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Q&A

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This compilation of questions and answers offers practical guidance in many different areas of life in the emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of Jewish life. The author focuses on having an intimate relationship with G-d, as well as developing individual self-awareness.

As is reflected in the many published works of the author, the Rav has a gift of helping us become familiar with the deepest parts of our inner self. The Rav's approach has become very popular over the years with Jews from all walks of life. Even in the earliest *sefarim* which stressed developing a closer connection with the Creator, the Rav also stressed personal inner development. The *Da Es* series morphed into the ongoing "Four Elements" approach, in which the Rav explains the human soul with incredible depth with practical guidance on how to attain one's unique personal soul-repair in this world.

Recently, a "Q&A" system was launched, enabling anyone to ask any questions they wanted to the Rav, via the email address rav@bilvavi.net. These questions and answers evolved from a few emails into a rich, diverse array of guidance on virtually every important topic in a Jew's life. This enabled anyone to receive direct guidance from the Rav and, for the first time in the lives of many, to finally be personally guided in whatever areas of difficulty they were experiencing.

This selection is based on the Hebrew *sefer* released last year entitled **שאל לבי**. However, it is not a translation of the Hebrew *sefer* and includes many questions and answers not yet published in Hebrew. This is truly a treasure chest of comprehensive Torah wisdom for all of life's issues.

PSYCHE

Self-Concept & Self-Esteem

How Do I Become More My Genuine Self?

Which factor determines what kind of actions a person needs to do that will be uniquely tailored to his own soul? Is the source of this the *neshamah*, or does it come from the physical experiences a person has undergone, such as how he grew up, environmental factors, etc.?

A

Any behavior of a person can be influenced either by internal factors or from external factors in one's life. A person may act a certain way because of external factors that shaped his personality, because that is how he grew up, that is what he saw, etc. Or he may be acting based on internal factors. When he is acting in a way that comes from his inside, this is coming from his own *nefesh* (lower soul).

The *nefesh* is rooted in a higher source, the *neshamah* (Divine soul), but the actions mainly come from the area of the soul that is called "*nefesh*," which is the root of a person's power of action. Each person needs to do actions that are in accordance with his unique personality, and accordingly, that is how he can "redeem" his soul in the area of the actions that he does.

How Can A Person Know What His Main Strength Is?

How can a person know if action is his primary power, as opposed to the powers of speech, emotion, thought, or will?

A

The more a person gets used to acting from within himself, and gets used to internal quieting, the more his actions will become deeper, and then he will feel more connected to his inner being. From that, one will slowly be able to identify the main strength of his soul.

Can a person fluctuate between what his primary power is, depending on his current stage on life? Can it change, based on the current circumstances in one's life?

A

Yes, it can definitely change. For example, a child's main strengths may change by the time he is a teenager or adolescent, and a teenager or adolescent may change entirely by the time he is an adult. The changes happen due to maturation in general, and they are also influenced by various events and periods in a person's life, which move the soul in different directions. There can be always be changes due to whatever specific stage of life a person is up to (which are usually subtler kinds of changes), and certainly there are changes of orientation when different major stages of maturation are reached, such as going from childhood to adolescence, or from adolescence to adulthood (which are more dramatic kinds of changes). But the root primary power of the person will always remain as it is.

Feeling Fulfilled In Life

What does it mean exactly to act more from within oneself? Does it mean that a person feels fulfillment when doing it?

A

Feeling fulfillment from what you do is the final result. The more a person gets used to doing things not because of what others are thinking and not because of what they are doing, but instead does things because he feels this is the right thing for him to do, he is acting more from within himself. This is the beginning of inner redemption. Slowly with time, as a person continues like this, he will act from a much more inner place in himself, and then he will feel great fulfillment from what he does, but that is a much later stage, and it is but the result of the entire process. The first step, then, is to make sure that you are doing things not because of what others are thinking, what everyone else does, what is socially acceptable, what others will think about me, etc. Instead, do what you feel is right for you to do. Slowly, as you get used to this, you will enter further into the path toward inner redemption. Then you will be able to slowly awaken your own inner potential, and then you will be closer to feeling a personal sense of fulfillment from what you do.

I Need To Be Loved & Valued By Others

There are many things which others are successful at doing, which I am not successful in (I have a speech impediment). This causes others to lose respect for me. But I understand that it's exactly what Hashem expects from me: To feel that I am small and that I don't deserve to be honored, because all honor belongs only to Hashem. But there is another area which is impacting me, and that is the need I feel to receive love from others. What should be my attitude? Am I supposed to stop being dependent on receiving love from others? Should I not care that others disqualify me? When it bothers me that others think that I don't count, it is hurtful to me because I am losing their love. It puts a lot of stress on me every time, because I keep worrying that maybe I will lose my friend when he realizes that I have certain issues or handicaps. Yet it seems impossible to me that I shouldn't need others to love me and appreciate me.

A

It is impossible for a person to live without being loved. However, your main source of receiving love must come from within your own self-love. A person needs to be able to love himself [in a healthy way]. One needs to be connected to himself. Even more, the main source of our love from must be from HaKadosh Baruch Hu's love for you, and from your love for HaKadosh Baruch Hu. There is also a way to receive love from other people. In This World, usually when people love each other, it is not the complete level of love, such as the love that existed between David and Yehonasan [a love that did not depend on any factors]. Rather, it is usually "sparks" of love, sometimes a bigger spark and sometimes a small spark, and depending on the person and on the particular circumstances at hand. Therefore, our main source of receiving love needs to come from our own self, as well as from the love of the Creator for us. And additionally, if one merits it, he can also receive love from other people.

The same thing applies to the need to be valued by others. Your main source of approval needs to come from the value that you have for your own self, as well as how much HaKadosh Baruch Hu values you. The value that others have for you should only be seen as an "additional" source of value to you. Therefore, you need to make sure you have your primary source of being valued [feeling valued from within yourself, and feeling valued by Hashem], and you need to see the value that others have for you merely as an "additional" source of value to you.

Why Am I So Hard On Myself?

Is there a difference between low self-worth versus a natural predisposition of being self-critical? I notice that when I am around certain people, I have a strong tendency to be overly self-critical, and then I begin to mentally attack myself. Or sometimes when I remember a mistake I made or an *aveirah* (sin) that I once did, I become consumed with self-critical thoughts and I begin to become depressed. And sometimes, when I experience doubts about which approach I should have about something, such as how to approach different situations in my life or on how to take responsibility in my life or on in areas of how I should serve Hashem, I begin to receive all kinds of thoughts that plague my self-worth, and these thoughts entangle me further and further within all of the doubts I experience. I find that when my negative feelings overtake me, it disturbs all of my inner peace, and it has negative effects on my inner world, which I had worked so hard until then to carefully develop and nurture. It confuses me and makes me feel scattered from all of my thoughts.

My questions are:

1. Does my nature of being self-critical come from a low self-worth, because I don't love myself, or from some other source?
2. If my self-critical nature doesn't come from low self-worth, would developing self-esteem solve the issue?
3. What is the best way the Rav recommends, in solving this issue?
4. Are there any additional possible solutions that the Rav recommends for this?

A

(1) Your self-critical nature may come from any of the following reasons: Either from a lack of proper self-worth, or because you don't love yourself [as you mentioned], or because you tend to be negative, which really stems from a nature to search for the truth. (2) Developing a healthy self-worth would only partially solve the issue [of being overly self-critical]. (3) From the reasons mentioned, you need to clarify which of these factors [lack of self-worth, lack of loving yourself, focusing on the negative] is the root that's causing you to be overly self-critical. After that, you should organize for yourself a plan for what the inner work should be, once you know what the root of the issue is. Practically speaking, it is recommended that besides for doing this, you should write down all of your qualities – your general qualities as well as the more specific aspects of your qualities – and read from this list every day. And, thank HaKadosh Baruch Hu every day, verbally,

for all of your qualities that you have. Additionally, every day, you should think about one positive thing in the world each day, and each day you should also focus on one good quality in another person.

Low Self-Esteem Because I Don't Know Much Torah

In “Getting To Know Your Self” the Rav explains that the Torah way to remove a low self-image is by identifying oneself as a *neshamah* (soul), and to know that one's *neshamah* is always good, no matter what. I suffer from low self-esteem because I feel like I lack knowledge in Torah. How can I fix this low self-image I have towards myself by identifying with my *neshamah*? Does my *neshamah* remember all of the Torah that it learned (in the fetal state), and it's only the body which makes a person forget all of his Torah learning?

A

Yes, the *neshamah* remembers all the Torah it learned [in the fetal state], as it is written, “My soul knows very much.” At the giving of the Torah, every soul received its share in Torah. Throughout every lifetime, a person learns all of the parts of Torah that are suited to that particular lifetime, while he is still a fetus – which is taught to him by an angel and which is then forgotten at birth, as the Sages teach.

Remedy For A Self-Critical Nature

A person who suffers from being angry at himself, or from being strongly [and unproductively] critical with himself – what is the proper way for him to deal with this?

A

Every person has a place in the soul where he loves himself, with a kind of love that is unconditional, even if only a little. Meaning, there is a place within oneself where one loves himself boundlessly, when it comes to that point. The *avodah* (task) of a person is to expand this place

within. Therefore, as a person is in the midst of suffering from strong [unproductive] self-criticism, he needs to let himself drop into the place in his soul where he loves himself unconditionally. Then, slowly, he should expand that place in the soul, more and more. To explain this, just as the physical body needs the ground to stand on, so does the soul has its ground to stand on, where it can find refuge for itself so that it shouldn't encounter trouble. One should fall into this place in the soul, from the awareness to expand this place in the soul and to strengthen it.

Spiritual Frustration

I feel that I'm missing *shleimus* (self-completion), I feel that Hashem has placed me here on this world to complete a mission, and I don't know what I to do about it. I feel that I'm not completing my G-d given task, and I feel so lost. I know that I am unique, and I know that I have capabilities. It is just that I don't know what to do with myself on this world to reach my personal mission. Any thoughts the Rav can enlighten me with?

