself. Of course, we can't say that there is no connection at all, because sometimes a child's mind and emotions do work together. But even when there is a connection, it is lacking *Da'as*, and without *Da'as* everything is just a random mix. A child's love or fear are just emotions – they aren't built upon the mind. They are just natural emotions which are rooted in a person's *ratzon*.

This is the way a person is since he is born.

When a person gets older, he gets *Da'as*, but his *middos*/emotions don't necessarily change. It's very possible that an adult still remains with the very same emotions he had since he was a child. It could even be that he is very mature in his mind, but his mind is one thing, while his emotions are another thing. He can know in his mind that a certain desire is wrong to pursue, but he just follows his emotions and gives in to his desire.

When a person's *middos* aren't connected to his mind, this resembles Esav, who head was greater than the rest of his body. Esav knew what the right thing was in his mind; he had a

⁵⁷ *The holy spirit*

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very great mind. But his *middos*/emotions weren't connected to his mind, so he followed his emotions.

Free Will Is Essentially To Choose *Da'as*

In the lower mode of thought of an adult, the more mature his *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as* become, the more he is aware in his mind if something is good or bad. An adult is able to decide if he will listen to his mind over his emotions. This is the basic power of *bechirah* (free will) which we all recognize in ourselves – our heart wants something which our mind knows is wrong, and it is up to the person to decide if he will listen to the heart's emotions or to the mind's knowledge.

When a child loves something, why does he love it? It is because one time he tasted it and saw it was good. His whole love comes from his emotions, not from his mind. This isn't based on his *Chochmah* or on his *Tevunah*, but purely on his natural emotions.

The lower *Chochmah* and *Tevunah* are also in a child. Even if you don't give him the exact candy he likes, he will like it anyway because he compares it with the first candy he saw, which tasted good; this is a usage of his *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*. But even when he uses *Chochmah* and *Tevunah* in what he likes, it is only just bringing out his original liking toward the candy, which is based on mere emotions.

All people have basic emotions. Many adults continue to live with the same emotions they had as children. People get smarter as they get older, but the emotional level often stays the same as when they were children.

Even the lower *Da'as*, which is the power to decide, is often not used so much by many people. Why? It is because a person as a child experienced love for something, but he didn't have *Da'as*. As a result, every time that love comes back, it awakens in the person an emotion that is based just on *Chochmah* and *Tevunah* without *Da'as*. People thus have a tendency to skip over their *Da'as* whenever they feel a liking to something.

Of course, there can be a more internal reason for this, since the *sefarim hakedoshim* say that the power of love is really a feeling that is above intellectual comprehension. But what is relevant for us to know is as follows. The first time a person had a desire for something, like when he was a child, he didn't have any *Da'as*. All he had was *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*. Thus, the second time he feels the desire again, it awakens in him the first time he had the desire, and the same goes for the next time he has the desire. The original emotions keep being awakened, and these original emotions didn't have any *Da'as* in them.

When a person gets older and matures, he gains *Da'as*. What happens if he encounters the desire again? His natural reaction will be to follow his original emotions, which lacked *Da'as*. For this reason, many people fall into their desires when they encounter a powerful temptation.

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Chazal state that “When the *yetzer hora* is present, there is no memory of the *yetzer tov*⁵⁸.” When an evil desire is present, there is no good present; what is the reason for this? It is because the first time a person had a desire, he had no *yetzer tov*. When this desire gets awakened again in the person even as a mature adult who has *Da’as*, it awakens his original emotions in which there was no *yetzer tov* present – in other words, when there was no *Da’as*.

Even though an adult is capable of deciding between right and wrong, desires awaken the first time a person had a desire, which was a time when he didn’t have *Da’as*. This is a very fundamental point in understanding the human soul.

When a person gets older and matures, he has a choice: either to awaken his *Da’as* that he has now, or to push it away. Then he has to decide if he will listen to this decision or not. But the beginning point of free will is for a person to choose to even awaken his *Da’as* or just go back to his original, childish emotions.

Many times a person can feel this in himself. He feels that he wants something, and there is an inner voice telling him, “No.” But the person just pushes away this inner voice and runs back to his old emotions he is used to.

Mature Emotions

But when a person makes use of his higher mode of thought, it’s the opposite: the emotions of a person now become mature, because they are based on the mind.

A simple example of this is Avraham Avinu, whose love of Hashem came about from the wisdom he discovered. Here is an emotion based on the mind. Did his wisdom come from his love, or did his love come from his wisdom? His love came from his wisdom. What his wisdom wanted, that is what he loved. On a more subtle note, love is rooted in a point that is above the mind.

In order for a person to have more mature emotions, he must leave his lower mode of thought – totally. Why?

According to what we have described before, it is very clear. With the undeveloped mind, everything a person does comes from his emotional reactions. Here, even his thinking is based on his emotions. If such thinking isn’t really *Chochmah* and *Tevunah* but just a revelation of the natural emotions in a person, it definitely does not make use of *Da’as*.

In the higher usage of our thoughts, not only do the emotions work together with our *Da’as*, but the emotions here are a **result** of the mind. These are entirely different kinds of feelings that a person can have.

⁵⁸ *Nedarim 32b*

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This was also the difference between the *eitz hada'as* and the *eitz hachaim*. The knowledge contained in the *eitz hada'as*, which was evil, is a *Da'as* that comes from emotions. Chavah only desired to eat from the *eitz hada'as* because she saw that the tree tasted good; in other words, the whole connection to the *Da'as* came from emotions.

But the knowledge contained in the *eitz hachaim* – the tree of “life” -- which is the good kind of knowledge, represents a different way to build the emotions. These are emotions which stem from the mind. The mind is the source of a person’s real “life”; “*Wisdom sustains its owner.*”⁵⁹

Truth and Falsity

The connection between the mind and the emotions is usually perceived of as “self-control”, but this is only a superficial definition.

Self-control is that a person learns about the good and bad *middos*/emotions and tries to use his mind to control his *middos*. This is true and it is a worthy thing to do, but if this is the definition, then a person is just using his mind as a tool to work on his *middos*. If this is his attitude, then his emotions he has now are the focus, and he is just using his mind to control them and fix them. That is the lower mode of thought; in the higher mode of thought, however, it is the mind which produces **new** emotions. The focus here is not to fix your current *middos*, but to use your mind to produce new *middos* altogether.

The Rambam (in *Moreh Nevuchim*) writes that this was the difference between before Adam’s sin to after the sin. Before the sin, the whole test of man was to differentiate between truth and falsity; after the sin, the test of mankind is to choose between good and evil. The difference is as follows: with “truth”, a person clarifies what the truth is, and the truth tells him if he should have the emotion or not. Here, the emotions are being produced from the mind. But in the lower state of mankind, which came after the sin, it’s not about the “truth”, but about what’s “good.” In this lower state, a person wants something because it is good; when a person wants something, it is *ratzon*, which is rooted in the *middos*. Here, the emotions are causing what a person wants.

This is also the deep difference between the *middos* of a Torah scholar to the *middos* of an ignoramus. Chazal say that an ignoramus cannot be pious⁶⁰, because even though an ignoramus can acquire *middos*, his *middos* don’t come from the mind.

An ignoramus doesn’t have a mind with which to base his emotions on.

⁵⁹ *Kohel* 7: 12

⁶⁰ *Avos* 2: 5

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Learning Middos From The Torah, Not From Animals

Chazal say that if not for the Torah, we would have learned how to act from animals. We would have learned modesty from a cat, consideration for other's money from an ant, and marital loyalty from a dove.⁶¹

What is the difference between learning how to act from the Torah or from animals? An animal's behavior doesn't come from any thought.

We can learn *middos* alone from animals – if we just want to know what a nice way to act is and what a mean way to act is. But *middos* alone aren't the *middos* that the Torah wants us to have. The Torah's attitude toward *middos* is that the *middos* have to come from the Torah, and not from anywhere else.

The Torah is a “*pure heart G-d created me with, and a proper spirit to renew in my innards.*” We need **renewed** *middos*. To have new *middos* is different than working on your present *middos* through using your mind. If we would just have to work on our *middos*, we wouldn't need to get new *middos*.

From the renewal of the Torah, a person can draw forth entirely new *middos* altogether. This is really the meaning of *mochin d'gadlus* – the higher state of mind.

It's not that I have worked on my *middos*, got rid of my bad *middos* and instead revealed the good within them. That would also be a nice thing to do, but that is not our Avodah we are describing here. We are describing *middos* and emotions which are drawn forth from the Torah.

There are thirteen *middos* of Hashem, and these are the *middos* which we aspire to. Chazal say, *hevay domeh lo* – “You should be similar to Him”. The real *middos* which we aspire to have are *middos* that come from the Torah, which are *middos* that are rooted in the Creator.

True Emotions Stem From The Mind

This is how a person really works on himself: first, a person has to purify his *middos*. He must turn his bad *middos* into good *middos*.⁶² After this he should work on acquiring *mochin d'gadlus* – a higher state of mind. When a person has *mochin d'gadlus*, he receives entirely new *middos*.

If a person hasn't fixed his *middos* yet and he attempts to reach *mochin d'gadlus*, he will not really be successful. Such a person is fooling himself.

⁶¹ *Eruvin 100b*

⁶² There is another series of the author, *Da Es Middosecha*, which is an in-depth course explaining how we can rectify all our *middos*. Adaptations of some of these lessons can be viewed at the Bilvavi website.

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The new *middos* only come to a person if he has worked to eliminate his bad *middos*. The mind can only produce new *middos* when the bad *middos* have been first transformed into good *middos*. When a person only has *Mochin D'Katnus*, he simply works on his *middos*, but with *Mochin D'Gadlus*, he is a whole new person, because he has entirely new *middos*.

Mature Love Vs. Immature Love

To give an example of what we mean, a person has to love the Torah. If a person has reached his higher mode of thought, loving the Torah is not the same love a person is familiar with. It is not a different way to use the power of love; it is whole a new kind of love. In the higher mode of thought, the feelings come from the mind.

When a person has love for the Torah from his higher state of mind, it's not even that he loves the Torah more than any other worldly pleasure; it's not that he is channeling his love for the physical toward loving the Torah. Although it is true that a person should do this, that is not yet the depth of loving Torah. Loving Torah is to realize what the Torah is, and from that realization to come to love it. This is a whole new kind of love.

If a person loves the Torah only because of the first way, there can be no greater downfall to a person than this. This is because he is using the lowest kind of love in order to love the Torah, which is entirely different than the regular love that people know of.

We specifically gave Torah as an example for this, because Torah is entirely the mind. Learning the Torah in a true way brings a person to have a whole new kind of mind.

Chazal⁶³ say that every day a person should look at the Torah like new. If the entire Torah was already revealed to Moshe at Har Sinai, how can it be new every day? The answer to this is because it has to be new to you, on a personal level. How can it be new to you? If it is coming to you from your real mind, it is new. Chazal are saying that every day, one should strive to have new *middos* which come from the Torah.

When a person remains in the lower state of mind, he might be able to channel his regular emotions toward the Torah and even purify his *middos*, but these will not be new *middos*. A person who worked on his *middos*, let's say, used to love certain exciting things that were materialistic, and now he loves the Torah instead – but in the same way he loved this world. Such a person has indeed worked on himself, but he doesn't have new *middos*.

By contrast, someone who works hard at learning the Torah and comes up with new Torah insights all the time is revealing a whole new *middah* of love

⁶³ *Sifrei, V'Eschanan*, 6.

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which he never had before. It's not that he is improving his *middos* – it is that he is getting new *middos*.

Cleaving To The Middos of Hashem

Chazal taught us that we must cleave to the *middos* of Hashem; just as He is merciful, so must we be merciful⁶⁴.

In the lower state of mind, the emotions are a mix of good and evil. Cleaving to the *middos* here is to overcome the evil and instead listen to the good in you; when you feel like acting cruel, instead be merciful.

But this is not the depth of cleaving to the *middos* of Hashem. Does Hashem have any bad *middos*? Heaven forbid not! What does it mean then to cleave to His *middos*?

It is true that we must remove our evil and instead cling to good, but the depth of cleaving to the *middos* of Hashem is to have *middos* which come from the mind. When a person connects to his mind, from there he can derive *middos* which are completely good.

“Hashem, the Jewish people, and the Torah are one.” Hashem has completely good *middos*, and the Torah has entirely good *middos*. The Jewish people also have entirely good *middos*! But this is only if someone derives his *middos* from Hashem and His Torah, not if he simply channels his natural emotions for good.

We are not saying that a person shouldn't work on his *middos* in the simple sense. If a person doesn't work on his regular *middos*, he will never reach his mind. A person must work on his *middos*, simply put. What we mean is that after a person has worked on his *middos*, he must work on connecting to his mind, and from there he can draw forth new *middos*.

This is the real way to build up our minds.

Let us explain this in more simple words. Usually, we think that we need to just use our mind to work on our *middos*.

But it's really the opposite. What do we mean? Before, we explained at length that thought is not simply for a person to become a thinker, but that we should live in a world of thought. When a person doesn't live in a world of thought, he lives either in a world of emotions or in a world of action. He is either acting upon his emotions or he is simply just acting. Such a person, when he thinks, limits his thinking either to his emotions or to what

⁶⁴ *Shabbos 133b*

he's doing. By contrast, someone who lives in a world of thought always does everything from a viewpoint of thought.

For example, a person sees an object. What does he first think as he sees it? An action kind of person thinks, "What do I do with this?", while a feeling kind of person thinks, "Is this thing good for me or not?"

But someone who lives with thought thinks, "What is this thing made up of? What is its function?"

Chazal state that Hashem thought first to create the Jewish people before He thought of creating the universe. This shows us that the Jewish people are first supposed to make use of their thoughts, before the feelings and the any actions. Our feelings and actions need to be clarifies to us through the thoughts. Whatever a person encounters, he has to approach it first through thought, and then the feelings and actions will be based upon the thoughts. To give a more inner description of this – the emotions are supposed to come from our mind.

How The Emotions Can Be A Result Of The Mind

In the future, we will reach a more perfected state of mind, in which we will reveal a kind of mind that is above the emotions.

The world which we live in is a world of emotion. Hashem thus relates to us with *middah k'neged middah* (measurement for a measurement), because since the current state of the world is that of *middos*, Hashem relates to us in terms of *middos*. But in the future, Hashem will give us all a future reward, a state of total mind above emotion. The depth of the future reward is the revelation of the Torah's secrets – a revelation of the mind, and even above this level, there will also be an utter connection to Hashem.

But in our current situation of the world, which will last for six thousand years (not just in the average seventy-year lifespan of people, but even in Gan Eden right now), our minds are not yet total. This is why Chazal say that "Anyone who says, "All I have is the Torah" does not even have the Torah⁶⁵." Since this is so, we must use our mind to affect our emotions and actions. We must "learn in order to do."

Therefore, when we discuss the mind, it is clear that we can't just work on this just for the sake of building our mind. Our entire discussion here is about how to use our mind to affect how we act and feel. (On a very subtle note, there is a deep place in our soul in which there is a total mind, but that is only once our mind is connected to all the other parts of our soul).

The real function of the mind is to affect us and produce new *middos*. In the *sefarim hakedoshim*, the mind is referred to as "*Abba and Ima*" – "father and mother", because the

⁶⁵ *Yevamos 109b*

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whole function of the mind is to produce new *middos*, just like a father and mother give birth to children.

Before, we discussed *Chochmah* and *Binah*; these are ways to build our mind for the sake of building the mind. But more than this, we also have to use the way of “*Abba V’Ima*”, which is to use our mind to affect how we act.