A

Think about the good abilities which Hashem has implanted within you, and then think about what your most special ability is, which is hidden within you. Then after discovering it, try to use access your best ability more often, so that you keep actualizing its potential.

Developing Self-Confidence

How can a person develop a renewal of the self if he didn't "believe" in himself as a child?

A

Firstly we need to understand properly what the concept of self-confidence is. It doesn't mean simply that a person "believes" and is "confident" in himself. A person has no intrinsic power of his own, without Hashem. Rather, self-confidence means that a person needs to believe that Hashem gave him certain abilities and capabilities, which he is able to actualize from their potential. From

this point onward, “self-confidence” and “believing in oneself” will be described here in that context.

It is well-known that every person is created with a different nature than another. Each person has different aspects of personality and differing abilities. One’s personal *avodah* is to reveal his hidden potential powers, to serve the Creator. Herein is the root of the matter which we will discuss here, which we shall explain, with *siyata d’shmaya*.

A person came to develop a lack of self-confidence if, in the course of his life, he has consistently tried to perform above his actual energies, and therefore he wasn’t successful with his approach; or, if he didn’t act in a way that would have enabled him to actualize his potential, and therefore he doesn’t feel satisfied enough from his successes [he may seem successful on the outside, but deep down he doesn’t feel connected to what he does and he feels that he is simply not “being himself”].

Each person grows up in a certain environment, family, neighborhood, yeshiva/school, shul, etc. Each of these factors contribute to certain socially accepted norms and achievements which a person needs to do, and in order for one to become “accepted” in that environment, one needs to live in a way that corresponds with these “rules.” When one grows up in an environment where all of these “rules” are not aligned with his personality, one will still try to conform to the situation in most instances. Sometimes this is because a person doesn’t recognize himself well enough to know what is really good for him, and sometimes he does identify that certain things are not good for him yet he is prepared to do whatever he needs to, in order to become accepted in his environment. There are also things which do not depend on environment, but there is still a certain level of talent which is considered “normal” to have, and if one has any less than the “required” amount, he is in danger. In any case, when a person sees himself as being less capable than whatever is considered normal and socially acceptable, he begins to feel that he cannot be successful in the particular area, and then he despairs from even what he is capable of doing, and his energies contract, more and more. When he sees that his capabilities are not of value, he stops using them, and they contract. As a result, he stops acting according to his capabilities.

When the years pass as one keeps up this approach, the soul will perceive more and more that it is not capable of succeeding, and even if the reality is that this is only true about certain details, it can cause his soul to get a general feeling of being incapable [when one isn’t aware of what’s happening to his psyche]. This will certainly be the case when others criticize him and tell him explicitly that he isn’t successful. This is a common reason for lack of self-confidence.

Therefore, a person has to understand well that success is defined by “a person who does everything according to his natural capabilities.” Success does not have any superficial form which applies equally to all people. (There are some people who will have difficulty admitting to this, and they should begin with the next step.) One needs to begin recognizing the aspects of personality in his soul: his capabilities and his weaknesses. Then he can begin to access the unique portion which has been given to him from Hashem. The more a person acts from who he really is, and he succeeds

in actualizing his potential, the more he will believe in himself and begin to feel more and more confident when he does things, that he is able to do whatever “I” can really do in this situation.

One should write down a list of everything he hasn’t been able to succeed in throughout the years as much as he would have liked to, and then make a list of things that he has seen success in. One should then clarify which of these successes was really “me.” and which of them came from the outside. Any successes and capabilities which are really “me” should be continued, and one should train himself to gradually desist from putting effort into anything that isn’t really “me.”

How To De-Sensitize

1) How can a very sensitive kind of person attain a balance in his heart and emotions, so that he can become more objective and focused (in spite of the fact that he is a very emotional kind of person)? 2) The Rav has said that if a very sensitive kind of person learns how to balance out his personality, he is able to reach a level of *Ruach HaKodesh*. How indeed can a sensitive person use his sensitivity in a good way?

A

1) The most superficial way to deal with this is by learning how to connect and disconnect, in a cycle, from all outer stimuli in one’s environment. 2) Or, by developing the soul’s power of *gevurah* (strength). 3) Or, by entering inward, one is not “found” with the antagonist, at least for this short time period. This is the true and inner way to live, for those who are *bnei aliyah* (truly spiritual and growing people), who are able to live in two “worlds” at once – they live deep within their own inner world, and they are also able to be involved with the external world when they need to be. 4) Or, by entering into the deepest place in the soul, which is called “Aisan” (might), one draws forth true power and strength, at its root. There are two parts needed in order to connect to this deep place in the soul: By acquiring strength that comes from the soul, and by entering deeply within oneself. 5) Or, by developing the power of the intellect, one is able to think clearly, and thereby attain a balance between his intellect and his emotions, between his mind and his heart.

When one’s emotions are not simply emotional reactions, but instead they are coming from deep within the person, one can then feel the refinement of his soul. Within this sensitivity, one can absorb information that comes from the *neshamah*, and this is one of the ways to reach *Ruach HaKodesh*.

Overcoming My Need For Approval From Others

My satisfaction in life mainly comes from doing actions which others will compliment for me for, because I am seeking validation and approval from other people. How can I overcome this and begin to get satisfaction from my actions because they are eternal (as explained in this lesson)?

A

Generally there are two reasons why a person is doing things so that others will know about what he did and compliment him for it. (1) They are lacking in confidence in themselves. (2) They want compliments because they want warmth, and a good feeling, and a feeling of honor, from others. One should first identify which of the above reasons is causing him to seek the approval of others.

If I am seeking compliments from others because I want to receive warmth from others, what can I do in order to overcome this?

A

Think about the following: Whenever you do something, do you need everyone to know about it? Do you need other people to validate you on everything that you do? Ask yourself: Are you ever able to sometimes do things without getting validated and complimented by others? Do you need approval for everything you do?

Overcoming Bashfulness

What is the way to overcome bashfulness, according to the Torah's approach?

A

Practically speaking, get used to doing one small action a day which you are a little bit shy about doing, and get used to doing it, until you are no longer embarrassed about doing it. Keep trying this and make gradual process like this, step after step.

In general, you should reflect on the following. People analyze others all the time, thinking about the good and the bad that is found in others. Therefore, there is no way for you to be spared from the negative opinions of others about you. Sometimes, you can think of the fact that you simply will ignore whatever anyone thinks of you. This kind of thinking can be a bit helpful to some people.

On a more inner level, the more that a person has become balanced and inward, the less affected he is from others' opinions of him. Even more so, the more that a person discovers his unique potential in Torah learning, the more that he is found within his own inner "four cubits." his own "private domain." and he will become far less reactive from others' negative opinions of him.

Even more so, one can become connected to the very essence of the soul, which is called "Aisan." lit. "giant." a place of great inner strength in the soul, where one is not afraid of others' opinions of him.

Those who are more sensitive may sometimes have a harder time with this, because they are much more reactive to others' opinions of themselves. In order to balance out their sensitivity, they will need to develop their inner strength, a strength which comes from their power of *daas*, which is the root of all of the emotions. The stronger a person becomes in his *daas*, the less reactive he will be from others' opinions of him.

Embarrassed At The Mikveh

Something has always been bothering me about the *minhag* in *Klal Yisrael* of going to the mikveh. I do not understand how people are not embarrassed to undress themselves in front of other people. What has always been particularly troubling to me is that one of the primary traits of the Jewish people is shame. Since shame is part of our Jewish DNA, how is it that we don't have shame of being undressed in front of others at the mikveh?

I tried to go deep within myself and try to understand why I am struggling with something which no one else has a problem with. Why is it that only I am embarrassed at the mikveh, and *tzaddikim* aren't? I have not yet reached clarity on this matter. I am just angry with myself and I feel ashamed at myself because of this, and I am also angry at other people when

I see that they aren't watching their eyes properly at the mikveh. I get especially angry when I notice someone else staring at my body when I am undressed (or if I just sense it).

The worst part of the issue is that I feel so alone in this. I think I am the only suffering with this issue, because it doesn't seem to bother anyone else. The loneliness I feel because of this is the most difficult part of the issue.

Maybe the Rav can help me with this issue which is breaking my spirit and my heart which gives me no serenity, and to give me the clarity I need for this topic.

A

There are two reasons why people wouldn't be embarrassed [to be undressed at the mikveh]. The external reason is because a person may simply be coarse [unrefined, hence he lacks shame]. There is also an inner reason, however, not to be embarrassed: when one goes very deep within himself, he can be connected to the level that resembles Adam and Chavah before the sin, when they had no shame yet. Therefore, the inner advice [when one is undressed at the mikveh] is to enter very deep within yourself, to the point that you aren't thinking at all about others: You don't care if they are looking at you, or if they're guarding their eyes or not. Instead, just become connected to the state that resembles the beginning of Creation, when man was created individual [alone and with no other people in the world].

Staying In One's Comfort Zone Vs. Leaving It

Should a person mainly do what is difficult for him to do, or should a person mainly do things that better suit his personality?

A

Generally speaking, in the beginning stages of a person's improvement, he must make sure that he is doing whatever he is obligated and responsible to do. That should be clear. When it comes to doing things that he is not obligated to do, he should mainly do things that suit his personality. One should also try to do at least one thing that doesn't suit his personality, which is difficult for him to do, and to force himself to do it.

So, generally speaking, a person needs to do mainly what suits his personality [besides for his obligations and responsibilities in life, which he must do anyhow], along with doing at least one thing that is hard for him to do, so that he is balanced. Often a person thinks that a certain undertaking is suitable for his personality to do, when it is really not, because he has never learned how to go against his own personality, and therefore he has never left his comfort zone. But if a person forces himself to do at least one thing that is hard for him to, he has trained himself to leave his comfort zone sometimes, and this will slowly show him what his true personality is and what he should mainly pursue. In fact, the very idea of forcing yourself to do something that doesn't suit your character is what lies at the core of nullifying yourself to do Hashem's will.

Prioritizing My Talents & Interests

I tend to be involved with many different subjects that interest me. I am good at all of them. How can I know if I should continue to be involved with all these different interests? What should I be focusing on? Which of these should I leave on the side? I don't know how I can feel my main *shelichus* (unique task) that I was meant to fulfill on this world. What can I do to give a *nachas Ruach* to Hashem?

A

There are two different parts of our soul, a power of individuality and a power of collectiveness. Our individuality is called the tribe of "Yehudah" within the soul, for Yehudah's name comes from the four-letter name of Hashem [which, on an individual level, is the root of the essence of one's unique soul]. The other power in our soul, "collectiveness," is called the tribe of "Don" in the soul – the tribe Don was called the one who "collects all the camps," representing a power to integrate everything into one unit.

Therefore, each person needs to clarify these two powers in his soul. Concerning your "individuality" aspect, you should write down a paper all your different possible talents, such as music, giving health advice, etc. After that, make a list of these talents in order of primacy: Your best talent, your second-to-best talent, etc. Also, write down your interests in order of primacy: The thing that interests you the most, the thing that interests you second-to-most, etc. This gives you a "map" of your abilities. That all refers to the "individuality" of your soul. The result of this will be that you will be able to connect mainly to your primary talent, both in how much you are using it as well as in the quality of how you are using it. You should do all of this with the awareness that you are involving yourself in the "individuality" aspect of your soul.

Concerning your “collective” aspect, you should clarify what your collective task is, just as you did regarding your “individuality” aspect, and you should set aside a considerable amount of time, as necessary, to get in touch with your “collective” aspect. You should do this with the awareness that you are involving yourself with your “collective” aspect. Understandably, even when it comes to your “collective” aspect, you should also make a list of your collective tasks in order of priority, based on your personal interests.

Constant Headaches & Anxiety

Until today I am suffering from headaches. Every time I get an ache in my body, it translates into a headache. If I am a bit tired, I begin to get headaches. If I am a bit hungry, or if I’m a little cold, or if I’m not understanding the *Gemara* or anything else that I’m learning, I get headaches. Throughout all of this, I have cried to Hashem about my problem, and I have sought all of the *Gedolim* of the generation, yet I have still not received a satisfying Ato help solve my problem or to help me know how to deal with it. I have been to all kinds of therapists and doctors, ranging from neurologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and natural healers. From what all of the Rabbis and therapists have told me, I understand that the main reason for my headaches is stemming from inner anxiety.

I am begging the Rav to help me, because I am like a blind person groping in the dark.

A

After I read your letter with the seriousness that is appropriate for such a , it appears, with *siyata d’shmaya*, that the following will illuminate the way for you.

1. The basis of our day-to-day living requires *menuchas hanefesh*, a serene soul. There are many ways to arrive at this serenity. One of those ways is explained in the “*Da Es Hisbodesecha*” series. It seems that this is your *avodah* right now: to acquire *menuchas hanefesh*.

2. After that, it’s possible for you to apply yourself with more exertion [to Torah study], from amidst your newly acquired *menuchas hanefesh*, and to keep repeating the cycle, of being serene, then exerting yourself [in Torah], then returning to serenity, etc. If you are ever straining yourself to the point that you can easily regain your serenity back, it is an indicator that you are acting way above your current level [which is detrimental for you].

3. As a general course of action, for the time being, it would be appropriate for you to make sure you are eating healthy and tasty food, which will calm you on a physical level and on an

emotional level. You should also sleep as much as you need to, but don't pressure yourself to get a specific amount of sleep. You should also involve yourself in pleasant activities which calm your soul, such as singing, taking walks, etc. until you feel that you have become more serene. Correspondingly, involve yourself in the *avodah* that is described in the "*Da Es Hisbodesecha*" series.

4. For the time being, whenever you learn Torah, you should learn about things which you find interesting and enjoyable, without pressuring yourself. Generally speaking, do not learn any of those parts of Torah which you had been learning during your difficult period, because that will trigger the old issues.

May Hashem give you the illumination of Mashiach that it should shine within your soul, completely, and through this, you will "return, and healing will come to you." Amen, and may this become His will.

Managing Emotions

Balancing Intellect And Emotion

What is the proper relationship between intellect and emotion, [and] between the spiritual and the realm of action? How much emotion during the day needs to be expressed? How can it not hamper the functioning of the intellect?

A

The intellect must be active at almost all times, and calm emotions need to be active at almost all times. That is true for one who already has a revealed, clear faculty of intellect and emotion. If not, it will depend on his personal level, and even more so, in his soul root. Emotions need to be awakened as necessary, in order to pull away from one's bodily hold, but one should not excite himself too much, because this hampers the intellect. The same goes for the relationship between spirituality and action – it depends on his personal level.

Is it good to listen to soul-stirring songs which are calming? Or does it fool a person into feeling that closeness to Hashem can be achieved without hard work? Should a person who is more emotional refrain from it, because it will cause him to slacken off from Torah study and from pursuing his long-term goals, and the like? If it is a good thing, how much should one listen? Should a person set aside time for it, or can it be whenever he feels like it?

A

Yes, one needs to be balanced through consistent and stable exertion. Each time, one should see if his connection to his intellect is strong, and see to it that he is not satisfied or serene through the good feeling of emotional excitement alone. One should have a set time when he listens to songs, and also at times when he feels the need in his soul. But it should be done with pauses in between, and with the awareness that it is only an external drive.

Emotional Release

I always thought that releasing your emotions is not a good thing, but the Rav has explained that it's a good thing to do. What is the proper perspective about releasing emotions? Is it a good thing or not?

A

There is a *mitzvah* of the Torah of *ahavas* Hashem (to love Hashem) and *yiras* Hashem (to fear Hashem), which is a release of positive emotion. However, because there are also negative emotions, people are often cautious about releasing their emotions in general, out of concern that this will cause them to release their negative emotions. But this is a mistake. If a person tries to keep his negative emotions inside, he will stifle them, and at a certain point, they will explode outward. The proper perspective is to deal with these feelings, in the proper way. We should never completely release all of our negative feelings at once. Rather, we must deal with each of these negative feelings, slowly, and one by one. But we should never let negative emotions fester inside ourselves, because usually they will explode outward some time later.

The Rav explained a method of revealing the emotions by way of using the intellect. But we know that it is also possible to reveal the emotions by way of the emotions themselves. Is the approach explained here by the Rav the only way in which the emotions can be revealed from their potential state?

A

There is never any one way in a person's *avodah*, whether it concerns the work he must do with his own personal soul or whether it comes to man's task in serving his Creator. There is certainly a way to reveal the emotions by way of the emotions themselves. However, the way we mentioned here is not just a way to reveal the emotions by way of the mind. It is rather a way to reveal the emotions from the existing emotions, by way of the mind. So it is not just using the mind, and it is rather like a middle path between the mind and emotions.

There is certainly a way to reveal the emotions by way of the emotions themselves, and there is an advantage as well as a disadvantage to this method. The advantage is that it is a more direct

approach, going straight to the emotions, as opposed to dealing with the issues on an external and superficial level; it is an inward kind of approach. But the disadvantage of this method is that usually the person who reveals his emotions through becoming more emotional will become emotionally dysfunctional. The emotions will be off-base. A person then has to make use of his mind to stabilize his emotions, and indeed, this can work.

However, here we have presented an opposite approach: Instead of exposing the emotions in a way that will lead to problems and then taking care of them with the mind, the approach we explained here is to use the mind and emotions together, to release the emotions through the mind and emotions together. The emotions are being opened through the mind.

Practically speaking, however, if a person feels however that the approach of working with the emotions directly will work better - which is often the case with women, who have a stronger amount of emotion – then the way to go about this is as follows (briefly): Identify an emotion, and focus on it. This further reveals that emotion, with the more you concentrate and focus on it. However, even when using this approach, which uses the emotions directly, you will still need use your minds to carefully scrutinize your emotion, to make sure that the emotion isn't going too far, to make sure the emotion doesn't get thrown out of whack, and to maintain clear awareness to the emotion.

If one has emotions that are very strong, it probably won't help to use the mind to maintain emotional regularity, since this kind of person has an intense experience of emotion, and he has only a superficial experience of his intellectual mind. Will such a person be helped by using his mind to direct his emotions (since this kind of person can only use his mind to deal with the external surface of his feelings, and not the depth of his feelings)?

A

This is a subtle question, and I will try to Ait as precisely as possible. If someone has a strongly emotional personality, he identifies his emotions as his "I." whereas his intellectual abilities are deemed by him as external and superficial. When he uses his intellect to deal with his feelings, he will feel as if he is using an external, superficial ability to deal with his "I." and therefore he will find his intellectual abilities of little value, when he tries to deal with his emotions. He will feel that he is not getting through to the depth of his emotions. But he can become deeper than this, and he can learn to identify his power of intellect as his "I." When one has that self-perception towards himself,

he will feel that using his intellect to deal with his emotions really does get to the depth of his emotions.

If a person has two different kinds of strong emotions and he wants to reveal these emotions, should he deliberately place himself into an emotionally charged situation which would reveal those emotions more?

A

Certainly a person can have more strong emotions than one, but he has less awareness to the other emotions, and more awareness to a particularly strong emotion than he has for his other emotions. But there certainly exist other strong emotions in a person.

As for the question if a person should deliberately place himself into situations that would reveal his other emotions, it depends. If it is an extreme situation, the general response to this would be no. If it is not extreme, then sometimes, he may place himself into such situations. That is one way of *avodah*.

Another way of *avodah* is to begin to work with the strongest positive emotion that is already revealed, and then a person will become more aware of his emotions, and this will make him aware of his other emotions as well.

These are two options to take. To repeat, one should only place himself in normal situations which can reveal his emotions, and he should not place himself into abnormal, complicated situations in order to reveal his emotional side, because that is a dangerous path to take.