With the lower *Chochmah* and *Tevunah* – abilities in the lower state of mind -- a person uses his mind to build his *middos*. But what was described in this chapter is to use our mind in order to produce entirely new *middos*.

One function of our *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da’as* are meant for us to build up the mind; although Betzalel was blessed with these abilities in order to build the Mishkan, of course this doesn’t mean that *Chochmah* and *Binah* are only for the sake of knowing what to do. They can be used to know what to do, but they serve a purpose other than this as well – to build the mind.

The other function which *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da’as* serve is to use these abilities in order to work on our *middos*, and then produce new *middos*.

What we discussed in this chapter was this second function of our *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da’as*, which is to use our mind to produce new *middos* in ourselves.

How The Mind Affects Behavior and Emotions

When it comes to getting things done – action – everyone can understand that our mind affects how we act. The *mitzvos* and good actions which a person has are called his “fruits”⁶⁶. The good actions which righteous individuals have done are considered their main offspring⁶⁷.

It’s not that a person does something and then afterwards he examines himself to see if he did the right thing. That is *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) and it is something else. Our thoughts come into play even before we act. Before a person does something, he thinks if he should do it or not. The point is that when it comes to how we act, everyone understands clearly that our thoughts affect us.

But when it comes to our feelings, this isn’t as clear. Feelings are more sudden and this makes us less aware that our mind is able to come before it.

The Ramban writes that a person must think before he acts. The same can be true for our feelings – we are able to think before how we will feel and react.

⁶⁶ *Sotah 46a*

⁶⁷ *Rashi, beginning of Parshas Noach*

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Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote that one of the ways to fix our *middos* is through learning the part in the Torah about that particular bad *middah* we want to fix. The simple understanding of this is that through learning about that area of the Torah, the Torah's light is shined upon the person and it removes the darkness of that bad *middah*.

But according to what we have said in this chapter, there is more to his words: a person needs to work on his weaknesses because through learning about it, he will receive entirely new *middos*.

Working on our Middos -- The Point of Life

We must always remember that when we build up our mind's power, besides for developing our mind we have to mainly use it to improve our *middos*.

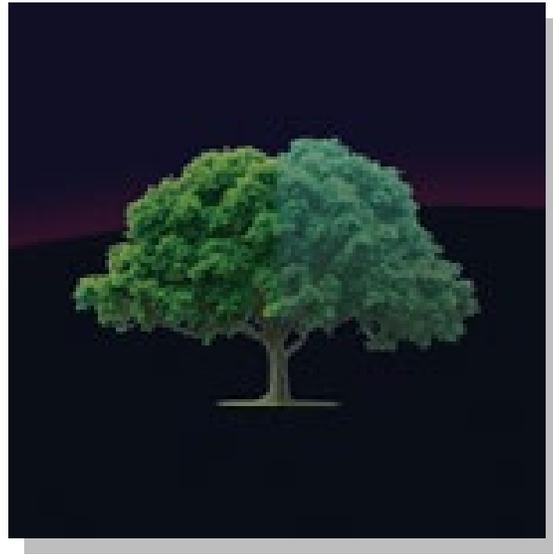
There is a well-known statement of the Vilna Gaon⁶⁸: "A person lives in order to break the *middah* which he hasn't broken yet until now. Thus, a person must always strengthen himself to work on this, because if he doesn't, what is the point of living?"

What does this mean? If we don't break our *middos* then there is no pint to life?! What about learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*?

The understanding of this is that we are currently living in a world of *middos*. (There are also people who are living entirely for action, and this is the lowest kind of existence). Therefore, if we don't break our *middos*, life on this world is pointless. If a person wants to break his *middos*, he needs to break his *middos* as well as gain new *middos*.

The entire function of our mind on this world is to produce new *middos* in ourselves. When we all merit this, we will gain *middos* of Hashem, which will be the perfected state of the future.

⁶⁸ *Mishlei* 4 :13



2

Your Imagination

2.1 | The Imagination

Intellect and Imagination

A person is created with two main mental powers - the power of *chochmah* (intellect) and the power of *medameh* (Our emotions rule over our minds imagination).

It is written, “*Let us make man in our image (betzalmeinu) and in our form (kedemuseinu).*”⁶⁹ We are taught⁷⁰ that the word “*betzalmeinu*” refers to the power of the intellect. In other words, our human intellect is an example of how we are created “in the image of Hashem”. In contrast, the root of the word “*kedemuseinu*” is “*medameh*”. This word is usually interpreted as the “imagination”.⁷¹

Two Levels of the Imagination

We can divide the concept of imagination into two types - ‘higher level imagination’ and ‘lower level imagination’. ‘Higher level imagination’ is based on mental reasoning and grounded in reality. In contrast, ‘lower level imagination’ works in tandem with the emotions. It is not connected to mental reasoning, and it leads to a complete fabrication of reality.

‘Higher level imagination’ involves discriminating between different pieces of information. It involves an intellectual analysis of existing facts and it extrapolates this information to new scenarios. It relies on real and substantial information in order to transform potential information into reality. In contrast, ‘lower level imagination’ does not involve reality at all. Since it is not grounded in reality, it leads to a completely false assessment of each situation.

A prime example of our mind being dominated by ‘lower level imagination’ is when we dream. Our dreams are usually dominated by fantasy rather than reality. In a dream, ‘lower level imagination’ takes over the mind of a person who is dreaming, and he believes he is riding a bus, while in reality, he is lying in bed. (Though he truly feels and believes that this bus-ride is true reality, obviously in this moment his rational mind is not grounded in reality and thus he is not being objective).

⁶⁹ *Beraishis 1:26*

⁷⁰ *Arizal*

⁷¹ *It also shares a root with the word “demus”, ‘resemblance’, implying that man’s power of medameh also enables man to ‘resemble’ Hashem on some level. Alternatively, the fact that imagination is related to “likeness” or similarity may mean that a proper use of our imagination involves comparing and extrapolating from existing information and facts to potential scenarios.*

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Rather than merely being an inaccurate form of ‘higher level imagination’ – such as when a person fails to use his powers of inference or discrimination accurately – ‘lower level imagination’ takes people to a completely false and inauthentic place. This fantasy place may seem completely real. For instance, dreams feel real and intense. Though this dream or fantasy may still involve tangible objects or even fragments extracted from reality (such as the fact that a bus is a real object), the scenario as a whole is completely divorced from reality.

The source of ‘higher level imagination’ comes from the mind’s power of mental vision, a positive power of the mind which connects our senses to tangible reality, essentially enabling us to extend this information to that which is still in potential form. But what is the source of ‘lower level imagination’? Why does it cause people to imagine things which do not exist? And what is the detrimental effect of relying on this ‘lower level imagination’?

The Relationship Between Emotions and Imagination

We all possess both intellect and emotion. Whereas the intellect is rooted in the mind, the emotions are rooted in the heart. Our imagination and our emotions are interconnected. The word “*middos*” – our character traits, also identified as our emotions⁷² – has the same root letters as the Hebrew word “*dimayon*”, imagination.

Ideally, our intellect should source or fuel our emotions. However, in cases when the mind is overtaken by our ‘lower level imagination’, our emotions are more likely to govern the intellect. Generally speaking, the weaker a person’s intellectual mind, the stronger is his ‘lower level imagination’. Conversely, the stronger one’s intellectual mind, the weaker one’s ‘lower level imagination’. The more a person is detached from actual *reality*, the more he relies on and relates to his *imagined* reality.

When our mind is strong and functioning properly, it can be assisted by the power of ‘higher level imagination’. But when our base emotions govern our mind, the ‘lower level imagination’ can run rife, leading a person to become detached from reality.

More specifically, our emotions are rooted in desire, the faculty of *ratzon*. For example, the two root emotions are *ahavah* (love) and *yirah* (fear), both of which fuel our desire. These emotions are powerful and can have both positive and negative effects. For instance, a negative effect of desire stemming from love may lead a person to chase after something that is beyond the scope of reality.

Consider a person who is so caught up in his desire to own a yacht that he either imagines that he *has* it already or he futilely chases after this impossible dream. A negative effect of fear may cause us to run away from something imaginary. Fueled by the imagination, our

⁷² See *Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part 2, Chapter 2*

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emotional fear may block us from realizing that this thing we are running from is really imaginary and not substantial.

In summary, when emotions dominate over rational thought, the imagination has the opportunity to govern our mind and may cause the mind to lose its ability to think rationally (objectively) or know the true reality. Ultimately, this process can lead a person to sin.

'Lower Level Imagination' Distorts Reality

The imagination can become dangerous and lead a person to sin when the mind is controlled by the emotions. Our 'lower level imagination' is used by the *yetzer hora* (the evil inclination) harnessing the power of imagination, in order to encourage a person to think or commit an act they otherwise would not commit.

For instance, the Snake in Gan Eden enticed Chavah to eat from the *Eitz HaDa'as* ("tree of good and evil knowledge") by telling her that the fruit would give her powers like Hashem. In this way, the Snake relied on Chava's imagination in order to persuade her. *Chazal* also teach that the Satan led *Bnei Yisrael* to commit the sin of the Golden Calf by showing them an image of Moshe's coffin in the sky. Their 'lower level imagination' fueled their fear, and their fear led them to create the Golden Calf.

It is written, "*The inclination of the heart of a man is evil from his youth.*"⁷³ When emotions take over the mind, the logical, rationale part of our brain is weakened and the 'lower level imagination' may dominate. In turn, the imagination may fuel the emotions, creating a vicious cycle. We may become falsely convinced that we are following Hashem's will, when in reality we are being led down a false path and being propelled by our base or erroneous desires. This is how we can fall prey to acting on sinful drives.

The *emes* (truth) refers to the only true reality – that is, the reality of Hashem's existence and His *ratzon* (will) for how He wants us to live. It is written, "*You created me with a pure heart*"⁷⁴. A "pure heart" desires the true reality and to do and follow Hashem's will. However, when a person's heart is 'impure', he cannot see the true reality. His vision of the objective light of reality (that is, the *emes*) is blocked by emotions. Thus, he chases after falsehood or wickedness without even realizing his error.

There is a fundamental difference between the *yetzer tov* and the *yetzer hora*. The *yetzer tov* brings the heart's emotions up to the level of the mind so that "the mind controls the heart"⁷⁵. A person then can see and follow *emes*. His heart may assist him to achieve realistic goals by fueling it with the power of *ratzon*. In contrast, the *yetzer hora* uses the 'lower level imagination' to fuel our emotions and try to confuse us with falsehood and imaginary

⁷³ *Beraishis* 8:21

⁷⁴ *Tehillim* 51, 12

⁷⁵ *Sefer Tanya; Zohar III 124a*

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concepts. It attempts to convince us to follow paths other than *emes*. A sign that the *yetzer hora* is dominating over our *yetzer tov* is if our mind is governed by emotions, rather than the other way around.

The *yetzer hora* tries to trick a person into consciously and subjectively believing that falsehood is truth. Without a *yetzer hora*, we would realize immediately the pathetic nature of the ‘lower level imagination’. For instance, though it is quite absurd for a person to be fooled into imagining that he can become like Hashem, this is precisely what the Snake managed to convince Adam and Chavah!

Our souls naturally only want the true reality – that is, Hashem and His Torah. Our souls recognize that there is no reality other than Hashem’s will. Our *yetzer tov* helps us to search for, and follow this true reality. Our ‘higher level imagination’ is one tool we can use to assist us to put Hashem’s *ratzon* into practice. In contrast, our *yetzer hora* employs the ‘lower level imagination’ to appeal to our emotional side of the brain so that we are confused.⁷⁶

‘Lower Level Imagination’ Fools The Mind

Until this point, we have explained that there are two kinds of imagination – ‘higher level imagination’ and ‘lower level imagination’.

The ‘higher level imagination’ can be usefully engaged in conjunction with our intellect to help us channel our emotions in order to achieve Hashem’s will. However, ‘lower level imagination’⁷⁷ can be dangerous if we allow it to dominate and rule over our intellect. It may rob us of our mental powers of clarity and leave us at the mercy of our emotions. This, in turn, leaves us vulnerable to confusion and subject to a distortion of *emes*. We may then be innocently fooled into following various, impure, selfish desires (a negative use of *ratzon*).

According to *Chazal*, a person only sins if a *ruach shtus* (spirit of folly) enters him.⁷⁸ In other words, a person only sins when the imagination takes over his intellect. ‘Lower level imagination’ acts like *shochad* (bribery). It ‘bribes’ the mind into thinking that falsehood is actually truth, thereby fooling one’s very *ratzon* (will). Since our *ratzon* is our driving force to make things happen in this world, a confused *ratzon* has the dangerous power to drive us in the wrong direction, convincing a person to ignore or override his teachers’ advice and lessons.

⁷⁶ Editor’s Note: Refer to the adaptation of the author’s previous sefarim (“Building A Sanctuary of the Heart”, Parts I and II) for learning how to make self-introspection and purify the heart from erroneous desires.

⁷⁷ Editor’s Note: And indeed, we initially start out in life with only knowing of the lower kind of imagination, and it is our *avodah* to leave the lower imagination and instead gain the higher kind of imagination, as will be described throughout this sefer.

⁷⁸ *Sotah* 2a

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A person who lives and makes life decisions based on his ‘lower level imagination’ is really living in a dream-world, with his vision based entirely on egocentric or inauthentic desires or fears. Instead of subjugating himself to Hashem’s will, he is fooled into thinking that his lower drives **are** Hashem’s truth.

For instance, consider a person who dreams he is on a cruise. A strong, intact intellect would ground this person, enabling him to identify this vision as simply a daydream. However, a person whose ‘lower level imagination’ dominates his intellect may become divorced from reality and believe this scenario is actually happening. This is an example of the ‘lower level imagination’ overpowering the mind, holding wisdom hostage and distorting the truth.

Another example of such delusion caused by ‘lower level imagination’ may be when someone writes out a check to pay a debt, despite there being no money in his account. Why would a person behave this way? He is so keen to pay his debt and take away the pressure of the debt-collector that this emotional desire clouds him from the reality of the situation – which is that he has no money in the bank. He is obviously not acting rationally and his mind has been overrun by his desires.

Such a person is living solely according to how he **feels**, with his emotions ruling over his higher soul and intellect. He wants things to be a certain way so badly that he detaches from reality and convinces himself that his desires are reality. Thus, he is actually living in a dream-world.

In summary, in the absence of strong intellect, the imagination can lead the emotions to take over a person’s common sense and rational decision-making. Such a person lives a life divorced from reality, detached from his higher soul and essentially distanced from Hashem’s will.

A World Of Imagination

The Snake convinced Chava that “just as Hashem can create universes, so can you create universes.”⁷⁹ If we presume that we can act like Hashem and create something completely new, we are being deluded by our ‘lower level imagination’.

Interestingly, the Snake targeted and enticed Chavah to sin, rather than Adam. Why did it try to ensnare Chavah rather than Adam? The Snake knew that the feminine mind is generally more prone to ‘lower level imagination’ (stemming from the fact that it is likely to have less *chochmah*). It sought to take advantage of the fact that Chavah may be more susceptible to the “spirit of folly” taking over her mind and thus more easily led astray.

⁷⁹ *Midrash Tehillim:1, Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer13, Midrash Tanchuma: parshas Tazria: 9 [Editor's Note: Elsewhere, the author explains how this power exists in the side of holiness as well in the form of the power to break our limits and reach the Endlessness of Hashem.] This is the holy use of the inherent aspect of “medameh” in man.*

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In contrast, the Snake considered Adam more difficult to entice to sin. Unlike Chavah, Adam was created awake and he retained *chochmah* (wisdom) which could help his mind override his imagination. However, after he committed the sin, Adam also was equally subject to the temptations of ‘lower level imagination.’

Nowadays, both masculine and feminine minds are subject to the same enticement of the ‘lower level imagination’ and are thus equally vulnerable to the emotions overtaking them and being blocked from clarity. Most of us these days are swayed by our imaginations to the point where we are detached from reality. Our emotions rule over our minds. Even those who have learned Torah for many years and who know in their minds Hashem’s *emes*, often experience life through the prism of a dream-like world.

When we wake from this long nightmare of this world, the Sages state that Hashem will slaughter the *yetzer hora*⁸⁰. Since the ‘lower level imagination’ and the *yetzer hora* are integrated, this suggests that after Redemption, our minds will cease to be dominated or governed by our ‘lower level imagination’.

In *Tehillim*, it is written that when the *Moshiach* comes we will exclaim, “then, *we were like dreamers*.”⁸¹ This implies that currently, before the advent of the *Moshiach*, we are living in a dream world. Only after the Redemption will we look back and realize that we were dreaming. In the future, we will see how the six thousand years of this world is merely an illusion. After Redemption, wisdom will overpower our ‘lower level imagination’. However, until this point when *Moshiach* comes, our minds will often fall prey to the dominion of our ‘lower level imagination’, instead of realizing *emes*, truth.⁸²

Changing Our Thought Patterns

We have explained that the danger of listening to our ‘lower level imagination’ is that it can fuel our emotions to the point where we are confused about truth. In turn, this may lead us to act on what we subjectively feel or desire, falsely convincing ourselves that this is reality and what Hashem wants.

If we imagine something unrealistic and then become emotionally attached to this goal or vision, we risk becoming egocentric. Following our own base desires is equivalent to acting like a spoiled child - like a little girl who sees a doll in the toy store and demands that she **must** have it right now because she needs it!

⁸⁰ *Sukkah* 52a

⁸¹ *Tehillim* 126: 1

⁸² Editor’s Note: In spite of this predicament, it is still our *avodah* to try to avoid our ‘lower level imagination’ and only use ‘higher level imagination’ as much as we can, as will be explained throughout this *sefer*.

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However, every person has the power of *bechirah* (free will). Superficially, we may learn to use our *bechirah* in order to give up our negative desires altogether. However, on another level, we can learn to channel our *bechirah* so that our mind is governed by our intellect or ‘higher level imagination’ instead of our emotions or ‘lower level imagination’.

When we succeed in accessing and revealing our true inner will (which is really the will of Hashem⁸³), our emotions will be less able to control our mind and actions. Instead, our actions and thoughts will be under the power of our rational intellect and we will be able to pursue realistic and true goals in line with Hashem’s will.

But revealing this true inner will and channeling our *bechirah* to achieve such truth takes hard work. If we do not work hard to break our negative desires, we will simply be enticed by the *yetzer hora* to always strive to gratify ourselves instead of Hashem’s *emes*. As a result, we will remain living in a fantasy-world, constantly wasting our attention on dreaming about unrealistic goals or wasting our energy chasing them.

In contrast, working hard and breaking these negative desires allows us to access our real mind. In turn, a strong mind enables us to train ourselves to be in control of our emotions, rather than the other way around.

This process does not simply involve us trying to rid our heart from negative emotions in order to reveal our underlying positive emotions. Rather, once we use effort and truly desire to distance our minds from being controlled by our emotions, we may merit Hashem’s assistance. He may strengthen our mind so that our mind can function as a powerful tool to control and direct our emotions. Such a strong mind can deliberately select only particular emotions which serve it well and channel them to achieve a life of truth and Hashem’s will.

It is written, “*A pure heart G-d created me with*”. Revealing our da’as (mind) essentially leads to a “*lev tahor*” (pure heart). When Hashem sees that we are working to gain control over our desires and emotions in order to gain a pure heart, He will surely assist us to achieve our goal. This in turn enables us to more easily identify and fulfill His Will.

‘Higher Level Imagination’ – Transforming Potential into Actual

The imagination can be useful and positive. When is imagination approved of by our holy Torah?

‘Higher level imagination’ can enable a person to achieve real goals by drawing on facts that currently exist and enabling a person to apply them to a currently potential scenario in order to draw it out into reality. In other words, our imaginative faculty can be beneficial and lead us to holiness if it is based on reality and authenticity.

⁸³ See *Building A Sanctuary In The Heart, Part II, Chapter 26*

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For example, *Chazal*⁸⁴ teach that seeing *techeiles* (turquoise strings of *tzitzis*) can bring a person to have *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven) because the blue color reminds him of the sky, which in turn reminds him of the *Kisei HaKavod* (Throne of Glory). The *Kisei HaKavod* is a reality. However, a person may struggle to properly identify with it or achieve a mental vision of it because his physical senses in this World have not yet seen or experienced the *Kisei HaKavod*. In contrast, most people have seen the blue sky our ‘higher level imagination’ can rely on our sensory exposure to the blue sky to enable us to relate to and imagine the *Kisei Hakavod*, even though we have not actually seen it. This is a good and holy use of our imagination, enabling us to access a spiritual truth to which our physical senses have not actually been exposed.⁸⁵

Evil Imagination: Imagining The Non-Existent

When can the imagination become harmful and lead to evil?

The power of imagination’ becomes evil when a person uses it to imagine something that is not realistic or is completely inauthentic. A person whose mind is governed by ‘lower level imagination’ may be convinced that falsehood is truth and truth is falsehood. In this way, his imagination serves to distance him from a life of *emes*, causing his willpower (*ratzon*) to channel his energy towards sin and lust, rather than towards Hashem’s will.

The Problem With ‘Guided Imagery’ Techniques

Unfortunately, some recent non-Torah-based therapies employ people’s ‘lower level imagination’ to attempt to help them overcome their issues. For instance, a therapist may advise someone who feels unloved to imagine that he **is** loved. The therapist might reassure the patient that he can obtain love (or anything he wants) simply by using his imagination. He may instruct the person to convince himself that he is loved by imagining himself being loved by others, when, in reality, the person is not loved by anyone. So this process is based on falsehood.

Alternatively, if it is a gentile therapist, he may try to convince the Jew who comes to him to access the power of love in himself and thereby feel loved. However, this will still not

⁸⁴ *Sotah 17a*

⁸⁵ *Editor’s Note: The Mussar masters relied extensively on their imagination; see the author’s Building A Sanctuary In The Heart, Part 2, page 168, where it is brought that Rav Yisrael Salanter zt”l used to hold his finger near a flame to feel a brief pain and help him feel a spiritual fire within. He used his higher level imagination to then extrapolate from the pain of his finger to the pain of yiras Hashem. Note however that most of us in this generation do not have strong enough imaginative faculties to make use of this ability.*

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work, because a gentile himself does not contain the very kind of self-love that a Jewish soul needs.

This form of therapy cannot assist a Jew, because the method of imagery employed is based completely on falsehood. Although the person may try to believe such imagery out of desperation, deep down, his inner soul knows the truth. Essentially, such ‘lower level imagination’ is employing the *yetzer hora*’s power to conjure up a false reality.

Many of such “guided-imagery” therapies rely on ‘lower level imagination’, in a way similar to the Snake’s persuading Chava that she could become “like Hashem” if she ate from the *Eitz HaDa’as*. In turn, this sin that Chava and Adam committed allowed an evil form of knowledge into the world which confuses people and conceals the truth.⁸⁶

The Torah’s Way of Using the Power of Imagination in Therapy

In contrast, a Torah-approved way of using the power of imagination to help someone who feels unloved is to teach him how to use his ‘higher level imagination’ to draw forth the inherent self-love that is contained deep within his Jewish soul. Though one’s self-love may be concealed, it still exists in its potential form, and one can use the imagination to draw it out by mentally visualizing it. To access self-love, a person may be taught to remind himself and work on believing that he has a *neshamah* (Divine soul). He can work at accepting and internalizing the truth that it is simply his physical body which is holding him back from feeling this self-love. A person can then use his imagination to visualize his *neshamah* being **revealed** from its potential state to its actual form.

This practice has the power to succeed because it is based on the *emes* (truth). In this way, a person can use his imagination to reveal his *potential* self-love and bring it down from his soul into his body, thereby exposing it to reality.

The *Eitz HaDa’as* was called the “tree of good and evil knowledge.”⁸⁷ The good kind of *da’as* refers to the ‘higher level imagination’ (outlined above), whereby a person uses tangible and revealed knowledge in order to access the holiness within. In contrast, the evil kind of *da’as* within the *Eitz HaDa’as* refers to ‘lower level imagination’, which confuses a person into thinking that truth is falsehood and falsehood is reality, thereby leading him to use his *ratzon* to chase after sin.

In Summary

⁸⁶ *Sforno to Bereishis 3:1*

⁸⁷ *Beraishis 1:9*

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On the one hand, our imagination – in the form of ‘lower level imagination’ - can be dangerous, misleading and problematic. On the other hand, our imagination – in the form of ‘higher level imagination’ - can be used for holy purposes and can be spiritually beneficial.

The *yetzer tov* can help us use our ‘higher level imagination’ to transform something positive in our souls from its potential form into its active state. Thus, our ‘higher level imagination’ can be used to drive our emotions and our actions to further Hashem’s will. In contrast, the *yetzer hora* employs our ‘lower level imagination’ as a tool to dominate over our minds, confusing us and blocking us from identifying Hashem’s *emes*. We may then be subject to the risk of chasing after fantasy or sin.

In other words, our imagination can serve a positive function only when it is not severed from reality but rather is serving to **reveal** something that already **exists**. In contrast, ‘lower level imagination’ tries to incite our emotions and clouds our better judgment, convincing us to conjure up or chase after something fabricated and lacking in truthfulness.

A person whose mind is governed by ‘lower level imagination’ is ignorant of the fact that he is essentially falling for the Snake’s ploy and chasing after a false reality, essentially replicating the primal sin of Creation.

With the help of Hashem, we will continue to elaborate on the power of imagination in the upcoming chapters. May we merit Hashem’s help to avoid the dangers of our ‘lower level imagination’ overtaking our minds, and to instead focus only on using the power of imagination for the purpose of holiness.

2.2 | Experiencing Life By Existence Or By Imagination

Holy and Evil Imagination Are Both Rooted In Yaakov and Esav

There is a source to everything in the holy Torah. The source of the power of imagination is found by the story of Yaakov and Esav in the Torah.

Man is called “*adam*”, while Esav is called “*Edom*”; Chazal state⁸⁸ that the other nations of the world are not called man/*adam*. Esav got the infamous title *Edom* because he demanded that Yaakov pour the red lentils down his throat when he was starving; red in Hebrew is *edom*.

There is another reason why Esav is called *Edom*. The word *Edom* also comes from the word *dimayon* (imagination). Esav wasn’t considered to be a person, since Chazal say that the nations who come from Esav are not considered ‘man’/*adam*; if so, why is he even titled anything? It was because he made himself seem similar to what a person is supposed to be like. This was through his ability of *medameh*, to resemble. To compare, resemble or make oneself similar are all terms for *medameh* – they are all ways to use the evil power of *dimayon*/imagination.

This helps us understand a confusing story in the Torah. Esav was the first-born, and it seems that he was deserving of the blessings that his father wanted to give him. How was Yaakov able to trick him into selling it to him? Wasn’t this unfair to Esav?

The answer to this is because Esav used the power of *medameh* to make himself resemble the ideal kind of person, while in reality, he was not. Yaakov used the power of *medameh* as well to dress up like Esav and get the blessings, but this was not the same kind of *medameh* that Esav represents. Yaakov used the power of *medameh* to reveal the truth, which was that it was he who deserved the blessings, not Esav. This was because Yaakov received the rights to the first-born through a sale, which was justified; therefore, at the time of the blessings, it was he who deserved it, not Esav. He was therefore allowed to use the power of *medameh* by making himself look similar to Esav, because he was doing so in the sake of the truth.

He did this precisely because Esav’s whole power is the evil kind of *medameh*, and therefore, Yaakov used *medameh* for a holy purpose in order to counter the evil power of *medameh* of Esav. By doing so he took what was rightfully his; he used *medameh* to reveal the truth. (Although his father Yitzchok wanted to give the blessings to Esav, and Yaakov knew about this and initially refused to trick him, still, in the end he received the blessings by using *medameh* for this holy purpose).

88 *Yevamos 61b*

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What is the difference between the way that Esav used *medameh* with the way that Yaakov used *medameh*?

When Yaakov used *medameh* to dress up like Esav, he wasn't creating anything new. He was revealing the truth, which was that he was the true first born. Rashi says that really Yaakov was supposed to exit the womb first, because he was conceived before Esav. Yaakov used *medameh* to receive what was rightfully his. Esav used *medameh* to create a new situation, because since he wasn't supposed to get the blessings – for he was not the true firstborn – his demand for the blessings wasn't justified; he made himself appear as the firstborn [by exiting the womb first], while in reality, he was the faker and the undeserving one.

Here we can see when that *medameh* is used to reveal what's here, it is a good and holy use of *medameh*, but when it is used as a means to create something new, it is evil.

Death Only Occurs To Our Imagination

There is a deep point contained in this.

When something ceases to function, we call this death. When something is functioning, it is considered to be alive. What is death, though? And what exactly is it that dies when “death” occurs?

It is really only imagination which dies! Our wisdom of our mind never dies; it is written, “Wisdom sustains its owner”⁸⁹. Death only happens to one's imagination!

How does this happen? When it is totally clear to a person that imagination has ended, this signals the death to the imagination. When imagination dies, that is how it gets fixed!

When a person experiences life only through the prism of his imagination and he never realized this, then death to him will feel like the death of his reality [because such a person thinks that imagination is reality]. But when a person discovers that it is only imagination which dies - not his actual existence - then death will feel to him how “from a wound itself comes the recovery.”

Death is connected with the first sin in Creation. Adam and Chavah were warned that they would die if they would eat from the tree. Adam was convinced to eat from the tree because he wanted to be like Hashem; in other words, his imagination caused him to want to eat from it. “*For on the day you eat from it you shall surely die.*” The “death” which occurred when he ate from the tree was that he exited his mind and entered instead into imagination. To leave the mind and enter into the imagination is really a description of death!

⁸⁹ *Koheles* 7: 12

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The actual mind in a person is his very life (“*Wisdom sustains its owner*”), while the imagination, which is a fake reality, is not real - and thus it not considered to be “life”. From an inner perspective, Adam didn’t “die” after 930 years of living on this world – he “died” as soon as he ate from the tree, because it was then that he left his mind and entered into imagination. It appeared that he was alive for 930 years, but that too was being imagined. Mankind has entered a deathlike kind of existence ever since the sin.

There is no such thing as death to our actual mind. Our minds cannot die. In the future, we will see that “*We were like dreamers*”. We will then see that death is only occurs to our imagination – but it does not affect our actual existence.

To illustrate what we mean, let’s say a person doesn’t have children, and he has a dream that he had a child. only for the child to die soon after being born. He wakes up from the nightmare. Now he’s back in real life, where he doesn’t have a child. Does he think now that the reason why he doesn’t have a child now is because he had a child in the dream that died? If he entertains such a thought he’s viewing life through imagination! The reality is that he doesn’t have a child because he never had one to begin with, and it has nothing to do with the bad dream he had.

Chazal say that the righteous are considered alive even when they die, while the wicked are considered dead even while they are alive. The depth of this matter is that a righteous person lives through his real mind, while a wicked person lives through his imagination. A wicked person, who lives through his imagination, is really living a deathlike kind of existence, even though it appears as if he’s alive. But he’s really living a dream; he’s walking on two feet, but he is living an imaginary and dreamlike kind of existence.