Working With Our Emotions

Should one begin to work on his emotions by strengthening his most positive emotion, or by weakening his most negative emotion?

A

One must also try to weaken his most negative emotion, along with trying to strengthen his most positive emotion. But it is not recommended at all to only work on weakening the worst emotion, without trying to develop the most positive emotion.

There are some people who have a hard time weakening their worst emotion and therefore they only work with strengthening their most positive emotion. They do not work on their most negative emotion at all. They may do so if they find this effective. But if a person only works on trying to weaken his worst emotion, without trying to strengthen his most positive emotion, this will not work at all.

Talking To Hashem Amidst Intense Negative Emotions

How can I talk to Hashem as I am in middle of going through a negative emotion, such as if I am in middle of anger?

A

As you feel yourself getting angry, say to Hashem, “Hashem, You gave me the power of free will to choose if I will overcome my anger or not. I don’t want to get angry, because I know that it is your will that I should not be angry. Please help me choose correctly and overcome my anger.” In this way, you don’t just ask Hashem to help you overcome your anger; you include Hashem in all aspects of it, because you ask Him to help you choose.

If I am in a very emotional situation and I need to talk to Hashem right now and there is no time for me to gather my thoughts about what I want to say, what should I do?

A

One should first begin speaking to Hashem once a week at the end of *davening*. That is the first step. This gives us the time to prepare in advance what we want to talk to Hashem about. Only after that will one gain the ability to speak to Hashem even when he is in turmoil. As a general recommendation, though, it is always better to pause a bit and wait until you calm down somewhat

before talking to Hashem, so that you will be talking to Hashem in a state of calmness, from your inner world.

If a person is in a situation where he can't think properly and is very emotional, is it better to hold off speaking to Hashem until one has calmed down, or can he speak to Hashem even though he is in emotional turmoil?

A

It is written, “A worry in the heart of man should be told over.”¹ Sometimes, a person should speak to another even when he is full of emotion. It is necessary to speak about what's on our heart, and part of the reason that Hashem gave us speech is so that we can pour out our heart to Him when we are in turmoil. However, at a later point, a person should try to become aware of where his speech is coming from (from his emotions or his intellect), and when possible, add some intellect to his speech, by thinking beforehand what he will say.

When Negative Emotions Don't Let You Focus

The Rav said that we should begin by writing down only our experiences of positive emotions. However, as soon as we discuss emotions, we immediately are reminded of certain negative emotions that we have. What should we do about this?

A

Generally, there are two types of people when it comes to this. Some people are dealing with a very strong negative emotion, which doesn't allow them to have peace of mind. For such people, there is no question that they need to professionally deal with the negative emotion that overtakes them, because it is causing dysfunction in their life. Another kind of person does not experience particularly strong negative emotions, and it is just that they are immersed in something negative,

¹ Mishlei 12:25

which causes them to experience negative feelings. They simply need to channel their negative activities towards positive activities. But if someone has a real problem with a particular negative emotion, there is no question that he must deal with it professionally.

How do we refocus after going through an intense emotion? How can we return to our world of *avodah* after going through emotional turbulence?

A

Ask yourself what Hashem wants from you in this situation. The difficulty itself can become a part of your actual *avodah*. For example, if you are having difficulty with certain people, you can see which point you need to work on, and that will become your *avodah*. Or, if you are dealing with anger problems, you can make working on anger your current *avodah*.

Detaching From Intense Emotions

How can a person detach from his intense emotions, such as if he was in mourning this year over a family member? And how can a person learn how to detach from other intense periods of grief?

A

If a person can train himself to detach from intense emotions in general, then the next time he goes through a very intensely emotional period, he will be able to detach even from these intense emotions times that he is now encountering. It will not be easy of course, but its difficulty will be greatly lessened. We can't start to learn how to detach from the emotions during the actual time when the intense emotions are happening. Rather we need to develop a lifestyle of being able to emotionally detach from situations already from before, and only through that can we cope emotionally through the rough times in our life.

Emotions & Middos

What is the relationship between the *middos* (character traits) which the Rav elaborates upon in *Getting To Know Your Feelings* and in *Getting To Know Your Soul*, with the emotions that we recognize, such as anger, sadness, joy, fear, etc.?

A

The *middos* described in “Getting To Know Your Feelings” and in “Getting To Know Your Soul” are the core *middos* of the soul. All other *middos* are a product of various integrated forces in the soul. For example, anger is a product of a desire (*ratzon*) which hasn’t been actualized. *Ratzon* (desire) is an actual character trait of the soul, whereas anger is a result of a *ratzon* that hasn’t been actualized. The opposite of anger is joy, and joy is a result of something that has been actualized. Joy is a product of *binah* (contemplation), when a person understands something based on something else, which actualizes the potential of the raw knowledge. So joy can only result from contemplation. Worry is also a product of a desire that hasn’t been actualized. Fear is called *pachad*, but it is also called *yirah*, and *yirah* is synonymous with *gevurah* (strength). Fear places some restraint on *yirah*. All of the emotions are a “branch” of something else in the soul, and we need to see the root of each particular emotion.

Examples of Expansion & Contraction

I need a clarification on the concepts of “expansion” and “contraction” of the soul. I do not understand the concept that the soul is constantly in movement, and that it is either moving towards expansion or towards contraction.

A

Expansion is when the soul is moving towards an expansive [extroverted] mode, whereas contraction is when the soul is contracting inward [introverted]. Below is a list of actual examples of expansion and contraction, but one should be aware that sometimes what seems like expansion can actually be a contradiction of the soul, and vice versa. For example, when one lives more inwardly, this can be understood superficially as “contraction.” but in actuality, it is an expansion of the soul,

because it enables the soul to enter a vast, expansive inner world, which is far deeper and wider than the world found on the outside.

Examples of “expansion” of the soul are (1) Socializing with others. (2) Engaging in the external side of life, taking care of physical responsibilities. (3) Whenever one feels a need to experience noise or even “inner” noise [i.e. dramatic emotions or turbulent thoughts]. (4) Engaging in increased chatter. (5) Speaking. (6) Extending outward the hands and feet. (7) Action. (8) Being awake. (9) Focused thoughts. (10) Looking. (11) A need to hear loud music. (12) Hearing. (13) Joy. (14) Thinking. (15) Involvement in many different activities. (16) Using the elements of water and wind in the soul. (17) Eating a lot. (18) Moving quickly. (19) Conceit. (20) Anger. (21) Explosive reactions of emotion. (22) Smiling at others.

Examples of “contraction” of the soul: 1) Being alone with oneself. 2) Living inwardly. 3) A need for external and internal quiet. 4) Talking minimally. 5) Silence. 6) Contracted body language. 7) Serenity. 8) Sleep. 9) Calm thoughts. 10) Closing the eyes. 11) Calm music. 12) A need for calmness. 13) Sadness. 14) Silencing the thoughts. 15) Involvement with minimal action. 16) Using the elements of fire and earth in the soul. 17) Eating minimally. 18) Fasting. 19) Laziness. 20) Humility. 21) Patience. 22) Seriousness.

When The Emotions Contract

What should a person in situations of experiencing the mode of “contraction” in the soul [as the Rav describes in *Getting To Know Your Self*] do?

A

[When the soul is in a state of contraction, for example, when one feels that he has contracted inward and he needs to be more reserved right now], one should “contract” into the inner, positive point that is found within the contraction, which is pleasurable. “Expansion” of the soul affords joy (simchah), whereas “contraction” of the soul affords pleasure (*Oneg*). The good part about contracting in the soul is that it enables one to experience pleasure. People usually look at contraction of the soul as a negative experience, only considering the negative side to contraction. But one is able to contract in the positive sense, by remaining in a state of pleasure, and this is known as the concept of *Oneg Shabbos*.

Dealing With Fears

Getting Over Fears

Is fear ever a good thing?

A

The only thing a person must ever be afraid of is the fact that he fears anything besides Hashem. That is something to be truly afraid of, and it is the only pure fear which exists. Either we fear Hashem Himself, or we fear anything that is besides for Hashem – which essentially causes us to have the fears. Whenever we experience a fear, like when we feel fear from the Arabs, we should view it as an awakening to remind us that we are not afraid enough of Hashem, and that is why we have become afraid of something. It is an awakening to us that we are not close enough to Hashem; because if we would really feel close with Hashem, there would be no reason to fear anything.

Again, let me emphasize that this is not a mere intellectual definition. If a person would really believe that Hashem is close to him, he would not be afraid. When you are found with HaKadosh Baruch Hu, there is no fear there. So if a person experiences a fear, it is a reminder to the person that he needs to be afraid of the fact that he is not close enough to Hashem. That is why a person becomes afraid of the Arabs!

Do we need to fear the effects of sin?

A

Yaakov *Avinu* had this fear, of being afraid of the effects of a possible sin. However, even this fear was ultimately stemming from the “*tzeil haguf*” (“body shadow”). This came from the physical body of a *tzaddik*, the part which is not completely and perfectly attached with Hashem. But Yaakov *Avinu* had a balance between the inner layer of the soul (which contains no fear, for it is part and parcel with Hashem), and the outer layers of the soul, which fears sin. If a person does not feel enough closeness with Hashem, he will be dominated by more fears, fear of sin included. If a

person becomes more connected to Hashem and he feels closer to Him, he is calmed on the inside, and the outer part of the self which feels the effects of fear will stay in balanced proportion. This is the kind of fear which our *tzaddikim* had. They had a fear of sin, which was equally balanced with a great feeling of closeness to Hashem.

When a person fears the effects of a sin, does this fear exist even in the inner part of the soul which only feels closeness to Hashem? Or does it exist only on the outer layers of the soul that experiences fear?

A

The inner part of the soul feels a complete closeness with Hashem, so it is not possible in that point to feel any fear of sin, because the inner part of the soul is above the point of sin. Therefore, when a person feels this part of the soul where he is completely attached with Hashem, there is no fear of sin, because there is no possibility of sin there.

So whenever a person feels a fear, it is a sign that something is wrong and that he needs to improve in some area? Does it mean that he has sinned, or that he is not close enough yet to Hashem? Fear is thus entirely a symptom that something is wrong?

A

You have defined it correctly. If a person is feeling a very intense fear, it is a sign that something is amiss. But if you keep feeling an alternation between fear and feeling close to Hashem – in other words, at the same time that you feel calmed by the knowledge that Hashem is near you, you are stilling experiencing a fear – this is called *pachad d'kedushah*, “holy fear.” If you do not feel that you are moving back and forth between these two feelings, it is a sign though that something is wrong [and that you need to work on your relationship with Hashem].

Sadness & Joy

Rehabilitating After A Nervous Breakdown

What am I supposed to do, so that I can get past this weakened state (meaning my physical and emotional symptoms), as a result of a breakdown that I experienced? It's also possible that now it's too difficult for me to do even the barest physical or emotional exertion, as long as it's a bit above my current capability, because ever since I broke down, my capabilities have declined.

A

Begin your life again, as if you are just beginning. Become like a convert to Judaism, who is considered to be like a newborn infant. Don't think at all about the past. Don't work off your past, because if you are continuing from your past, you will still be stuck in the past, of being weakened emotionally, which led to you become weakened physically. If you begin your life again, starting from a new beginning, you are starting from your current capabilities [with no relation to your past].

It may be necessary for you to "start from a new beginning" several times throughout the day. Whenever you feel a difficulty with something, desist from it, and only after you feel calmer physically and emotionally should you begin again, according to your current capabilities. In addition, you should access the soul's power of *Oneg* (pleasure) in different ways, which will strengthen your soul. In this way, you will soon be healed. May you have peace and may peace be upon you. Rise, and succeed. As an aside, try to get advice on which types of foods you can eat, which will give you more physical strength.

Down In The Dumps

My *ruchniyus* (spiritual situation) has taken a downslide. Nothing comforts me. What should I do?

A

Search for the most beloved and joyous place in your soul, and return to this pleasant space. From there you can ascend higher. [You can uncover this space in the soul], even if it is a very concealed and hidden place in yourself. There is always a spark [of this pleasant place in your soul], though it may be very small, which is still revealed. Connect to it. “Shake off the dust, arise” – arise, arise, arise, holy *neshamah* – with splendor, joy, and pride!

How Do I Stop Being Negative?

If I see bad in a situation, how do I focus on the good? Do I have to get myself to see a situation how others see it?

A

Good. It depends why something is bothering you and not other people. Sometimes there is something that bothers you that really shouldn't, and you are just overreacting. This kind of problem stems from simply being negative, which is a problem that stems from the *nefesh* habehamis (lower, animal layer of our soul). But if it's a problem that not only bothers you but bothers others as well, it can be because the negative elements in the situation far outweigh the positive aspects of the situation. If that is the case, the *avodah* is, as we have explained here: to find how the root of the situation is somehow good.

Getting Through A Dismal Period

What is an example of a good point to hold onto when we are going through difficult times?

A

There are two opposite powers in the soul: despair, and hope. When a person is in a going through a dismal period and he despairs, and he is too accepting of the despair, he is weakening the “fire” of his hope. The only thing a person needs to do, in order to access the power of tikva/hope, is for a person to know that “I will soon return to the way things were.” Practically speaking, a person should understand that his soul needs to go to “sleep” sometimes, just as the body needs sleep [meaning that the soul isn’t able to perform at it best, during a dismal period].

So when a person is awakening the power of hope, there is nothing specific which a person needs to hope for?

A

You only need to be on the proper level to do so, to have hope that you will certainly return to the way things were before, and that you can certainly succeed. This doesn’t meant to simply say “I hope” superficially, but to feel truly confident that Hashem will certainly help you succeed.

If a person’s *ratzon* (will) dries up, how can he get it going again?

A

During a dismal period, a person should not focus on action (*maaseh*) that much, and instead he should focus more on maintaining whatever willpower (*ratzon*) he has acquired until now. It will be too difficult for a person to “create” a *ratzon* now for more growth, now that his will for growth has stopped. But this much, he will still be able to do.

I have learned that a person needs to keep doing what he needs to do and to keep serving Hashem, even when he doesn’t feel like it and he has no enthusiasm or will to serve Hashem. For example, a person should *daven* to Hashem even if he doesn’t feel particularly enthusiastic about *davening* right now. But according to what the Rav is *saying* here, it sounds like we need to keep awakening our emotion and will.

A

Only a person who has reached a very high level of *pnimiyus* is able to do so. A person will never build his inner world if he serves Hashem without feeling. If a person has already developed his *pnimiyus*, then he is able to have times in which he serves Hashem even when he doesn't have any will. But for most people, it is not a proper approach to always serve Hashem without any feelings.

Women are more usually emotional than men, they need to work more with their emotions, than with trying to act when they don't feel like it. By contrast, men, who are less emotionally inclined than women, are better equipped to do what they have to do even when they don't feel like it. But this doesn't either mean that men need to act robotic and mechanical, with no feeling in what they do. Everyone needs to open their hearts. This should not be about "doing what you have to do even when you don't feel like it."

Do we have any way of knowing when these "good times" or "bad times" will come?

A

We do not have any control of when they come and go, but the more a person works on himself, the less the "bad times" will come, and the less intense they will be. But there is almost no one in the generation who never goes through these "bad times."

During a dismal period, a person wonders if he's going on the right path or not. How can person indeed know if he's going in the right path?

A

During the "bad times," it is too difficult for us to know if we are going on the right path or not, so we will have to wait for the "good times" when we can think more objectively. During a dismal period, if a person feels that he needs to improve in certain areas or take a different path, it is usually coming from an unhealthy place in the soul, from feeling down and broken. So in order to analyze one's path, one will need to wait for the dismal period to pass, and analyze his path later, when "good times" return.

Why does our soul need to go through this state of “sleep.” or “Bad Days”? And is there any way we can prolong our periods of “Good Days?”

A

Hashem created the world that everything needs sleep, even our soul. Since our soul needs sleep, we need to also go through “Bad Days.” There is nothing we can do about it. But the more we work on ourselves, the longer our “Good Days” will last.

How To Pull Out Of Sadness

If a person becomes sad whenever he thinks of his troubles, is it better for him to avoid thinking of his troubles altogether? Or should he try to force himself and learn how to rejoice in his suffering?

A

Sometimes a person should “run away” from his troubles, to a certain extent. One certainly doesn’t need to be focused all the time on his troubles. Only a person who cannot stand any bit of suffering at all should run away completely from thinking about any of his suffering. But the average person, who is able to handle a bit of suffering, is able to learn how to cope with his suffering and to deal with his troubles, and at times, he can also “run away” a bit from his suffering, by engaging in various activities that will take his mind off his troubles. There is certain validity in doing this, at least for a short amount of time. In a usual situation, a person will need to learn how to cope with troubles and learn how to accept his suffering with love, and at other times, he should also take his mind off it and ‘run away’ a bit from his troubles.

Forgetting About Negative Experiences

Unfortunately, people have gone through all kinds of negative experiences. How can we truly forget about all that we have gone through in life?

A

It is not possible to forget completely. What is possible, however, is that a person can sit with himself in a calm silence, and allow his thoughts to roam. (The thoughts should be allowed to blow around freely as if they are floating above the surface of the water.) For every thought that comes to you, allow the thought to continue. Become aware of it, and allow it to continue further. Let it roam, and slowly, slowly, a person will then feel that his mind has been quieted and emptied. [So] you should let the thoughts roam freely during a time of quiet, without disturbances.

This is not a way of totally forgetting [about the bothersome thoughts], but it is a way for a person to return to a calm place in the soul. When you then enter the quiet place in the soul, [you will discover that] this inner place in the soul has never experienced the bothersome thoughts. It has remained clean [pure and undisturbed] all along. But in order to reach it, one needs to quiet all of his surroundings, and then he can reach this [inner] place [in his soul] which is clean [pure and undisturbed], quiet, and relaxed.

Helping A Depressed Sibling

I have a sibling who has a lot of suffering in her life, and she is disgusted with her life, as simple as that sounds. It doesn't seem like there's any natural solution to help her. How can I help her and make her happy? She never got married and she's physically and emotionally tired all the time from all of her suffering. How can I strengthen her *emunah* in Hashem and show her that Hashem is good to her and loves her, when she feels like her entire life is one big experience of suffering, and she's so frustrated and disappointed with everything in her life and she doesn't see any good future for herself? I happen to think that she did do go through an extreme amount of suffering in her life, way more than what any normal person can handle.

A

Try to show her how there is good in any given situation, and through that, she can be shown how Hashem was kind to her and how Hashem loves her. By showing her a bit of good in any given situation, a spark of G-dliness can become illuminated within her and then she will be enabled to see how good Hashem is. As for the rest of her lot in life, she will need to be taught how to accept her suffering lovingly. But the main emphasis needs to always be on the positive. She should always be shown how there is always a spark of good in any situation, and through it she can be able to see how Hashem is present and being good to her somehow. After that, she can be taught about how to strengthen her *emunah* even in the darkest times of life, as in the verse, “And you faith at nights.”

Depressed From The Suffering Of Others

In shul, there are people who come from all over the world (mostly *Eretz Yisrael*) who, after *davening* is over, they will give a bang on the *bimah* and start pouring out all of their troubles. We keep hearing story after story, of all the different *tzaros* (tribulations) that people have.

I have alternating reactions to this. Sometimes, I react with indifference, because I feel like I will go crazy if I become too emotionally connected to the stories. At other times, I become very emotionally connected to the stories that I hear or read about, and then my heart breaks. I become sort of “frozen” for a while afterwards. I feel so pained from these stories I am hearing about that I eventually feel kind of paralyzed, sad, and uncommunicative. I am aware that the Rav explains in “Getting To Know Your Feelings” that a person can control his emotions through the ability of *daas*. But how exactly do I acquire this power of *daas* and prevent myself from getting scatted through my emotions? I will be very happy to receive help from the Rav about this.