A Mind Controlled By Imagination

After Adam’s sin, the world entered into a state of imagination. We are really all living in a world within an imagination!

On a more subtle note, this is the depth of our current exile, which is called the exile of Edom. Edom comes from the word *dimayon* (imagination).

When a person is in a dream, he’s imagining everything. But a person, through his imagination, is also in a dreamlike state, even while he’s fully awake. Just like a person can have a dream that he dies, so do most people experience death in their life – when they are caught up in their imagination! There are people who never left their imagination their entire life, so their entire life is spent in a deathlike kind of existence.

If a person never left the imagination, he lives his whole life through his imagination and then dies in that frame of mind. Even when his soul comes back down again as a *gilgul* (reincarnation) he is still in his imagination, and the process keeps repeating itself. His very existence, throughout all his lifetimes, is being experienced through his imagination!

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If a person wants to leave this kind of existence, he needs to develop a holy mind, which is by refining his mind through the wisdom of the Torah. There is no other way – any other way is just being imagined.

Imaginations Fools The Mind

It is written, “*And the eyes of Leah were brittle.*” The words of Chazal are well-known: The rumors were that Leah would marry Esav, and that Rachel would get Yaakov. Leah feared this and cried so much in prayer that her eyebrows fell out from stress.

The depth behind this matter is that Leah’s fear of marrying Esav was due to her imagination. She heard rumors that she would marry Esav, so her whole fear wasn’t based on reality; it was based on her imagination. She wasn’t seeing reality as it is; she was seeing a made up reality, which led her to become afraid. This is exactly imagination – when a person sees something, but he’s not seeing the actual reality.

Where else do we find this? Chavah saw the *Eitz Hada’as* that the fruits were “good”. She saw that it was good, but in reality, it was not. She was only seeing that it was good through her imagination.

The only way a person can really see reality is through using his real mind. This is also called *eini haseichel*, “eyes of the intellect”, (a term used by the *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*).

If a person never learned how to leave the imagination, he lives every part of his life spent in imagination. Even when we learn Torah it can all be just in our imagination! (On a deep note though, every Jew’s soul still has some real part of the mind left in it that is unaffected by imagination.)

We must realize that imagination is not just another problem our soul can have. It can fool a person *entirely*.

A liar isn’t believed even when he speaks the truth. Why? It is because even when he says the truth, the truth isn’t part of him, so even when he speaks the truth, it’s not really the truth.

Why do people have such a hard time living a truthful kind of life? On a superficial level, it is because it is hard for people to concentrate on what’s important in life. But there is a more inner reason: because even when a person thinks, he usually isn’t thinking, but just imagining a thought. Because people imagine so much, they have a hard time making use of their real power of thought.

For example, children get distracted very easily. A child is heading to go somewhere and then he meets a friend, getting distracted totally from what he planned to do. This is actually because a child doesn’t think – a child lives in imagination. A child always thinks that something is similar, which is a use of the power *medameh*; that is why children are jumpy.

Developing The Mind

Let us think about this a little more. A person consists of three factors: the actions, the emotions and the thoughts. These are three parts to our soul.

If a person's actions are based upon his imagination – he acts based on what he imagines - it can be said of him that he is mentally unstable. If a person all day or most of the day thinks that his imagination is a real action, this is clearly not healthy. All of us tend to imagine a little, but if it's only a little bit, a person is still able to have a normal life. But when the imagination gets a little overboard than the usual amount, that is when a person has a real problem: he leaves his natural state and lives a life of imagination. If this is the case, such a person is not healthy. We aren't addressing such kinds of intense issues here.

We are discussing here a more subtle kind of a problem: when people experience their emotions through their imagination. This is apparent when a person wants something and because he wants it so much, he imagines that he has it already. This we can see clearly from a child. A child wants a certain toy and thinks that he has it already; a little girl sees a doll in the window of a toy store and wishes so much she could have it that he demands, "I *must* have it!" The older a person becomes, the more his mind matures and he sees that just because he wants something, that doesn't mean he must have it.

In relevance to us, what happens when we get older? Are we gaining a new and mature kind of mind, or are we still thinking like a child (except for the fact that the variables have changed and now we want different things)?

When we were first children, we learned everything using our imagination. We received all our Torah knowledge through our imagination as well. Are we still using our old imagination to learn Torah, or are we currently developing a whole new kind of mind to think?

Usually, people are continuing how they thought as children, and they remain their whole life that way; the only change is that as adults, people want things that are simply bigger and better. Although adults are smarter than children, their thinking can actually be the same exact as a child's thinking. The only gain that an adult has is that he has expanded his imagination a lot more since he was a child. Although it is true that an adult knows that there is such a thing as imagination, and that he can't get everything he wants - and thus he learns that you have to be realistic in life - still, he can still be living the same kind of life as a child. He is still living a childish kind of life. A person can be at the ripe old age of seventy and still remain with the same kind of thinking he had since he was a child.

This is many times, it can happen that people think that what they have imagined is real. It is because people are so used to thinking through their imagination that eventually there comes a point where people confuse imagination with reality. Just like a person acts upon his thoughts, so does a person act upon his imagination – when he thinks that imagination is the reality. In fact, a person might even think that what he is imagining is more real than even

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reality, and he thinks that there is no greater wisdom to be found than in the power of imagination.

For this very reason – and it is quite clear – a person doesn't also sense the existence of Hashem, because the only reality he knows of is the imagination, and he cannot sense any other reality other than what he imagines; he can't even sense the reality of Hashem's existence!

Imagination makes a person think that what he imagines is real, and it doesn't show a person reality the way it really is. If a person lives his life through imagination, he only knows how something exists through his imagination; all he can do is **imagine** how something exists.

Even when two people look at the same thing, they never see the same thing – if they are both living lives through their imagination. An example of this we can see is by Queen Esther, whom each nation claimed looked to like their own, while in reality, she did not look like any of them, due to her unique complexion.

Senses Controlled By The Imagination

Now that these points are clear, the question we must begin to ask ourselves is: How can we leave our imagination and instead enter into our real mind?

A person knows he exists, simply because he exists. We also sense our own existence, but our senses are not the only way we know we exist. This is because our senses can sense reality, but they can also be imagined. So we cannot know we exist based on our senses alone. We know we exist -- simply because we know so.

There are many things a person can imagine, but one thing we do not imagine is our own existence. We all know we exist; we are not experiencing this through our imagination. Your senses might even be imagined, but your existence is not being imagined. Why? It is because your power to recognize that you exist is in a place in the soul that is above your ability of imagination, and therefore, your imagination cannot affect your existence.

How do we know this is true?

Imagination is called *medameh*, which also means to compare. The entire concept of the imagination uses a human ability to compare things [at its root]. How does a person compare? He sees one thing and then another, and he can see that the second thing is similar to the first thing. But when it comes to a person, can you know he exists because you compare something else to him? There is no such thing. A person knows he isn't someone else. If I am not him, then I must be me.

What we are describing here is really a description of the innermost point of our soul; it is also called the *yechidah*, and it is otherwise known as the power of *levad* – “alone.”

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A person needs to realize that his senses and his existence are not one. The senses are in a place in the soul that is covering over the recognition of our existence, so we need to remove the senses and see that our existence lies underneath it all, in the inner layer of our self.

By realizing one's existence, two things are accomplished: first of all, the person has revealed his actual essence, and in addition to this (which is no less important), a person has revealed reality: the depth of his own existence. Through this self-recognition, a person is able to come to recognize the ultimate existence, which is the existence of Hashem.

When a person commits a sin, it can always be felt through one or more of his five senses. This shows us that there is a connection between sin and the senses: the entire concept of the senses was brought about through sin. As soon as Chavah sinned by eating from the *etz hada'as*, creation was altered and now people only sense their existence through their senses. When a person experiences life through his imagination, he loses the self-recognition of his existence.

Your Existence Is Above Your Imagination

By contrast, when you recognize that your existence is above the reach of your senses and above your imagination, it is only then that you can have a real self-recognition. This is also the only way how you are able to come to recognize Hashem's existence. Only your actual existence can show you what reality is. Our senses aren't guaranteed to last; people lose their vision and hearing in their old age. This is actually because the senses are based upon imagination, which doesn't last.

Reality itself never dies. The very concept of death is really all in imagination, as we explained; because death only happens to our imaginary existence, not to our actual existence. Chazal say that Hashem created a light on the first day in which a person can use it to see from one end of the world to another; why don't we have access to this light? It is really because our vision is through our imagination, and imagination is not capable of seeing so far.

It is for this reason that a person can't either hear or smell something on the other side of the world; it is because our senses are only through our imagination, and the imagination is limited.

Most People Are Living Lives Of Imagination

We can expand this discussion a lot more upon the words of Chazal, but our main point here is to explain the root. Our senses are experienced through our imagination, and thus a person who only feels reality through his senses is living a life led by imagination. When a person looks at something, he gets caught up in his senses and loses focus. Sometimes

shutting one's eyes can help one concentrate a little, but it's still just a sensual kind of life: using one eye to see positive, another eye to see the negative, smelling with the nose, hearing with the ears...it's a scattered way of thinking. The problem with such a life is not that the person's mind is scattered. The problem is that the person is living in imagination – and imagination is split up into the five different senses.

Chazal say⁹⁰, “The soul has five names: *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah, and Yechidah.*” The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that it is only our imagination which makes us think that there are five different parts to our soul. Really, we have one existence; our existence is not split up into five different parts. Our imagination though comes and makes us think that we have five different parts to our existence. Our existence is really one unit.

Ever since the first sin, people are usually only aware of their senses, but not their actual existence. A person's intrinsic existence is very hidden from himself, and most people therefore end up spending their whole lives instead through their imagination.

Chazal say that most people have to endure some Gehinnom in the next world; this is because the angel appointed over Gehinnom is called *Dumah*, which is similar to the word *dimayon*, imagination. It is not because people sin that they have to endure Gehinnom; it is more than that. It is really because people are spending their entire existence in their imagination. When a person leaves his mind and descends to the lower part of his psyche – the emotions – this is the root of imagination. As we explained before, *middos* (emotions) has the same letters as the word *medameh*, imagination, because imagination is the root of the emotions.

A person has to reveal his own existence, and this cannot be done through any of the five senses; the existence of a person is not felt through any of the physical senses, because it is above the senses. It is an ability in and of itself.

When a person reveals his actual existence, he reveals a whole new reality than what he was used to living with until that point. But this does not mean that a person has to reveal a “new” depth to his life, or a “new” idea or a “new” source of vitality. These definitions do not bring out the concept. It is really a *revelation* of your own existence; upon revealing it, a person will realize that whatever he perceived until now was only through the lens of imagination.

Once a person reveals his actual existence, he sees and hears things from his own existence, and the same goes for the rest of his senses: his own *senses* will also be felt through his actual existence. These are highly developed senses which never die – they spread to the rest of one's reality, and from there, to the rest of all senses that are holy. These are higher kinds of senses, illuminated the light of one's intrinsic existence.

2.3 | The Detrimental Effects of Imagination

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"Yaakov" and "Leah" – The Roots Of Imagination

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of [higher] imagination, which we have already mentioned before: one kind of imagination is when we compare knowledge, and the other kind of imagination is when a person compares two actions with one another.

Right now, we are speaking about the third, evil kind of imagination, which is also manifest in two ways.

One kind of evil imagination is when a person distorts the truth. An example of this is written by sefer *Mesillas Yesharim*, who writes that a person can feel like he is walking in the dark and imagine that objects are dangerous people.

This is the kind of imagination that *Yaakov* used when he used *medameh* to look similar to Esav; he distorted the truth [except that he knew how to use this power for good]. A person has this ability in to distort information - because the original fact and the new, invented idea look *similar*. Since *Yaakov* used this power of *medameh*, is known in the *sefarim hakedoshim* as an ability called "*Yaakov*", and it can be used for good or evil [as we will explain].

Another kind of imagination is when a person imagines that something exists, when it really doesn't. For example, a person is walking in the dark at night and he thinks he sees a snake in front of him; he has used his imagination to make up something new. This kind of imagination is termed "*Leah*" – and it can also be used either for good or evil.

The Connection Between Leah and Imagining New Information

The second kind of imagination, making up new information, is called "Leah." What does this have to do with Leah?

Leah imagined that she would marry Esav. In the kind of imagination we find by her, she didn't exaggerate something, but she made up something totally new; she made up that she is destined for Esav (On a subtle note, she was destined for Esav because of her tendency to imagine in this evil way, but because she davened and cried so much that this shouldn't happen, she rectified her imagination and merited *Yaakov* instead).

With this kind of imagination, a person imagines something totally new that does not exist. For example, a person wants a car and imagines that he already has it. It's not that he's imagining that his old car has become new; that would be the first kind of imagination. In the second kind of imagination, a person makes it up totally.

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Leah was able to take this kind of imagination and use it for good. She was really destined for Esav, and by the natural course of events she wouldn't have become one of the Matriarchs; each of the forefathers had only one designated wife. Sarah was destined for Avraham. Rivkah was designated for Yitzchok. Rachel was the future soul mate of Yaakov. Leah was not in the equation – she was really destined to marry the wicked Esav. Through her prayers and tears, though, she altered her destiny, and she became instead a second wife to Yaakov. She came up with something entirely new – she went from her future of remaining a non-Jew to being a Jew, and to become a fourth matriarch. Leah used this power of *medameh* for good.

Because she came up with something new, “*medameh*” when it comes to coming up with something new is therefore generally referred to as “Leah.”

The Downfall Of The Imagination Is When Our Emotions Are In Control Of Us

In terms of our soul, this applies to us as follows. In the mind, we have the three mental abilities of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*, and our mind also contains the power of imagination. When does the imagination become evil?

This can be in either one of two ways: either as a materialistic kind of imagination, or when the imagination makes the emotions take over.

The soul [generally] consists of three layers – action, emotion and thought. When the thoughts become negatively affected, they can either become demoted to the level of emotion and become controlled by them, or they can fall even lower into the actions. In either case, imagination is the cause.

When the thoughts fall to the level of the emotions, this is synonymous with the concept of using the imagination to make up totally “new” information. When the thoughts fall even lower to the level of the actions, this becomes the kind of imagination which “changes” information.

These are two different ways how the mind can fall from its level: either by imagining something totally **novel**, or in a different way - by **changing and distorting** the information. “*Yaakov*” is the term that implies imagination which changes information, and it is when the thoughts fall to the level of action. “*Leah*” is the term that implies the power to make up new information, which is when the thoughts fall to the level of emotions.

Now that this is clear, we can continue to the next step.

Trying To Resemble Hashem

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Before we explain how to fix the problems with our imagination, let us first describe what exactly the problem is.

The two kinds of imagination really represent two root functions in our life: our mission to improve our middos, and to deal with the fact that man was created from “dirt.” Each of these plays a role in our life’s mission.

A person has a general avodah to cleave to Hashem, through perfecting his middos. Chazal say that the way one can ‘resemble’ Hashem is through having good middos (“hevay domeh lo”). That is one aspect of a person – his middos, which he must use to emulate Hashem.

Another aspect of a person was that he was created from the dirt of the earth; he has a body, which is the way the design of man. This shows us that there is another way for a person to emulate Hashem – not through his middos, but through the way he is designed. All the 613 mitzvos are the way a person is supposed to look in the spiritual sense, just like the physical body is made up of 613 bones and sinews. So the mitzvos, which are done by our body, are what represents the second part of our mission on this world.

These are two ways for how a person can come to emulate Hashem: through the middos/emotions, and through the mitzvos, which are performed by the body.

The first kind of evil imagination [changing and distorting information] can be fixed through doing mitzvos. The second kind of evil imagination [inventing new information] can be fixed through hevay domeh lo, “resembling the ways of Hashem”.