A

On the superficial level, one should avoid hearing or reading about tragic circumstances as much as he can, and only to the extent that he can handle emotionally. On one’s own level, one should

join with another's pain and also with the pain of the *Shechinah*. Anything that a person cannot handle emotionally is beyond his current level, and it can only be comprehended by him intellectually. Alternatively, one can temporarily allow himself to remain callous to all of the stories that he hears, until he eventually develops his inner world, and after that, he should try hard to repair this callousness. However, ideally, one should still try to avoid hearing or reading about these things in the first place. This is what the Chofetz Chaim did [in order to avoid becoming callous].

On a more inner level, the more that one's inner world becomes opened to the person, the ability [to remain balanced] is not simply a kind of thought or a feeling to have, but an internal "place" in oneself. Just as a person is in a noisy place can enter into a room inside a building and he hears less noise, and the further he enters into the rooms inside, the more he is separated from the noise on the outside, so can a person enter into a "room" inside the soul, where one can be "alone." separated from everything that is taking place outside. One needs to keep alternating back and forth, between being "alone" versus being involved with the outside world. One needs to be involved with others [which is outside of himself] when there is a need for it, and to the extent that he can handle, based on his current level.

In addition, a person also needs to develop a mind that is clear and strong. Through this, one can attain a balance between his emotions and his thoughts. Just as one's emotions can be greatly opened, so can the mind be greatly opened. The mind and the emotions each balance the other out. After this [developing the mind and attaining a balance between the mind and the emotions], one acquires the ability to "enter into" the mind as well, as the ability to "exit" the mind and thereby enter into the emotions. But this should be done with conscious awareness [of either entering the mind in order to leave one's emotional state, or to exit the mind and enter into an emotional state]. But in order to reach this ability, one needs to develop the power of the mind, as mentioned above.

Correspondingly, one also needs to develop the ability of "quieting" [to quiet the mind or the emotions], and this can be done through emptying out the thoughts [as discussed in "Getting To Know Your Soul"]. One thereby acquires the ability to enter into his mind [to be in an intellectual, objective state, as opposed to an emotional state] and to exit his mind [to be in his emotional state, as opposed to his intellectual, objective state].

When Hearing About Tragedies

When I hear about tragic news, for example when I heard about children who are *niftar* (and there are unfortunately many such stories each year, may G-d save us from this), I become depressed for many days. I keep remembering these tragic stories, until the next tragedy

comes, and then I keep thinking about the new tragedy...What is the perspective I need to have, whenever I hear or read about tragedies? How can I come out of the trauma that I get from bad news which I heard or read about?

A

(1)[You need to have] *emunah*, faith in G-d. (2) Think about the spiritual suffering that there is today, which is far worse, considering the great spiritual destruction that is taking place in our generation. (3) Think about what you can generally do to act kinder towards others. (4) Connect to the inner good that is within you. (5) Immerse yourself in a world of inner thought. (6) Be happy about the fact that you are able to feel others' pain. (7) Accept the suffering that you feel, with love. (8) Reflect and conclude that part of the makeup of Creation is that it entails "evil" [anything we perceive as not being good], and that the result of this is all of the suffering in Creation. (9) Connect to a holy kind of joy – both through actions that will make you joyous, as well as by feeling the emotion of joy. (10) In general, it is worthwhile to be aware that it's better for a person when he doesn't know that much about any news that happens in the world. This is how the Chofetz Chaim conducted himself. Therefore, one should avoid reading the newspapers and etc. (This is besides for other reasons why a person shouldn't read the newspapers, but let this reason suffice.)

How Do We Create Joy?

The Rav explained that complete joy comes from fully actualizing a potential. How do I fully actualize my potential? Is it by being happy whenever I release my potential? Or is it by actualizing my potential more and more?

A

Complete joy is mainly achieved by focusing and concentrating on the fact that you have released your potential, when you do. This generates more joy and causes you to release your potential more, whereupon the cycle can keep repeating.

Does joy come from the act itself of actualizing my potential, or does it only come after I have succeeded in concentrating on the fact that I am actualizing my potential?

A

There are three parts to the joy. Actualizing your potential creates joy. After you have actualized your potential and you concentrate on the fact that you have just actualized your potential, you gain another degree of joy. This completes your joy, and then you can an added degree of joy after you have actualized your potential and you have also focused on your success. So there are three parts to the joy. There is joy in the process itself of actualizing your potential, there is another joy which comes after you have focused on the fact that you have actualized your potential, and the resulting joy from this creates another degree of joy for you.

The Balance Between Inner Joy & Spiritual Aspirations

Does the concept of *someach b'chelko* (being happy with our lot) apply as well to our *ruchniyus*/spirituality, such as being happy with the *middos* one has, or does a person only need to be happy with his physical side of life?

A

That is a classical question which is discussed. When it comes to our physical areas, we need to be totally *someach b'chelko*, and when it comes to our *ruchniyus*, we have a two-sided *avodah*. We need to be happy with even our current level of *ruchniyus* that we have, as the *Vilna Gaon* says; at the same time, we also need to aspire to reach more and more levels in our *ruchniyus*. We need a certain amount of inner happiness towards ourselves so that we can “feel good about ourselves” somewhat, and at the same time, concerning our future, we need to aspire for more growth. So yes, there is a degree of *someach b'chelko* in our *ruchniyus*, and it is a very subtle *avodah*.

How Can We Become Happier With Ourselves?

Do we need to first love Hashem in order to be *someach b'chelko* [happy with who we are and with what we have]?

A

We must first believe in Hashem, before we work on trying to love Hashem. A person can believe that all that Hashem does is good, and from that, a person is *someach b'chelko*. There are people who are naturally happy with themselves, because they have a very pleasant nature that is drawn towards calmness and pleasantness; these are people who were born with a dominant element of water in their souls (which is the root of pleasure). There are only a few people who are like this, but they do exist. As for those of us who do not possess this nature, we will need to make use of either of the paths described in the earlier chapters, or we need to use our power of *emunah* in order to reach our *someach b'chelko*. Altogether, there are three ways for a person to be *someach b'chelko*:

1) When a person is already born with a pleasant, easygoing nature, he finds it natural to be “*someach b'chelko*” [These people do not have an *avodah* of trying to reach their *someach b'chelko* point, because they are already there].

2) One can also reach *someach b'chelko* by using methods of inner calm [see *Da Es Hisbodesecha* chapters 1-10]. 3) Alternatively, one can reach *someach b'chelko* by developing the power of *emunah* (believing how everything is from Hashem).

Relationships

How Do Can I Get Myself To Love Other Jews?

How do you increase love towards another person? By doing things for others?

A

There are external and internal ways to love others. On the external level, you need to do actions for others, but internally, you need to do things for others out of a feeling of love for another. On a higher level, you can make sure to give a little more than the amount you originally wanted to give to the other. Do so with the intention of increasing your love to another. After you are doing that, you can progress to a higher level: you can think of how bad it is to only love yourself and to not love others. Even more so, you can think of the other's good qualities and thereby awaken a love for him. On the highest level, awaken your love for all of the souls of *Klal Yisrael*.

When I do *hisbodedus* [meditation through attaining inner quieting], I feel more loving towards others, but when it comes down to my actual day-to-day life, I find that I have lost those feelings and then wonder where it has gone.

A

How do you love others – do you love others only based on the qualities you see in them...? The general way to overcome your disgust you feel towards others is that during your time of *hisbodedus*, concentrate on how much you would want to love that person. First imagine a person whom you find it easier to love and concentrate on how much you love for him, so that you can increase your love for him. After you do *hisbodedus* like that, you will find that you love that person even more in your actual day-to-life. When you realize that, you can now do this with all other people you know.

It is better to try this one-by-one as opposed to concentrating on how much you love the general whole of *Klal Yisrael*, because you cannot grab too many high levels at once. Instead, it is better to focus on increasing love towards one person at a time.

Why Do People Act Insensitive?

How it is that certain people can be so insensitive to other people's feelings? In our language today, we call this a lack of "tact." There are people whose behavior in a way that shows that they aren't *paying* attention to what they do and sometimes they are completely unaware that they are hurtful to others. In other cases, there are people who do weird things and basically behave like uncivilized people. I am trying to understand what the core of these issues are, and how these issues can be fixed.

A

- 1) Insensitivity to others' feelings stems from egotism. The way for a person to fix this issue is by engaging in acts of giving and love.
- 2) It is an issue that also comes from being overly self-absorbed. The way to fix this issue is by thinking about the lives of others, and by listening to another.
- 3) It is also a behavior that can come from a lack of refinement. This results in brazen, disrespectful behavior. The way for a person to fix this issue is through learning the subtleties of [the Torah's] wisdom, as well as through acquiring the awareness of subtleties in general.

Social Anxiety (I)

Should I be working on fixing my *middah* of *shiflus* (feelings of unworthiness), or should I be working on my *middah* of *yirah* (awareness of Hashem)? And what should I be doing about the *gaavah* I have when I am feeling good [about myself]? Also how should I go about practically working on this?

A

You should set aside some time alone to yourself (making sure you are also balanced by having friends and enjoying being around them), and build for yourself a world of your "self." your own internal world, an internal space where there is just you, alone, and which only you can enter. It is the internal world of connection to yourself, to the good that is in you, to your very "I." Thereafter,

whenever you meet other people who awaken feelings of unworthiness in you, you can enter within, into your very existence, and from there, you can receive strength and inspiration. For now, don't bust yourself trying to fix the trait of gaavah, until after you have solidly built for yourself an inner world of your own.

The foundation of repairing all problems is when you have built your own inner world, with a strong and powerful connection to your inner self. It is a pure and subtle connection to who you are: to your true self. In order to do it, you should identify the most positive aspect of your personality and connect to it - on the intellectual level, on the emotional level, and on a "soul" level. And you should actively connect to that positive aspect of your personality. You should accustom yourself to sitting with yourself alone at times, in silence, and slowly you can gain a love for this silence. It is recommended that you listen to the series of **הכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש** (Self-Recognition & Self Empowerment), and to practically act upon those lessons.