Cleaving To The Middos Of Hashem

When a person uses his *middos* and emotions to emulate Hashem, he must realize that his *middos* come from Hashem. If one thinks that his *middos* are his own, he is creating something from new, which is really evil imagination.

The *middos* which we aspire to have are *middos* which come from Hashem. They are not the same emotions we are used to. For example, the *middah* of Avraham Avinu is *ahavah* (love). The love that he had for Hashem was a revelation of Hashem’s *middah* of *ahavah*; it is not the same kind of love that a person has when he likes a certain type of food. It is a whole different kind of emotion.

Chazal say that a cat is modest and a stork is kind. Is this the same *middos* of modesty or kindness in a person? The *middos* of a person come from his *cheilek eloka mimaal*, from the fact that he is “a piece of G-d”. The *middos* found in a person are totally different *middos* and emotions than the good *middos* we find by certain animals.

If a person thinks his *middos* are his own, then he will have good *middos* and bad *middos*. But when a person reveals the root of his *middos*, all his *middos* will be good.

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This is really the depth of working on our *middos*. Working on ourselves doesn't simply mean that we have to transform our bad *middos* into good *middos*, for example, by turning our anger into patience; it means that we reveal the root of our *middos* – the *middos* of Hashem - which is when we connect our *middos* to Hashem's *middos*. In other words, the way we emulate Hashem is by revealing His *middos* within ourselves.

That is how we use and repair the first kind of [higher] imagination/*medameh*: by 'resembling' Hashem, through improving our *middos*, in the perspective that was described here.

The second way we use and repair our imagination is different: when we use our materialistic body to emulate Hashem. This is practically reached when we use our body to perform the *mitzvos*. This is not the concept of revealing Hashem from within us, because Hashem is not materialistic, and therefore we cannot reveal Him from within our materialistic side of existence. But it is a different angle of revealing Hashem - it is to shine the revelation of Hashem onto our materialistic body (through doing the *mitzvos*).

The Dismal Situation In The World Today

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a) say that the world will last for six thousand years.

Which world are we in? (There are four worlds – a world of action, a world of *middos*/emotions, a world of thought, and a world which is more sublime than even that.) If Adam wouldn't have eaten from the tree, we would have all been living in a world of thought. "*Wisdom sustains its owner*". That was the way things were supposed to be. This was revealed in some way at the giving of the Torah, and it will again be revealed in the future.

But because of the sin, we remained on this six-thousand year world – a world of *middos*/emotions. On the other hand, we are also living in an even lower world – a world of action. One of the most difficult things to understand is: Where are we? Are we in a world of emotions, or are we in a world of action?

The answer is that we are in both, and thus we have the advantages and disadvantages of both. We will explain this.

Before the sin, had Adam not eaten from the *etz hada'as*, we would have lived in a world of thought, which is a higher world than the worlds of emotions and actions. The sin caused Adam to leave the world of thought and instead enter into a world of imagination, either for emotions or for actions. Death, which came to the world as a result of sin, is essentially a curse caused by imagination; it is a fall from the level of thought to the level of imagination.

The two kinds of imagination – exaggerating information, and making up new information – are all the result of Adam's sin. If imagination would have entered the world as a separate force in Creation besides for the other forces, then it wouldn't be such a

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problem. But the problem is that ever since the first sin, imagination came and corrupted the very fabric of the world. It has created a new reality for the world, making us think that the imagined reality is the actual reality. On top of that, we have imagined more and more – since the sin, we have been piling up on ourselves another imagination upon another imagination!

The depth of the dire situation of today's world is that we are in an *imagination within another imagination*. We have even distorted and added even more changes to the new realities we have come up with. Our lives are full of imagination based upon another imagination.

It is a long time since Adam's sin. The world has changed a lot since then, and it is constantly changing – and it is all another imagination upon another imagination.

For example, you can ask someone, "Why do you do this?" and he responds, "Because that's what my father did." And why did his father do it? Because that's what his grandfather did – and why did his grandfather do it? If you trace it all back to the source, it was made up, and upon that it was only changed more and more until it got to be to what it was today – a total fabrication...

This shows us the impact of imagination on our soul. The Snake convinced Adam and Chavah to eat from the *etz hada'as* because they thought they would become like Hashem and be able to create universes. Where did such a desire come from? It is force in a person to desire a new, fabricated reality. What happens if a person imagines that he is creating worlds? It starts off as a total fantasy and then gets changed into different versions. All the changes being made are just distorting what's already in the imagination, fluffing it up even more than it already is.

False Reality

This brings out the difference between holy imagination and evil imagination which he mentioned before. Before, we mentioned that there are two ways how imagination is holy: through using our logic to compare facts, or through comparing one action we saw by our teachers to another action of our teacher.

When a person uses his logic to compare facts, what he learns from his teachers is true information. But when a person uses imagination in the second way, which is to deduce information on your own, you might still not be accurate; what you are taught by your teachers is true, but you don't always understand the depth behind how your teacher acts.

When a person uses imagination to compare something to another in this way (the second way), the person is actually not living in reality. Let us explain why this is so.

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When a person compares facts, even if he doesn't make a perfectly accurate comparison, he is at least dealing with reality. He might be a little inaccurate, but at least he is involved with something real to begin with. But if the whole comparison is based on something made up, then this person never dealt with reality, so it's a much worse problem.

If we think about it, we are really living in such a way. We tend to copy and compare one thing to another, but it's all a fabrication that we make up. What happens when we do this? We won't want to accept if someone tells us that we are off-base. Maybe a person will accept that his comparison is incorrect, but he will never want to accept that his whole entire way of thinking was incorrect to begin with, because no one wants to negate what they think is their own reality.

Any reality which we know of today – except for an inner reality which is so deep within us that it is very hidden – is based on a non-reality! All our comparisons we make between one thing and another is based on a false reality that was one time concocted. It's all imagination on top of imagination.

When this idea is absorbed by the soul, it can really shake a person up. The question is what we do with that discovery. Will we use this realization to revitalize ourselves, or will we just tremble about it?

Imagination Ruins The Mind As Well

Now we can understand with greater depth why the *yetzer hora's* whole power is with imagination. The *yetzer hora* is able to convince a person to make up new information when it comes to actions, emotions or thoughts.

The *yetzer hora* doesn't teach a person to live in imagination. It makes up totally new information, and upon that adds and distorts the information more than it already is. A person's mind trusts this distorted information and makes comparisons based on it, and this greatly ruins a person's mind.

Before, we mentioned two kinds of evil imagination – imagination that uses the emotions is when a person makes up new information, and imagination which involves the actions takes information and distorts it.

But when the thoughts as well are affected by imagination, the detriment is much worse. When this happens, all the information we learned from our teachers – even what was true – becomes corrupted and false from the imagination. The imagination causes a person to make inaccurate comparisons based on the information he knows, because the very information becomes corrupted.

When this happens, the teacher of a person becomes his *yetzer hora*! The *yetzer hora* is an evil teacher who misleads a person into falsity. With imagination, the *yetzer hora* is able not

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only to corrupt one's actions and emotions, but even one's very thinking mind gets stolen for evil purposes.

Amalek, the Erev Rav and The Yetzer Hora – The Evil Power To Look Similar

It is written, “*The first of the nations is Amalek.*” Amalek was the first nation to fight against the Jewish people, and because of this nation, other nations were able to copy suit and do the same. In doing so, they enabled other nations to compare themselves to Amalek, starting up with the Jewish people the same way that Amalek did. Amalek thus enabled the other nations to use their evil power of *medameh*.

The evil of Amalek was that they created something new. In essence, it is not really impossible to fight the Jewish people, but Amalek came and created a new reality: It's possible to fight the Jews. Amalek taught the other nations that they can fight the Jews – this nation is the teacher of the other nations, and there is no greater false reality than this. They used the evil power of *medameh*, which is to create new realities that were previously nonexistent.

There is another evil that exists, the *Erev Rav* (the “Mixed Multitude” of Egyptians who left Egypt together with the Jewish people). These were people who looked like members of the Jewish people, but in reality they were not. Only the Jewish people were in the plan of Creation; the members of the *Erev Rav* are not part of the souls of the Jewish people.

In Persia as well, after the events of the Purim story, there were non-Jews who tried to save themselves by claiming that they are of the Jewish people. All of these instances was the use of the evil power of *medameh* – the power to create new realities which Hashem did not intend. How are the Jewish people different from these fakers, the *Erev Rav*? The souls of the Jewish people are all part and parcel with the wisdom of Hashem; “*Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people are one.*” The *Erev Rav* used the power of *medameh*, making themselves “similar” to the Jewish people, but they are not part of the collective wisdom of Hashem.

This is the prime example of the evil of imagination – *medameh*, which also means to compare and resemble. All the forces of evil -- Amalek, the *Erev Rav* and the *yetzer hora* – use the evil power of *medameh*. Amalek creates false realities, which is evil *medameh*. The *Erev Rav* make themselves look similar to us, which is also an evil kind of *medameh*. And evil itself, the *yetzer hora*, uses *medameh*/imagination to convince a person to sin.

To summarize what we have said until now (we still haven't explained yet how to actually fix and improve our imagination), there are generally three kinds of *medameh*: in the actions, in the emotions and in the mind.

If we allow imagination to be in charge of our abilities, then we don't stand upon reality.

2.4 | Guiding Your Imagination

Two Kinds Of Imagination: Exaggerating Facts and Making Up New Information

We mentioned so far that there are two kinds of evil imagination: imagination which comes from the male aspect of the soul, which is an evil usage of the power in the soul called “*Yaakov*,” and the imagination which comes from the feminine aspect of the soul, which is an evil usage of the power in the soul called “*Leah*.” The male aspect of the soul uses a kind of imagination which takes already existing information and exaggerates it, while the feminine aspect in the soul is responsible for a different kind of imagination: to come up with new concepts that do not exist.

We will explain this more in greater detail and then, with the help of Hashem, we can speak of the solution to both kinds of evil imagination, which is the goal we are leading to.

What Esav Has Inherited To His Descendants

The non-Jewish nations of the world, who descend from Esav, have inherited the second kind of evil imagination – “*Leah*.” This kind of evil imagination is how to guide their power of imagination.

This non-Torah method is something as follows (this isn’t always the exact scenario, but in every case the line of thinking is always the same): They tell a person, “Imagine that there is a light entering your body and that it is surrounding you. Now imagine that it has entered you. Now imagine that it is purging the evil inside you. Now imagine that the evil has been emptied from you.”

Where does this “light” come from?! It is being entirely imagined. The person is using his imagination to come up with absurd new ideas that do not exist.

There are even many books written about how to use this kind of imagination, but the point of all these books is the same: to get a person to imagine something which doesn’t exist and then “purify” the evil within him by “purging” it.

If they would tell him to look at a candle and imagine that its light is entering him and purifying him, that would be one thing. If that would be the case, then at least a person is taking something that exists and exaggerating it. But that is not what they do. They are telling people to imagine something which does not exist at all and to base their lives on this.

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The non-Torah methods have unfortunately entered our society and are extinguishing the light of our holy souls. People know that imagination can be useful and holy, and therefore they justify themselves: “What’s wrong with doing this? Who says it’s against the Torah?”

Even if such a practice would not be forbidden by the Torah (we won’t get into the issue or not – that is a discussion for itself), it is detrimental to a Jew’s soul, because it brings us down to a lower level. Everything that a Jew is supposed to do has basis to it, while the non-Torah kind of imagination is based on nothing but total imagination. Non-Jewish imagination-based therapy is lacking any solid basis whatsoever; it’s all made up from nothing. Even if it’s not actual idol worship (which it might indeed be), it still resembles idol worship, because it is creating some new entity that doesn’t exist – which is the whole concept of idol worship.

It’s clear and it’s a given. There is no basis to permit one to use these non-Jewish therapies.

Using The Power Of Imagination To Change Information

Another kind of evil imagination is when a person exaggerates information. This power can be used for good or evil. How?

Superficially, to distort information in a holy way means to change something from bad to good, and to distort in an evil way is to change from good to bad. That is generally true.

But to be more precise, to change the information is essentially the same as *returning* the information to the way it was to begin with. We will explain how this is so.

If something has to be changed, then it was because something came and changed it from the way it was supposed to be, and it has to be restored to the way it was originally.

That is a Jew’s power in using imagination for holiness. A non-Jew only uses imagination to make up new things. Even when a non-Jew is attempting to use imagination and distort the information, he doesn’t restore it to the way it used to be, and he makes up something new. But a Jew has the power in his soul to use imagination simply to *restore* the information to the way it is supposed to be, and this is the holy way to “change” information – not to “*change*” it per se, but to restore it to the way it is supposed to be. The change to the information is not making up something new, but it is merely restoring it to what it is supposed to be like.

The Torah Approach To Dealing With Desires And Lusts

Let’s say a person has a problem with lusts, and he goes to a secular therapist to get help. The therapist tells him: “Imagine that there is a light surrounding you; now imagine that it is

entering you and purging you of your lust.” There are people who say that they were helped by this and that they succeeded to some extent in weakening their desires. They call this therapy “self-subjugation”. Even if a person claims that it helps him somewhat, it does more harm to him than good. We will explain why.

Every person has some evil desires in himself. How can we fix the problem of desires? The superficial response would be to “get rid” of our desires, through the many different ways that people can do this. But the point of this thinking is, “I have an evil desire, so I have to uproot it.”

The inner solution, however – which is the Torah solution – is to change our attitude about desire. Desire is an emotion in a person which has a root – Hashem Himself. “Hashem desired to dwell on the lower world.” The soul of a person contains desires which are holy, like it is written (*Yeshayahu 26:9*), “*My soul desires You at night.*” Desire in essence is holy, but it can get “stolen” for the wrong reasons.

When a person has an evil desire for something improper, it is just desire being used in the wrong place. The desire in its essence is good, but since the person hasn’t yet revealed its true use, the person only knows how to use the power of desire for evil. The desire is clothed by materialistic pursuits and has been stolen for selfish reasons. The *Yetzer hora*, who resides in a person’s heart, steals one’s desire and uses it for its own reasons. The materialistic pursuits of a person is thus only a garment of the desire, but the desire in essence is holy and G-dly.

How should a person deal with an evil desire that he has? He needs to remove the evil garments that are on top of it and reveal its essence, which is pure.

But the non-Torah approach is: “You have an improper desire? Come for therapy and we will help you get rid of your very power of desire.” The non-Jewish approach is that desire is evil. But this is wrong! To take away the power of desire from a person is like taking the life out of a person! A non-Jew considers desire to be evil, because since he doesn’t have a G-dly part in his soul (the *nefesh Elokus*), he cannot understand how desire can be holy. The only thing a non-Jew knows about desire is how it can be unhealthy, so of course the solution to a non-Jew is to eliminate the power of desire.

But the holy Jewish nation, which have Divine souls from Hashem, have a basic and necessary power to desire something. “*My soul desires You at night.*” By some this is more apparent and by others it is not, but every Jew’s soul has the faculty of desire. It just has to be removed from the evil garments that are covering it. The way to do it is by removing the evil from it, which is by using desire for the right reasons – to desire a closeness with Hashem.

If a therapist wants to take away the power of desire from a person, he might be correct that the person has an evil desire, but by uprooting desire from the person, he is invalidating a basic need in a person.

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How To Use The Holy Imagination

Now we will bring the Torah solution for dealing with the evil that resides in us. There is a way to use our imagination in a holy way and use it to rid ourselves from any evil.

To explain how this works, there is a G-dly light (“*ohr eloki*”) that hovers above a Jew’s head. This light is also present inside a person; the very existence of a person is a *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a portion of Hashem. This G-dly light in a person has the power to remove the evil in a person.

(If a person doesn’t feel a need for this light, he cannot use his imagination for holiness.)

When we use our imagination in this way (to imagine the G-dly light in us), we aren’t making up something new. The G-dly light is something that exists in us, and one can use his imagination to connect to it. Of course, there are other ways to receive this spiritual light - either through learning Torah or through doing the *mitzvos*. But one of the ways we can also have it is through utilizing our imagination.

So far we have mentioned one condition for imagination to be holy: it has to be something which already exists, not something which is being made up. Now we will add on another condition that one needs in order for imagination to be holy: we cannot base our lives on it. Therefore, if someone sits all day and practices holy imagination, he is actually using the evil kind of imagination inherited by Esav.

There are people today who don’t learn any *mussar* and don’t do any of the *Avodas Hashem* of our tradition, and instead they immerse themselves all day in holy imagination. But they are mistaken in this. Imagination can be a part of one’s *Avodas Hashem*, but it cannot be everything, or else it becomes evil.

Unfortunately, in today’s times, there are people who aren’t learned in the Torah, and they have written volumes of imagination-based therapy which are really based on the evil kind of imagination. They even quote Torah sources for some of their ideas, but it is only because they know that Torah Jews want to see the sources for these ideas; they themselves aren’t interested in coming onto the Torah for credibility. They aren’t learned in the Torah and thus they do not know how to really use the imagination. If a person wants to find sources in the Torah, he can find sources for just about anything....he will fool himself and claim that there’s a Torah source for it.

Someone showed me one of these books and I saw that it was written there: “Say a *possuk* before you do this....”

Saying a *possuk* cannot undo the improper use of imagination. It is not the way for a Jew, who has a loftier soul than the other nations of the world. If anyone thinks that this was the way of our ancestors, they are clearly mistaken, and they are contradicted from the very sources they rely on.

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Holy Imagination Must Be Used To Reveal Your Soul

There is a fourth condition in order for imagination to be holy: when we use holy imagination, it should be that we are trying to reveal our *tzelem elokim* (G-dly image) within us.

The power of imagination is rooted in “*kedemuseinu*”, which is one aspect in a person. But the other aspect of a person is “*betzalmeinu*”, that man is created with a *tzelem elokim*. The “*kedemuseinu*” has to be able to reveal the “*betzalmeinu*”; or else we cannot use “*kedemuseinu*”. If a person uses holy imagination but he doesn’t do so with the intention of revealing his *tzelem elokim*, he is just trying to create something new, which is the evil kind of imagination. Our whole intention in using holy imagination is so that we can use it to reveal our soul.

Our soul contains both our good *middos* and our bad *middos*. The good *middos* are located in the higher part of our soul, while the bad *middos* are located in the lower, animalistic part of our soul.

Our happiness, for example, is contained in the innermost part of our soul; “*Splendor and joy in His place.*” When a person is depressed, and he goes to a therapist who doesn’t use Torah-based therapy, what is he told? “Imagine that a light is entering you, and that the light is taking away the sadness from you, and that now you are happy...”

Can a “light” come and take away your sadness? Can it bring you happiness?! The non-Torah approach of imagination might be able to take away a person’s sadness, but it definitely doesn’t bring happiness. Happiness comes from the innermost part of the soul – which is only when one reveals Hashem from within himself.

The only “light” that you can use to bring you happiness is the light of the Creator. When a person uses this light (which we will see later how to use it), the sadness which comes from the animalistic part of the soul is removed, and this reveals the light of the Creator within a person, which brings happiness. But this kind of happiness is the happiness of “*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*” When a person’s imagination comes from the Creator, it is the Creator who is enabling the imagination to be beneficial to him.

Use Torah and Mitzvos To Get Rid Of The Evil Within You

The whole power of holy imagination accomplishes this one thing: to remove what isn’t part of one’s *tzelem elokim* and in its place to reveal the *tzelem elokim*.

On one hand, a person is a *tzelem elokim*. On the other hand, a person is also “dirt from the ground”. We have in us two forces that contradict each other: our *tzelem elokim*, which is all the good in us, and our dirt which we come from, which is all the evil in us.

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When a person uses imagination for holiness, what he is essentially accomplishing is to reveal use his imagination to reveal his *tzelem elokim* from within his “dirt”. We will explain what this means.

In a person, there is his *tzelem elokim*, and then there is his aspect of “dirt”. The imagination is in the point between these two forces, and it can come and shine the *tzelem elokim* onto our “dirt” – in other words, through using our soul, we can affect our own body, and we bring harmony between our *tzelem elokim* and our aspect of “dirt”.

Before, we discussed how the power of thought can drop and become downgraded to the level of either imagination or emotions. We have said that the difference between imagination and emotions is that imagination comes up with something that really does not exist (like when a person wants a car, so he imagines that he has the car), while the emotions don’t make up new information but instead exaggerates the information.

A person’s imagination can either be used for evil, which is when one leads his life based on emotions – or it can be used in a holy way, which can actually revitalize a person.

Our dirt which we are made from in our body contains all our evil, while all our good is contained in our *tzelem elokim*. **It is essentially Torah and mitzvos which shine the light of the *tzelem elokim*** upon the animalistic part of our soul and onto our “dirt” in our body.

One of the ways to use our *tzelem elokim* is through using holy imagination. It is holy because it’s not making up something new, but it is revealing your potential – you are using the *tzelem elokim* that exists within you and shining it onto the animalistic desires of your body.

Holy imagination is essentially to imagine your *tzelem elokim* and to imprint its power onto your imagination. The way to actually do this is for a person to imagine that **this perfection exists in the innermost part of the soul** (either he can imagine it as a G-dly light, or as one of the other terms mentioned in the *sefarim hakedoshim*), **and that it is penetrating the evil within him.**

This is the Torah approach to using the imagination, and anything other than this method is the secular, non-Torah approach which we cannot use.

The Difference Between Holy and Unholy Imagination

The *sefer Chovos HaTalmidim* speaks at length about the power of holy imagination. Some of the examples brought there are to imagine that one is in the *Beis Hamikdash* doing the Avodah, or that he is singing with the angels in Heaven.

. The angels exist, so that is why one is permitted to imagine them. Why must a person use imagination for this, and why is a person allowed to imagine it? It is because a person has a hard time connecting to this reality. By imagining that it is really happening, like when he

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imagines that he is in Heaven and singing with angels, he is able to connect himself to this reality. That is the purpose of holy imagination – to help a person connect to reality which, without imagining it, he would have a hard time connecting to it.

People used to always make use of their imagination in a holy and constructive way. If a father had to miss his child's wedding (like if his flight got cancelled), what did he do? This was before they had recent technology. What did he do? He would imagine that he was there and feel like he was dancing with his son. This is a good kind of imagination, because he wasn't inventing anything new; he knew his son is getting married right now, and he would use his imagination to connect himself to a reality taking place that he couldn't see with his own eyes.

If something exists, one can imagine that he is connecting himself to it. That is when imagination is holy.

There is a danger to this, however, and that is if a person imagines himself singing with the angels, he might try to actually come to picture the angels. If he imagines that he is singing with them, this is fine, but to picture the angels is already going too far.

But if let's say you were once by the Kosel and you want to feel like you're there, you can imagine that you are standing there, and there is nothing wrong with this kind of imagination. This is because you are connecting yourself to something that already happened in your experiences, and you are not making up something new.

When Should A Person Use Imagination?

Now we can, with the help of Hashem, speak about **who** may use his power of imagination.

After a person has learned Torah very in-depth, it is then that his mind is purified. Such a person is able to use his imagination in a holy way.

But in today's generation, it is unfortunately very common to have people who have not even learned any Torah, and these people attempt to use their imagination. Who knows what will become of these people? Their minds were already corrupted to begin with even before they began to use imagination techniques. When such people attempt to use their imagination, their imagination only leads them more and more downward. The result of this is that their minds are being led by their imagination within another imagination. In a way this helps such people somewhat, but the damage they cause themselves is much greater than whatever they gain.

We will give an example of this. Let's say a person has to go for anger management. He realizes that certain situations make him lose his temper. What should he really do?

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He can imagine that very situation that always gets him angry, and imagine the whole scene unfolding itself again, but this time, he imagines that he is not getting angry.

This is a Torah-approved method that is sound and can work, because he is using the G-dly light within himself to hold back his anger. The G-dly light is something that exists in a person, and he can use his imagination to bring it out from within himself.

But if he goes to a secular psychologist, they will tell him something like: “Imagine the stressful scene, and imagine that you are there, but this time you are not getting angry, **because you don’t want** to get angry. If you do this three times, then you will see that by the fourth time it happens, you are less angry.”

There are indeed people who have been helped by this therapy, but they harm themselves more than what they have gained. Why? It is because they have used their imagination which comes from the lowest part in their soul (the *nefesh habehamis*). It is an animalistic way to help someone! Professionals train horses as well not to get angry in the circus and misbehave; people are using the same way they get animals to behave in order to get humans to behave! Even if a person controls his anger in this way, he has harmed his soul in the process, by treating his soul like an animal. He has treated his G-dly soul like a non-Jewish soul, which for sure does more harm than good.

The Torah approach to dealing with anger, however, is that a person must believe that there is a higher power within him that can overcome his tendencies to anger. When a person does this, he is essentially making use of the G-dly light within him. He can imagine the stressful scene unfolding itself again, but instead of getting angry this time, he imagines himself strengthening his *Emunah* and not giving in to anger.

That is the holy usage of imagination.

Practice This Before Your Difficult Situation Comes

Let’s make this very practical now: we will give an exercise to do.

Every time a person has a failure – like if he is sad, or if he is angry, or if he has an evil impulse – he should imagine for himself the very scene which arouses that negative emotion (whether it has already happened, or whether it is imagining a future event), and then he should imagine that the G-dly light within him is holding him back from giving in to the negative reaction.

Chazal say that when the Yetzer hora enters the scene, a person forgets all about his Yetzer Tov (Nedarim 32a). When evil is present, a person forgets about all the good within him. So how is a person supposed to fight evil? The answer is by preparing for it beforehand. When a person is calm and he isn’t going through the test right this moment, he should now take the opportunity to imagine using the G-dly light within him to overcome his difficulty when it

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happens. Imagine the stressful situation; now imagine that you are overcoming it, because there is a G-dly light within you that can defeat the negative reaction.

Such imagination is holy, because it utilizes something that already exists within you; it is not making up something new.

The secular approach is that if a person imagines that he is happy even though he knows that he isn't, or that he imagines that he isn't going to get angry when really he does want to get angry. With this mentality, he's making something up new that doesn't exist, which is the evil, false imagination.

The Torah outlook on imagination, by contrast, is that a person should use imagination to reveal his already existing potential. (He can imagine that he's happy, not because he's trying to "make" himself happy, but because he's really happy deep down in his soul, and he just has to bring forth that inner happiness of the soul, using his imagination.)

A person will be able to accomplish a lot with this.

Only Spend A Little Amount Of Time On This

However, we must caution that this should be done for only a minimal amount of time. No one should base his entire life on holy imagination; if a person does, then he spends his whole life in his imagination. Such a person is missing the "*b'tzalmeinu*" (being in the image of Hashem) and only focusing on the "*kedemuseinu*" of imagination.

Betzalmeinu is when a person aspires to be like a *tzelem Elokim*, in the image of Hashem. *Kedemuseinu* is when a person uses his imagination. The third step of this is the end of the *possuk*, "*And He fashioned man out of the dust of the earth.*" This represents action, hinting to us that our holy imagination has to lead to acting upon it, or else it isn't holy.

When a person has all these three steps in the process, in their proper usage, and by not overdoing it, then he is living in a way that a Jew is supposed to live.

2.5 | How Imagination Is Used For Holiness

Holy Imagination Is To Reveal What Already Exists

In the previous chapter, we explained how imagination can either be detrimental or positive. Generally, when a person imagines something new that doesn't exist, it is detrimental, but when a person expands an already existing concept further, it is a positive kind of imagination. If imagination is being used to make up something new, it cannot be positive. The only one who can make something new is Hashem, the Creator of the world.

Holy imagination is permitted because the person isn't coming up with something new; he is connecting himself to something that already exists. He is simply revealing a new perspective in something. This is in contrast to unholy imagination, which is when a person comes up with something that doesn't exist.

That is the basic idea we have said, and now we will elaborate on this.

Connecting To The Unlimited

This world is limited. A person by nature is limited, but there is a way for a person to connect himself to what is above our limits. One of the ways is to do this is through utilizing the imagination.

The prophets had an ability to picture Hashem (*Beraishis Rabbah* 27:1). Humans are limited, while the Creator is unlimited; the prophets connected to the *Ein Sof* (Endlessness) of Hashem, which is above the limits of a human being.

How can a human, who is limited, connect to the *Ein Sof* of Hashem, Who is unlimited? One of the ways is through utilizing the imagination in a positive way. This was the greatness achieved by the prophets, who used their imagination to connect to what was beyond their limits.

Let us explain this a bit more.

We have in our mind the the faculties of *Chochmah*, the root of our *seichell*/intellect, and *Binah*, the root of our imagination.

Our *seichell*/intellect connects to Hashem in a different way than we are discussing. With the intellect, a person connects himself to the *Chochmah*, and since *Chochmah* is endless, this gives a person a connection to the *Ein Sof* of Hashem.

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But we are currently discussing a different kind of connection to the *Ein Sof* – the connection through our power of *Binah*, the root of our imagination.

Chochmah and *Tevunah* (which is lower use of *Binah*) are different in that *Chochmah* gives a person is to conceptualize something without picturing it, while *Tevunah* is to picture an image in order to understand it. *Chochmah* arranges information to a person, but it doesn't give a person a picture of it. *Tevunah* is what gives a person a picture. Now we can understand that imagination [when it used for holiness] is essentially giving a person a picture of what is above the limits of the world.

Chochmah uses our intellect. It is able to connect a person to the unlimited as follows. A person is able to comprehend a lofty concept a little, and by holding onto a little of the concept, it is like he is holding onto all of it. Even though the intellect is limited, the intellect is able to understand a little more each time. The whole entire idea of the intellect is that a person uses his intellect to try to understand something which is unlimited and endless.

But with *Binah*, a person is picturing something. A picture by definition is something which is limited. If something is unlimited, it doesn't have a picture. But if it can be pictured, it must be that it is limited. How then can a person picture something which is unlimited?

This is where imagination comes in. Imagination is the force which expands one's limits. How does this work? The imagination isn't really overcoming one's limits, but what it does is give a person a new picture, something more than before. This is the deep definition of holy imagination.

Defining Evil Imagination and Holy Imagination

The question is, how can a person picture something which doesn't exist? If it does exist, and a person is picturing it, then it's not imagination! So why is it considered using the imagination?

If a person can't see something which is real, so he imagines it instead, it isn't totally imagination. Why? Total imagination is to imagine something which doesn't exist. If a person never saw a chair in his life and he imagines how it must look – and he succeeds in imagining it – can we say that it's all his imagination? There is some use of imagination here, but it's not total, because the chair exists. Total imagination is to imagine something which doesn't exist and tries to picture it.

But this begs another question. If imagination is only considered imagination when it's total, then how can it ever be holy? Isn't a total imagination always a lie?

There are two answers for this.

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One reason is as follows. If a person imagines something for holiness, and he is **aware** that he is still within the **bounds** of imagination – then it is holy and proper. There is nothing wrong with this. It is only if the person in his imagination considers what he is imagining to be real – **then** his imagination is evil.

Those are the rules for holy imagination – as long as one is aware that it's not real, the imagination is positive and it is being used for holiness. If a person thinks that what he is imagining is actually happening because he is imagining it, he is acting mentally ill.