It is for you to reflect upon and understand that a person has an "inner world" – a complete world, in and of itself. In contrast to this inner space in yourself, there is also the outer part of your existence, which turns outward to others. As long as a person isn't strongly connected to his own inner world, his encounters with others will cause him to go outward from himself, and the person will try to adapt himself to his surroundings, and he will be very reactive to whatever takes place outside of him. That is why, in your situation, when you meet people whom you feel are successful, you feel unworthy about yourself, and your inner core is being influenced and shaped by what takes place outside of you.

In contrast to this, if you would become stronger within yourself, you wouldn't be that reactive to others. You would be only minimally reactive to them, so you wouldn't be as affected from others, and also, the frequency of your reactivity to others would also be a lot less, and it wouldn't affect you on such a core level. Becoming strongly connected to your own inner self would allow you to be more comfortable around others, because you wouldn't feel a need to be the center of the social circle. It is very possible that others have certain expectations from you and they want you to be a certain way, and that is why you also expect this from yourself, to try to become more popular and be noticed by others. But when people seek social approval, this actually stems from an inner emptiness, to take leave of one's true self, and a desperate attempt to show others "who I really am" - but it is actually not who you really are.

Therefore, whether the issue is feeling unworthy or feeling a need to be popular amongst your peers because you aren't strongly connected enough to your true self, the solution is to reveal your own inner world and to enter it regularly. The more you will live like this, most of your issues will be solved, with siyata d'shmaya.

Anxiety If I'M Getting Enough Kavod From Others

There are some people who I'm very afraid of and intimidated from. There are also people whom I want to be very respected by. In the past, there were certain people who used to accord me a lot of *kavod* (honor), but recently they are no longer giving me the same *kavod* (honor) that they used to show to me. Because of this, I have a lot of uncomfortable feelings every time I see them. I learn in the same *beis midrash* as those people and every time I see them it bothers me that they no longer show such *kavod* to me as they used to show me. I am suffering from a lot of anxiety from this, and I would like to know how I can free myself from these feelings and just be more settled in my mind.

A

There are several parts in what you need to do. You need to acquire (1) an ability to be strongly connected to a thought, (2) an ability to have a strong emotional connection to yourself, (3) an ability to focus on what you're learning in the *sefer* in front of you, (4) an emotional disconnection from another person, for the time being when you're learning in the *beis midrash*, and along with *staying* balanced in your relationships with others. (5) You also need to be able to love other people, and (6) you need to lovingly accept the suffering that you have from your painful feelings in general, and more specifically, you need the ability to be able to handle embarrassment or shame from others.

Popular But Suffering Inside

For a few years already I am dealing with an issue of constant negative feelings, recurring thoughts of low self-worth, fears, and other negative emotions. About a year ago I began to take some medication for my compulsive thoughts and negative feelings, and Baruch Hashem, I have seen much progress. In spite of that, however, I have a long way to go until I will be totally healthy. Although I have learned how to accept, to a certain degree, that this is the will of Hashem [that I should have these issues], it is still very hard for me, because it is very bothersome to my *avodas* Hashem – with regards to my Torah learning, my *davening*, my daily schedule, and the development of my inner world. This has caused me much agony in my soul. I am considered a very successful and popular bochur in my yeshiva – it is

possible that I have been affected by *ayin hara* (a ‘bad eye’)? How can I deal with my situation?

A

The more that one believes, in his mind and heart, palpably, that it is only Hashem Who orchestrates everything that will ever happen, one’s soul will readily desire to do the will of the Creator, from the awareness that only He is in charge, and that no human being can change or help him - only if Hashem allows it. Slowly as one carries this awareness with him, one’s soul will become more connected with Hashem and feel cognizance of Hashem’s presence. Then one will be able to do everything with intention to do Hashem’s will, and not out of a desire to please other people. The more that a person becomes concerned with doing Hashem’s will - as opposed to being tied down to social approval and doing only whatever finds him favorable in the eyes of others - the more that one’s soul becomes connected with Hashem. Slowly, one becomes calm, tranquil and serene, for he will be exerting himself according to his true capabilities and according to what Hashem wants from him.

On one hand, a person can accept his suffering with love, because he can know that it is all for his good. At the same time, a person will be calm and not demand more from himself that is beyond his current level of capability, and he will only act according to his actual capabilities on his current level. Slowly, with *siyata d’shmaya*, the crushing feelings of low self-worth, fears and anxieties, etc. will be removed, and one will become freed from these negative thoughts that had previously been plaguing his actions and feelings.

May you find true peace, through a healthy body and soul, through constant spiritual growth, amidst a settled mind, tranquility, and joy.

Social Anxiety (2)

Through *hisbodedus* (the Torah-true ways of meditation, as explained by the Rav), I feel that I have entered into the “inner world” that the Rav describes. I have begun to take this journey within, and I have been prompted to do so because I have social fears – I am afraid to be with people. Whenever I speak with people, I become very anxious and it is hard for me to keep a conversation flowing. When I *daven* or learn, I feel that I have entered into the inner world and this elevates my *avodas Hashem*, but in spite of this, I feel anxious when I

Speak with people. Is there a way for me live in the inner world and still carry a conversation with other people, without becoming afraid? (By the way, I don't even know what's causing me to be afraid.)

A

Since you do not know right now what exactly is causing you to be afraid, let's present here a practical way to go about this issue, without getting into the deep subtleties of the human soul.

1. Firstly, make a list of people whom you are not afraid to speak to, and make sure to speak to them, with the awareness that you are not afraid of talking to them. Through doing this, you will become stronger in the area of speaking to others.

2. Write down a general list of all the people that you speak to regularly, as well as the people you speak with only sometimes. Then decide which of these people is the easiest to speak to, which one is the second-to-easiest person to speak to, etc. and which of these is the most difficult person to speak to, second-to-most difficult, etc. Then begin to speak to the person on this list whom you find easiest to talk to, and make sure to speak to all the people on the list, until you eventually talk to the most difficult person on the list.

3. If possible, try to get hold of a picture of someone whom you find it uncomfortable to talk with, and speak to the person in the picture, in a closed, private room. Keep repeating the same thing to the person in the picture, and speak confidently. Keep doing this until you feel more confident with yourself.

4. After doing the above, go to the person whom you find it uncomfortable to talk to, and talk to him, in the same way that you spoke to the picture of him. Continue with this approach towards this person, and with anyone else whom you find it difficult to speak with, and do so gradually.

5. Come up with a few general phrases and sentences that you want to say to a person, and practice reviewing it with yourself, until you feel confident in what you are *saying*. Say those words to most of the people you encounter, and slowly you can add more words and phrases to your "list" of words that you say to people.

The Anti-Social Type

When I feel that I have entered “within myself.” I feel calmer, relatively speaking. Then I feel all kinds of things. As a result, I find that I can’t deal with the world afterwards, because it’s much easier for me to be alone, then to be around people....

A

When one has a soul that is more sensitive, inner, and higher, one will have more difficulty in the area of being involved with others on this world, for our world is a place that is coarse, superficial, and shallow. That is why a person needs to acquire in his soul a deep and subtle love for all [Jewish] souls. On a practical level, one should have some minimal connection with another person who shares a closer soul root to him. Although this kind of person will feel a distance from others and it will feel very difficult for him to connect with another – that is precisely the person’s *tikkun* (soul repair)!

How Doing Hisbodedus Can Improve Our Relationships

I am enjoying *hisbodedus* a lot, and because I have reached the understanding that I am always with Hashem, I never feel alone, and as a result, I am finding that my *hisbodedus* causing me to become anti-social. I don’t talk to my friends as much as I used to now that I am so immersed in *hisbodedus*. Is this a bad sign about my *hisbodedus*?

A

If a person is too isolated from his surroundings, yes, it is problematic. If *hisbodedus* is causing a person to separate from actions he doesn’t need to do anyway, this is actually the ideal state, and it is not bad at all.

But there is also a more inner understanding, of how *hisbodedus* improves our relationships. Most conversations with others are self-serving. Once we eliminate our need for people through *hisbodedus* - and we are speaking with people a lot less - now we need to learn how to speak to

others for the betterment of others. We then will be speaking to others as a form of giving to them, and not because we need things of them.

Self-Conscious Of What Others Think Of Me

I know a person who was emotionally abused as a child by a family member, who would constantly torment him and label him with derogatory put-downs. Eventually he grew up to be very intelligent, deep, alert, and a very feeling kind of person. And, because he went through so much pain as a child, being emotionally abused by that bully, he is extra careful never to cause any pain to anyone. However, he finds relationships to be very challenging. Every time he is talking to someone, there are very difficult and deep emotions that surface, and he is convinced that the other person he's talking to certainly thinks that he's crazy. Even though he knows intellectually that his feelings aren't the reality, he can't separate himself from the difficult feelings that rise up in him whenever he is trying to have a conversation with someone, and it's all because his emotions were stifled until now and now they're all coming out. He has tried many different approaches to get the negative feelings out of his system but he so far hasn't been successful at that. This is an issue that bothers his learning and his *avodas* Hashem. Does the Rav have any practical advice which he can do to help himself (besides for *davening* to Hashem about the problem)?

A

(1) He can access his internal world and not care about what others thinks of him. This is a very inner and deep method to use, and it's possible that right now that this deep technique won't be that practical for him.

(2) He should learn to "accept suffering with love." and even to do it happily. This will make it much easier for him.

(3) Right now, he should find 1 or 2 friends whom he's certain that they don't think poorly of him, and he should work on cultivating his relationships with these friends. This will help him develop healthy relationships, and once he learns how to have healthy relationship, he will be able to have a healthy relationship with others as well, gradually, by beginning from those whom it's easier to have a relationship with, until he can eventually have a good relationship even with those whom he found harder to connect with,

(4) He should think that in any case, many people will always think that others are crazy. And, from a deeper understanding, really everyone is somewhat crazy, and the only question is how much.