Still, it is very hard to understand how imagination can ever be holy. If it's not really happening, then why are we allowed to imagine it?!

Holy Imagination – Connecting Yourself To What Is Beyond

In all of Creation, there are two kinds of forces: a *koach*, potential force and a *poel*, active force. Reality is a *poel*; imagination is only a *koach*. In actuality, what we imagine for holiness isn't taking place; it is also something that can potentially happen. By contrast, when someone imagines for evil purposes, he is saying that it is actually taking place in reality when it isn't.

To illustrate this idea, we know that there are many different ways to combine the letters of the *Aleph-Beis* (*tzirufei ha'osiyos*). We do not know how to combine them, but in potential, there exists many different ways to combine them; we just aren't aware of them and don't know how to do it. In the future all will be revealed; but a person's imagination can show him all the different potential ways to combine them.

The prophets received their prophecy through the holy kind of imagination. They would take the holy letters that they received and combine them, forming ideas. They weren't inventing anything new – they were simply collecting and combining all of the facts in front of them, forming the conclusions based on already existing ideas. Thus, holy imagination isn't anything new; the only thing new here is the way they would combine their information, but they weren't inventing anything from the imagination. They were expanding a potential concept.

So holy imagination is for a person to connect himself to a place that is beyond where you are. The holy kind of imagination is the power to conjure up images and pictures of something that **already** exists. This is also known as *Tziyur*, the ability to imagine the World-to-Come by thinking about it in a very real sense.

The Sages say that *techeiles* is blue, because when a person sees the blue color, he will be reminded of the sea, which reminds him of the sky, which will remind him of the *kisei hakavod* (Throne of Glory) – and this will bring one to have fear of Heaven. This is clearly the use of imagination; no one has ever seen the *kisei hakavod*. But since every person's soul is rooted in the *kisei hakavod*, a person can connect himself to this unseen reality by using the

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holy kind of imagination. In such imagination, a person isn't coming up with anything new. He is merely combining all the information in front of him and expanding it, until he arrives at a greater conclusion of what he started out with.

To summarize: If I am connecting myself to a reality that does not exist, it is evil imagination. If I am connecting to myself to a reality that exists, just that it is above my comprehension – that is holy imagination.

Only Emunah Enables The Holy Imagination

Now that we have understood that, we can come to understand a deeper point.

In our mind, there is *seichel* (intellect) and there is our imagination. Our intellect is based on reality; it proves to us that something exists, even if we don't really comprehend it. If our intellect cannot feel the proof of something, then we cannot connect to the information using our intellect. A person would swear that he saw something, because his intellect has proved it to him and he is willing to swear over it.

Imagination works differently. In the evil kind of imagination, a person imagines something which doesn't exist and attempts to turn it into reality. This is actually the roots of idol worship! By contrast, holy imagination is to imagine something which exists, but it is something which is above one's comprehension, and through the imagination, one can connect himself to that reality.

If something is above one's comprehension, then his intellect cannot prove that it exists. So how does a person know that it does exist? This is the role of *Emunah*. *Emunah* is what is enabling one to connect to facts he doesn't see.

Holy imagination makes use of our *Emunah*; it shows a person that certain fact exists because he believes in it, even though he has no comprehension of it. If a person can't comprehend a certain concept, how can he connect himself to it? Through *Emunah*.

Holy Imagination Requires Emunah

Having understood that, we can speak about another point which results from this.

Emunah is the power we have which can shatter boundaries. It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that "The point where the *seichel* ends is where *Emunah* begins." A person's intellect brings a person up until where he can really understand, and a person's *Emunah* is able to take him and connect him to the point beyond his intellectual comprehension.

On a deeper note, *Emunah* is necessary in order to shatter any limit. Even a person's *Chochmah* requires *Emunah* if a person wants to connect to the *Ein Sof*. When a person

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understands as much as he possibly could, he has reached the end of his *Chochmah*; he believes that really his *Chochmah* is deeper than what he actually comprehends, so he uses his *Emunah* to connect to what is beyond his comprehension. This is essentially because a person believes that the Torah is vaster than the earth and the sea – he uses his power of *Emunah* to believe that there is more to what he is capable of understanding.

Since holy imagination can only work through *Emunah*, and holy imagination goes beyond our intellectual limitations, it is thus self-evident that holy imagination and *Emunah* work together. *Emunah* is what shatters the limits, and the holy imagination is how a person pictures the information of what is beyond the limits.

It seems that *Emunah* and holy imagination are the same thing, but they are not. Holy imagination is based on one's *Emunah*, step-by-step. The first step is that a person believes that a certain concept exists. When a person is told that a certain animal exists in another country and he has never seen it, he can believe the person, but how does he know how it looks? He imagines how it must look. So a person's power to believe, *Emunah*, is what gives a fact credibility, and then a person's imagination comes and pictures the fact.

This we can see from the statement of Chazal that looking at *techeiles* reminds a person of the *kisei hakavod*. No one has ever seen the *kisei hakavod*, so how does this work? It is because we have *Emunah*, and we know that it exists. Then we use our imagination to picture it, by seeing *techeiles*.

The point from all this is to realize that imagination can only be holy if it is coming from our *Emunah*.

How Holy Imagination Can Be Dangerous

However, even if a person has *Emunah*, imagination can always be dangerous, even when it is being used for holiness.

It is written (Devarim 4:15), “For you did not see any image on the day Hashem spoke to you at Chorev, amidst a fire.” Hashem gave a special warning at Har Sinai that we must not make anything in His image; this was because at Har Sinai, the Jewish people were all prophets and were able to picture beyond their understanding. When a person is at this level, he is warned by Hashem not to picture the *Ein Sof* of Hashem.

An ordinary person, who only recognizes what he is familiar with, isn't capable of picturing Hashem; for him there is no such warning. But there is a warning and prohibition from Hashem to a person who is more advanced and has reached *Emunah*: he can imagine what is **until** the *Ein Sof* (“Endlessness”) of Hashem, but not the actual *Ein Sof* of Hashem.

On a simple level, this is because such a person (who has indeed reached *Emunah*) is in danger of getting caught up in his imagination. But on a deeper level, we need to be cautious

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with our imagination, even if we already have *Emunah* and even if we are using it for a holy purpose; a person is not allowed to picture Hashem, even if he has *Emunah*.

If a person does not build his imagination upon his *Emunah*, he is missing a part of the equation. That is one kind of problem. But then there is a more complicating problem, and that is when one already has *Emunah*. Such a person is in danger of picturing the *Ein Sof* of Hashem, and to such a person there is a special warning.

Therefore even when we do have *Emunah*, we must be cautious and not try to picture the *Ein Sof*. Until that point, we can use our imagination – but not beyond that.

Holy Imagination Protects A Person From The Yetzer hora

It is written (*Tehillim* 104:24), “*All of them You made with wisdom.*” If everything is up to Hashem, how do we have any free will? We will explain this.

The Gemara (*Sotah* 2a) says that a person only sins when a *ruach shtus*, “spirit of folly” enters him. On a simple level this means that a *ruach shtus* enters him and removes his wisdom. The Ramchal writes (in *sefer Derech Etz Chaim*) that if people would really know what a sin is, no one would ever sin. How is it then that people could sin? It is only because a *ruach shtus* enters a person and makes a person lose his mind temporarily.

But on a deeper note, it is because a person only sins when he imagines something; if a person wouldn't imagine, he wouldn't come to sin!

Before we spoke about the *Yetzer hora* (the evil inclination); we mentioned that the whole influence of the *Yetzer hora* to convince a person to sin is through the imagination. For example, the *Yetzer hora* caused the people to sin by showing a picture of Moshe Rabbeinu's coffin in the sky, which put them in a state of despair.

The *Yetzer hora* uses imagination to get people to sin; the only way we can really utilize our free will on this world and have a chance against evil is by fighting the *Yetzer hora* with its very strategies. We need to develop our own kind of holy imagination and fight our evil imagination, which the *Yetzer hora* uses to attack us with.

Even if a person has *seichel*/intellect as well as *Emunah*, without developing holy imagination a person doesn't stand a chance against evil temptations.

The *Yetzer hora* bases all its tactics to get us to sin, through getting us to imagine. Chazal say (*Nedarim* 32b) that “At the time when the *Yetzer hora* is present, there is no one who can remember his *yetzer tov*.” When evil begins to tempt a person, a person's intellect leaves him and instead a *ruach shtus* enters him.

What should a person do then when he is being confronted with evil passions of the *Yetzer hora*? What remains left in a person when his mind is gone?

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The only thing a person can have left in him when he has no intellect is his imagination. If he has developed a holy kind of imagination, he will be able to have protection from the *Yetzer hora* when it comes.

How does this work? We mentioned before that the intellect remains in a person because of our power of memory (*zocheir*). Our imagination, however, is retained through our power of “protection” (*shoimer*). So even when a person loses his memory of what’s right and wrong, his imagination is protected. If he has a holy kind of imagination, his holy imagination remains imprinted in him even when his intellect is gone.

The more a person has worked to develop a holy imagination, the bigger mark he leaves on his mind, and the more *Yiras Shomayim* (fear of Heaven) he will have to fight the *Yetzer hora*.

In a time of *mochin d’gadlus*, a person has more *Yiras Shomayim*, because a person’s intellect is working. But when a person is in a weak state of mind (*mochin d’katnus*) – how can a person fight his *Yetzer hora*’s evil thoughts? The *Yetzer hora* is attacking and waging a full-fledged war with the person; how can a person fight with no mind?!

The way to fight is by using one’s imagination. This is an inner fight between the two kinds of imagination inside you. Your holy imagination will be fighting the evil imagination – it will be a war with the two kinds of imagination. So you have to develop your weapons before the enemy attacks...

This is the real meaning of *Yiras Shomayim*; it is the imprint left on a person even when his thinking mind isn’t functioning right now. If a person only develops his intellect but he hasn’t developed the imagination, then he will only win over the *Yetzer hora* when his intellect is working. In a time of *mochin d’katnus*, though, his intellect is gone, and he has no ammunition with which to be protected from the *Yetzer hora*.

The Sages (*Berachos* 61b) say that “the wicked are ruled by their Evil Inclination”. What does this mean? The depth of it is that wicked people are the ones who fall into their imagination; they will thus always lose to the Evil Inclination. But the righteous prevail over the *Yetzer hora* – how? Because they have *Emunah* together with their imagination. This leaves an **imprint** on them even when they lose their intellect, and that imprint is known as *Yiras Shomayim*.

The power of *Yiras Shomayim* is accessed by the righteous – and for all who have *Emunah*, together with holy imagination – and this can fight the *Yetzer hora*, even when one’s intellect has left him.

The *Yetzer hora*’s entire strength is the power of imagination that it uses on a person. When a person doesn’t have *Emunah*, his imagination isn’t strong enough to overpower the evil imagination of the *Yetzer hora*, and he falls to the *Yetzer hora* in a weak state of mind, like when he is in a time of *mochin d’katnus*.

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This is the function that our lower kind of holy imagination serves.

The Higher and Lower Kinds Of Holy Imagination

In the previous chapters, we have addressed one kind of holy imagination, which was a higher kind of imagination. But now we are discussing the lower use of our holy imagination, which is to use our imagination to fight the *Yetzer hora*.

In the first kind of holy imagination we have been discussing, a person is able to transcend his limits. The second kind of imagination doesn't take a person beyond his limits, but it serves a different purpose: to protect one's mind. This is necessary for a person to protect himself from evil desires (the *Yetzer hora*).

If a person doesn't learn how to use his imagination to protect himself from the *Yetzer hora*, then he has "successes and failures." When he is in a time of *mochin d'gadlus* – when he is in a higher state of mind – he will overcome evil desires, but when he is in a time of *mochin d'katnus*, the lower state of mind, he will fall....

The only thing that can protect a person from the *Yetzer hora* is to develop the holy kind of imagination.

How Hashem helps a person overcome the Yetzer hora

The Gemara (*Sukkah* 52a) says, "The Evil Inclination of a person gets stronger every moment, and if not for Hashem helping him, it would be impossible to overcome it." Why is it impossible to overpower the *Yetzer hora* without the help of Hashem?

On a simple level it is because the *Yetzer hora* is an angel, while we are only human beings, and we cannot fight an angel, who is much stronger than us. That is true, but now it is clearer to us: the *Yetzer hora* succeeds in taking away a person's intellect, and the person is left only with his imagination. Since he has no intellect, it's as if he's not a person; he has no *Chochmah* left in him right now, and his imagination by itself cannot help him.

It is written, "*A tzaddik falls seven times and gets up.*" If a person is always in control of his mind, he will be able to win against the *Yetzer hora* – he can fall, but he also "gets up." But the average person isn't always in control of his mind, and when the *Yetzer hora* comes, he always falls. He loses his free will, and what does the *Yetzer hora* do? It takes away his mind and makes him imagine. This is the problem; what can we do about this, and how indeed can we deserve Hashem's help?

On a simple level, the way to understand this is that a person receives *Siyata D'Shmaya*, direct assistance from Hashem to fight the *Yetzer hora*. This is true, but there is more depth to this.

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The deeper understanding of how Hashem helps a person fight the *Yetzer hora* is as follows. When Hashem helps the person, He gives him new abilities to fight. These abilities are beyond the normal limits known to a person. With these new God-given abilities a person is able to fight the *Yetzer hora*. The question is: how does a person enable himself to receive the help from Hashem?

This is when we try our best to fight it. When Hashem sees we are trying, He helps us. How do we try?

There is a statement in Chazal, “Open for Me an opening the size of a needle, and I will open for you an opening the size of an entranceway.” There is also a statement in Chazal, “It is not upon you to finish the task, but you are not exempt from being idle from it.” All of this is true, but we must understand how it works.

By developing a holy imagination, a person receives help from Hashem and acquires the ability to go beyond the normal human limits of the mind. The entire issue during the fight with the *Yetzer hora* is if a person will try to develop a holy imagination **before** the *Yetzer hora* attacks, when his intellect is working properly – when he is in a state of *mochin d’gadlus*. If a person developed his holy imagination, Hashem helps him when he is in a time of *mochin d’katnus*, when the *Yetzer hora* attacks; the person will then be able to go above his limits and overpower the *Yetzer hora*’s evil kind of imagination.

The Only Way To Fight The Yetzer hora

There are two ways that people have to fight the *Yetzer hora*. One way is unsuccessful, and the other way is the one that works.

The unsuccessful way is when a person simply tries to “avoid” the *Yetzer hora* and makes “boundaries” for himself so that he won’t encounter the *Yetzer hora*. For example, a person will daven a lot to Hashem to be saved from the *Yetzer hora*; this can definitely help him avoid the *Yetzer hora*, but what will he do when the *Yetzer hora* comes to him? A person’s boundaries that he has set up for himself cannot be enough to protect him from the *Yetzer hora*, who is unlimited in its power. The *yetzer hora* is a mighty angel whom it is impossible to defeat with even the strongest human perseverance.

If someone with unlimited strength is fighting you, how do you fight such an enemy??

The successful way is to fight the *Yetzer hora* with the same kind of tactics it is using! If the *Yetzer hora* is using forces against you that are unlimited, you can only fight it with an equally opposing force that is unlimited.

When a person is being tested with a difficult temptation, the only way he can overcome it is only if he has developed a holy imagination before the situation comes. Without holy imagination, a person will definitely fall to the *Yetzer hora*.

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When a person is facing an evil temptation, he loses his very free will. If so, what is our free will on this world? Our whole free will is to *choose to prepare for battle*, **before** evil strikes.

You can't come to a war without any weapons. You can *daven* to be saved, but there isn't much you can do if you didn't prepare. When you go to war, you need to prepare for it; you can't come into a war without any previous training. You need a lot of preparation before the enemy strikes if you want to defeat it. This is a full-blown war, and it needs training before the enemy attacks. The way you train for this war is through developing a holy imagination beforehand.

This is our entire choice on this world whenever we speak of how to avoid the *Yetzer hora*. If we try to develop a holy imagination beforehand, we will have help from Hashem when our mind is weak and the *Yetzer hora* attacks. We need to develop our holy imagination, in addition to our *seichel* and our *Emunah*, which we spoke about earlier.

This is the way that people with *Yiras Shomayim* used to fight the *Yetzer hora*; they worked very hard on developing their holy kind of imagination.

We are **not** giving advice here on how to win over the *Yetzer hora*. We cannot tell a person **exactly** how to fight the *Yetzer hora*. When the *Yetzer hora* attacks a person with evil imaginative thoughts, it is an internal war; it is a war going on in one's very imagination, and it is a fight between good and evil imagination. But what we can tell a person is to learn how to **prepare** for war – by **trying to develop** a holy kind of imagination, a person can have a chance against the *Yetzer hora* when it attacks.

Our Goal Is To Develop A Constant Reality Of Holy Imagination

How does a person develop the holy kind of imagination?

There are people who develop their holy imagination, but only because they want to be able to fight their *Yetzer hora*. We cannot say this is incorrect to do, but that shouldn't be our entire purpose here. Holy imagination isn't only necessary as a tool to fight the *Yetzer hora*.

It is true that we need to fight the *Yetzer hora*, but we need to build up our holy kind of imagination for other purposes as well. We are trying to achieve a **constant** state of holy imagination – to **live** it.

How can a person do this?

Most people have a disconnection between their intellect and their imagination. They are either using only their intellect or only their imagination, and do not see a connection between the two. But the true way to live is by “clothing” our intellect with our imagination.

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We will give a simple example of this. When a person is learning in Gemara about a case in which an ox gores a cow, he should picture the cow and the ox and how they are goring each other. Anyone can picture this, because everyone knows what an ox and a cow is, so they can also picture a scene of goring (even though most people haven't seen this happen).

A person should get used to picturing something, both with his mind and with his imagination. This is a very basic kind of imagination. If you know how something looks, get used to picturing it with your mind more. This will get you used to imagining something. (We must warn that sometimes a person can get carried away with his imagination and imagine things that are improper, so a person should be careful.) As you get used to doing this more, you will be able to acquire an ability to give a mental picture to everything. The more and more a person does this, the more he develops his imagination.

It is impossible to give specific instructions how to do this, but there is one thing which applies to all people: whenever you encounter information, picture it also. This is called *temunas haseichel* – “picture of the mind.”

We must mention again a warning: these matters are very subtle, and if a person overdoes it he will end up picturing something which really he shouldn't be picturing. For example, he will want to picture how the angels look, which is dangerous to do and causes one to live in his imagination.

In Conclusion

Let us summarize what we have learned about the holy kind of imagination.

Imagination is holy when a person isn't making up new facts. It is to connect oneself to something which exists, and what it essentially accomplishes is that it reveals a fact to a person. It is not actually taking place, but it shows a person the idea behind it.

In order to reveal potential concepts, we need to get used to picturing facts, both with our mind and with our imagination. As we get used to this, we are able to train our mind to actually picture the facts. This will get our mind to work together with the imagination. This refines our imagination more and more. The more we use our minds to picture a fact, the more refined our imagination will become, and it will be able to be a tool for our mind.

We have been brief about this last detail (*temunas haseichel*) because it is usually meant for certain individuals who are at the level of doing it. We have thus only given the general outline of the concept without getting into too many of the details.

May Hashem merit all of us to reach the most perfect kind of Chochmah, Binah, Tevunah - and to the holy kind of imagination.

2.6 | Weakening Your Imagination By Self-Awareness

Imagination Takes Over When We Sleep

One of the 48 qualities we need for the Torah is “little sleep.” What does it mean to get little sleep? Simply speaking, a person has to lose sleep over the Torah. But there is a deeper meaning to this.

A person has the power of thought as well as the power of imagination. By day, we use our thought; by night, the imagination takes over when we sleep. Chazal are saying that we need to lessen our sleep at night in order to learn Torah – this means that we have to lessen what we do when we sleep, which is our imagination. We need to weaken our imagination.

The depth behind why we have to weaken our sleep in order to acquire the Torah is that we need to weaken our negative kind of imagination, which is a kind of sleepiness.

Imagination Throughout The Day

When the Torah was given, we were given the power of the Torah, which is essentially the power of true thought. The power of true thought in a person is able to overcome our imagination.

All of the evil in the world has to do with imagination. When a person wants to sin, it is because his imagination has overcome his thoughts. Chazal actually call our imagination the *Yetzer hora*.⁹¹ Our entire desire to do evil comes from the imagination!

Everyone has both thought and imagination. By night, imagination takes over in our dreams, but during the day, we have both. Usually, we are not aware during the day if we are using our thought or imagination. Our thought and imagination keeps switching back and forth, but we aren't aware which is in use.

For example, in the last hour, how many of your passing thoughts were real thoughts, and how much was just your imagination?

We are constantly passing from thought to imagination. When we aren't aware of this, this is like the curse that came from eating from the Tree of Knowledge, which was a mixture of good and evil. We aren't aware which thoughts are real thoughts (which are good), and which thoughts are the evil imagination.

⁹¹ *Sukkah* 52a

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Such a kind of life – a lack of awareness – is a sleepy kind of life. If we are aware of our thoughts, then we are kind of asleep, even during the day. In a sense, most people can be compared to a mentally ill person, of whom Chazal (Chagigah 4a) says has times in which he is sane and times when he isn't sane. This resembles the state of most people, who are sometimes thinking but sometimes just imagining.

This kind of life greatly damages us. A child often exaggerates – why is this so? It is because children are prone to their imagination, which leads them to distort information. There are even adults who are in their imagination – and most people fool themselves and are convinced that they don't imagine things. But if a person is convinced that he never imagines, it shows how much he lacks an awareness of himself.

When the Torah was given, we left our mixed up state of mind and returned to the state before Adam's sin, in which good and evil were separate. After the sin of the Calf, we became mixed up again with good and evil. Now we must return to the state that we were like at the giving of the Torah, in which there was no evil mixed up into our good – in other words, when our thoughts were free of our imagination.

This is really the depth behind *Teshuvah* – to “return” – to return to our clarity. The way we can become clear is by thinking and paying attention to what's going on in our mind.

Paying Attention To Your Thoughts

If a person doesn't listen to his thoughts, his life is all mixed up. His life will just be a mixture of thought and imagination.

But if a person wants to become more aware, he should review what he has thought about in the last hour and see which thoughts were about reality, and which were just his daydreaming.

Let's say a person is dreaming about what's going on right now in Tzefas. Is this thought or imagination? Sometimes it can be thought, but usually it's just imagination. If a person is sitting and wondering what's going on in the world, this is imagination! Our thoughts pass so quickly to our imagination that we don't even realize we have entered our imagination. Our imagination takes over very suddenly, and we don't even realize.

Sometimes a person wonders, “How did I get into thinking about this?” It didn't just “fall” into his head. It is because the imagination took over, and the person wasn't aware of it.

Let's say a person is sitting on a bus and lost in thought. This is a typical conversation that goes on all the time:

“What are you thinking about?”

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“Oh, nothing.”

“What do you mean, nothing? Your brain is working, so you had to have been thinking about something! What were you thinking?”

“Oh...yeah...”

“Yeah, what? What were you thinking?”

“Something...”

“Why’d you think about it?”

“I don’t know, I just started to think about it....”

Such a person, if he wants to become aware of what’s going on his mind, needs to retrace his thoughts and see how one thought led to another.

Even when a person is learning Torah his imagination can be at work. Let’s take a person sitting and listening to a *shiur*. Does he even listen for a half hour without spacing out? If a person says, “Yes, I do concentrate for more than a half hour,” he is obviously fooling himself and he is not aware of himself.

We must listen deeply to what’s going on in our mind. Take a minute or two and review what you just thought about. It’s hard to do this at first, because there is a lack of awareness. But a person can get used to listening to his thoughts and see how fast his thoughts wander to the imagination.

This is a way for a person to reach the depths of his soul. When a person is in his imagination, he doesn’t have the tools to gain from any of his *Avodas Hashem*. Imagination doesn’t let you be calm to understand anything, and it also affects the level of how well you grasp something; because if you’re only understanding something through your imagination and not through your real thoughts, then you aren’t really understanding it.

In order to stop your imagination from controlling you, you must get used to checking your thoughts and seeing which of them were real thought and which of them imagination was.

Although so far we have been discussing the problem of imagination in regards to being an impediment to learning Torah, which applies to men, imagination is a problem for all areas of life, because if we don’t do this then we will be disconnected from ourselves. The solution we are giving here is essentially how you can become connected to yourself.

Therefore, both men and women need to weaken their imagination through this solution – to get used to checking your thoughts.

Imagination is the Root Behind Bad Middos

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Imagination is behind all that is evil. Chazal tell us that three evil traits remove a person from this world – jealousy, desire and honor.

Really, the imagination in a person is what causes these three evil traits.

Let's take jealousy as an example. Why is a person jealous of another person? It's only because of imagination. Why should Reuven care about what Shimon has? It's only because Reuven imagines that he is supposed to have it. When a person is jealous, he leaves his world – "Jealousy, desire and honor take a person out of the world." It takes a person out of his world into his imagination!

The problem with imagination is a very broad problem that greatly affects *the entire spectrum* of one's soul. It's not a side issue – it is *the root issue of all our issues!*

Of course a person needs to work on his *middos*, but it will be much easier if a person uproots the bad *middos* from their source – by uprooting his imagination. We are used to working on branches of a problem, like each individual bad *middah* we discover in ourselves. But we often don't get to the root of our problem – and that root is imagination, which we must work on getting rid of.

How To Become More Aware

If a person wants to really enter *Avodas Hashem*, he should take two minutes a day and see where his thoughts wander to. He should see what led him to think about one thing to another; he should wonder: "How did I get into thinking about B when I was just thinking about A?"

The more a person does this, he will discover something he was never aware of until now: often, our imagination takes something and compares it with another thing, tricking you into thinking that two different things are the same.

What happens when you notice your imagination? Use your *seichel* and see how your imagination has led you to compare things that are different and make them appear the same – and you will see how your comparisons were totally off-base. It was your imagination which led you to make an inaccurate comparison.

Fighting the Yetzer Hora before it attacks

This is essentially the battle a person has with his Yetzer hora.

The Yetzer hora, during the actual time of difficulty, makes a person forget about his Yetzer Tov. So how does a person fight the Yetzer hora? The battle starts before the difficulty. The battle takes place between one's thoughts and one's imagination. We must

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fight the Yetzer hora before it attacks – not when it attacks. We need to uproot its power when we are calm and thinking; it is then that we can separate our thoughts from the imagination.

Take some quiet time and review your thoughts: how did you get from A to B, and how are the two thoughts similar? The more you do this, the more you see how your imagination misled you to think how things are the same, and you will slowly weaken your imagination more and more if you practice this.

The inner way to prepare to accept the Torah is to check our thoughts and wonder: are we weakening our imagination?

Seeking Friendship Is Rooted In Imagination

Chazal say that “Every person was created individually.” Really, we are fine if we are alone and don’t seek friends. But it is a person’s imagination tricks him into thinking that he isn’t good by himself, and that he must seek friends.

The more you rid yourself of imagination, the less social needs you will have. Imagination makes a person want to be dependent on others for companionship. When a person rids himself of imagination, he will enjoy his own existence and actually crave solitude.

Why does a person want lots of friends? It is really because he isn’t connected to himself. His imagination causes him to compare himself to others and think, “Maybe I am like that person or like this person.” He wants something outside of himself and thus loves to always be around those who he feels are similar to him.

But when a person frees himself from the imagination, he is happy being on his own – not because he is lonely, but because he has discovered an inner world within himself. A person who discovers his inner world is not doing so out of a lack of love for other people; it is not because he doesn’t like people, but it is because he doesn’t need them to be happy.

This is not arrogance – it is rather a self-discovery. It is to realize your very worth; the more a person rids himself of imagination, the more he will enjoy being alone with himself, because he will realize his own self-worth.

When a person never seeks time alone for himself and only desires to be friends with others, he overdoes it, and he is around people too much. Although *Chazal* say that we should get along with people (*da’ato me’ureves im ha’beriyos*), that is only true for one who has reached the desired state to be in – to be clean of imagination.

We see that children love to play with friends. This need that children have comes from their imagination, which is very dominant in a child. What is the connection? Children view everyone else as similar to them, which is the work of the imagination; imagination convinces a person that someone or something else is similar. Because children think

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everyone else is similar, they befriend everyone. As a person gets older and matures, he sees that not everyone is the same, and he is able to pick and be choosy who his friends are.

The more a person cleanses himself from imagination, the less of a need he will feel to connect to others. He might have other reasons why he wants to connect to others, such as the need to love others or the need to bestow goodness upon others, but such needs are healthy, because they do not come from the imagination.

The Only One Who You Can Resemble

When you get rid of your imagination, you will see how less and less people are similar to you, and you will discover that there is only One who you can truly resemble – Hashem.

Maybe one will ask on this that this is a lack of *Ahavas Yisrael* (love of Jews) if a person doesn't seek to be friends with everybody. But actually, having lots of friends is not the meaning of *Ahavas Yisrael*. It is just a tendency in a person to compare himself to others – which leads him to want to always connect superficially to others.

When a person seeks friends, really it is because he loves himself and he loves to feel his own imagination working, when he has lots of friends. In order to really have *Ahavas Yisrael*, a person needs to discover *himself*.

In order to uncover our true self, we all need time alone to quietly contemplate our thoughts. This will enable our power of thought to overpower our imagination.

Otherwise, a person will just want to seek others' company, since he compares himself to them, due to his imagination that controls him.

The more a person weakens his imagination, a person will find that the less of a need he has for friends. We can see this from a child, who by nature always seeks to make friends; a child is led by his imagination and thus always compares himself to others, and that is the reason why the child likes to be around other friends.

But the stronger our power of thought becomes – the more times of quiet a person spends, in which he can sift out the imagination from the thoughts – the less of a need a person has to seek friends.

There are people who are very popular and are they can always be found surrounded with lots of friends, but this doesn't necessarily mean these popular people have *Ahavas Yisrael*. It is usually because these 'popular' people are being led by their imagination - and therefore they seek to compare themselves to others, always seeking others' company to for this feeling of security.

There are, however, people who don't seek friends, but not because of the mature outlook we are describing, but rather for a different reason: because they are simply being haughty,

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feeling that they are better than everybody else. But we do not mean to imply this. We are referring to one who wants to live an inner kind of life and enter the inner world of *Avodas Hashem*, and that the way to do it is through realizing that you don't need others for security, because you have a vast inner world within yourself that contains all your happiness.

This sounds very different from what we would think, but the truth is that only when we discover our true self – and become connected to it - can we really come to love others as we should.

The less and less a person has to do with his imagination, the more he will seek a life of solitude, not needing others, because he is attached instead with closeness with Hashem.

Chazal say *hevay domeh lo*, “You should resemble Hashem.” The only one who you should try to resemble is Hashem. A person must discover how he can best resemble *Hashem* (by perfecting his character), and not to resemble other people. And there is really no one who you can really ever come to resemble other than Hashem.

This is the inner way to prepare for the Torah, and from that, to come to connect to the Creator.