(5) Anytime that he feels somewhat self-conscious about what others think of him, he should emotionally detach from his feelings and instead becoming involved with cold, logical thinking. In order to learn how to do this, he would need to learn about the relationship between the intellect and the emotions.

How To Develop Lost-Lasting Friendships

I learn in yeshiva, and that is where I am found with my friends all the time. We have bonded together and have had made experiences together. Soon we will be taking leave of each other after four years of being together in yeshiva. Some of us are continuing off together, and some of us are parting ways. There are several things we are doing in honor of this occasion. Each of us has a notebook and each of us will mark off in all our friends' notebooks any compliments, blessings, and lessons we learned from each other. In addition, we are each preparing a speech for a banquet (*seudas peraidah*) which will be held at the end of the season, in which we will bless and express our gratitude to all the Rebbeim in the yeshiva and all those who work in it. We will also present pictures of various meaningful events which took place, so that everyone can [take them home and] have memories.

My question is, in general - besides for what the customs of the yeshiva are - How should such a banquet be held, in a meaningful way? This mainly concerns those friends whom we are taking leaving from, who will be going to a different yeshivah and with whom we will not meet up anymore. These were friends whom I have had a personal relationship with, which was meaningful and genuinely spiritual. Besides for the actual event of this banquet, what should be my general attitude towards a friend whom I had learned Torah together with for a long time, now that we are parting ways? What happens now? How do I maintain our bond, and what type of bond should it be?

Assuming that the Rav agrees that there is validity to such a thing, what does the Rav have to say about inscribing messages in each other's notebooks, and which things should we write there? Should we write down our *berachos* (blessings) to each other, and any good *middos* and qualities I learned from the other, and how I value the other person, as well as areas I feel he needs to improve in, etc.?

How should I relate to the things that my friends write about me? Does this have a place in the development of my soul? Should I feel anything towards it? What is the attitude I should have towards the things which my true friends say about me - as the Rambam says, “a group of friends who act for the sake of Heaven” – should I care what they think about me? I understand the need to hear criticism about me, and to think if there is truth to it and to see how I can work on my weaknesses. But what about others’ compliments about me? Should it have any meaning to me?

Concerning the actual banquet in which we will be taking leave of each other (the seudas peraidah), what should be my attitude? Joy, amazement, or sadness? Is there a purpose of such an event? We all have memories of what we have been through, and we are not making a self-accounting of what we need to improve in, so is it just a waste of time to have such an event? Is there a purpose to this event other than the gratitude and blessings which we will be expressing towards our yeshiva? What contribution does it make towards the development of our souls?

What should be our attitude towards anything else that we do which commemorates our times in yeshiva together, such as the pictures being given out? Is there a purpose when we envision those memories, which were meaningful and spiritual? What should we be remembering?

I apologize for this lengthy question. It is about a point which is particularly meaningful in my eyes. We [in our yeshiva] have gone through so many years together which were spent in *ruchniyus*, and now I don’t know how to go through the departure. Thank you very much.

A

Usually the relationship between friends exists on a very general level, and people are not aware of the different kinds of personal relationships they share with others. Instead, people just [know that they] enjoy being around certain friends and they get a good feeling from their friendship, and in this way they become closer and more interested in the other’s life.

[But] the proper attitude should be, that a person is aware of what kind of relationship he has with his friends, and what the relationship is based on. The human soul is complex and it consists of several parts and layers, and therefore, the relationship of a person to another can exist on several different planes – some are more superficial, and some are more inner, etc. When a person lives with this awareness, his relationships with his friends will be clearer to him, and as a result, the friendships will be stronger and more truthful.

In the situations where this [level of awareness in the relationship] doesn't exist, or if it only exists on a partial level, or if it only exists up until the day that the friends are taking leaving of each other - this is the time to sit and reflect and clarify, that by taking leaving of each other, there will be some return, to a certain degree, to the way things were before the friendships. The clearer one is about his connections with others, taking leaving of each other will be done with the right perspective.

Taking leave of each other (*peraidah*) divides into 2 parts:

(1) The first part concerns the relationships between man and himself. The soul of a person, upon taking leave of his friends, is about to go through a transition and a noticeable change, because a person receives a certain satisfying feeling from each friendship that he has with another. When that friendship weakens, or if it ceases, it is clear that this causes certain difficulty for the soul. Understandably, the deeper the friendship is, the more difficult it will be for the person when he becomes severed from the other.

When one clarifies the different kinds of relationships he has with others, he won't just take leave of his friends with an uncomfortable feeling which he isn't clear about. Rather, he will be able to understand what his soul was lacking and what the root of his difficulty is, which he is traversing. This understanding is the first thing that can lessen the difficulty of taking leave from others. When a person is clear of the difficulty his soul is going through, the matter becomes easier for him to deal with, relatively speaking. In contrast, when a person is not clear about the root and the particular reason of why he is feeling a difficulty with something, the difficulty becomes exaggerated and the problem becomes blown out of proportion.

A second thing is, that he can try an alternate route of how to meet the needs of his soul. A person can also see the degree of importance he attributes to a certain aspect, and as a result, he can relate towards it in a better way in the future, in his other relationships.

(2) The second part of taking leaving each other concerns the relationship between one and his friends. Your question mainly revolved around this point. After a person becomes clear about what kind of relationship he has with his friends, and he recognizes and values the importance of the friendships he has had during these years of his life, now that he is taking leave of his friends, he should now try to personally express words of gratitude to his friends, for all that transpired between them.

It is self-understood that this cannot happen in one evening, in the few hours of this event. Therefore one should understand that taking leave of each other is a period in life to go through, which takes time, and within this period, one should attempt to do the above [to personally express

his gratitude to his friends]. However, one should not compromise on his time of Torah learning for this, *chas v'shalom*. Instead he should just have the proper attitude about it.

An additional point here is that one should awaken his heart to think about the future of his friends. He should truly want his friends to have it good, because each of them is going on his way and he will be traversing whatever he will go through in his life.

Regarding how you can secure your bond with your friends, it is clear that changing [location] also changes the nature of the bond with your friends. Therefore it is impossible to protect all of your friendships on the same level.

But regarding your friends whom you are very close with, where an inner and deep bond has been created between you and your friend, it is worthwhile to secure such a friendship and maintain some connection with each other, even if it is only a get-together once a month or during *Bein HaZemanim*. In that way you can continue the inner bond which exists between you. However this should be done from clarifying what kind of relationship is has been until now, and what kind of relationship you wish to have from this point onward, and perhaps you will want to take the bond further and form a new kind of relationship with each other.

2. Regarding the other questions, we should first point out that any external action which you do can only have meaning if it is done with inner awareness, from thought and emotion, besides for the action itself, which is certainly meaningful in its own right.

The *avodah* (inner work) of a person is to reflect and understand what the inner point is, between each external action he does, and to try to connect to it. One will find himself reviewing this point throughout his life, and therefore it is worthwhile to take the opportunity to learn about how to relate to such matters. This will be the key which you can use throughout all of life. Therefore, we shall open here several different angles of how you can reach it, but it is better if you try to reach it yourself, to reach the inner point.

If you find this too difficult, you can use the “notebooks” as an aid, and write down anything there which comes from the heart. This is how you can learn how to express gratitude and blessings to your friends, as explained above.

You should give thought about what you will write down in others’ notebooks, so that you shouldn’t insult anyone. This isn’t the time or place to offer criticism to them.

3. You should understand that many people – almost all people - are obsessed with what others think about them. They relate to themselves based on how others perceive them. This, understandably, is not an inner approach, and it is also inaccurate.

One has to reach a recognition of himself that comes from within, and from that self-recognition he needs to serve Hashem. Therefore when a person reads or hears the compliments and appraisals that others say about him, he needs to examine himself truthfully and see if those appraisals are true. If they are, he can rejoice in his lot – not because others think and perceive him a certain way, but because he can rejoice in the knowledge that he has gained certain qualities for his soul.

4. First, [when expressing gratitude], one need to express gratitude to the yeshiva and to all his Rebbeim in the yeshivah. This is not a side matter, and one needs to relate to in the same way that he values his friendships. He needs to reflect about it and express gratitude and that which he has merited to receive from them. This also takes time, and it cannot all be properly expressed in an event that lasts for a few hours in one evening. One has to remember that they [his Rebbeim] are also people with their own lives outside of yeshivah, with their own problems that they are busy with, who try as much as they can to leave aside their own problems in order to teach their talmidim and to benefit their many talmidim as much possible.

The speech which you prepare in honor of this event should serve as a tool you are using to open up your heart. The words of your speech should come from the heart, so that they have will meaning and true purpose to them, and not just superficial inspiration.

Regarding pictures and memories of the experiences that transpired in yeshivah over the last few years - if they remind of a person of anything truthful or any of the exertion he put in order to acquire anything spiritual, viewing such pictures can be beneficial, because a person can see his progress and how he has put in effort. This is also a general rule for success – a person always needs to look back to his previous progress and see where he was before and where he is now. He needs to see how he has grown, and to be happy with his progress, and this will give him the energy to continue to put in hard work and effort, to achieve further.

Pleasant memories of certain past experiences can give a person a small good feeling, like smelling a pleasant scent, and one can access such memories during times when he feels a bit despondent, and he should go about this [making use of looking at pictures of pleasant experiences] in a balanced way.

Physical Affection Towards Friends

If someone has a very warm nature, and he has a strong yearning to express love to other people, through hugging others and sometimes giving kisses to others (and understandably, he does so sensibly), to people whom he feels needs it – does this stem from acting superficial

and from being empty? Does such a person need to become more inward, and learn how to connect to others through inner *daas* (intellectual connection) as opposed to physical touch? Or will this only serve to imprison his soul and it's not meant to be his *avodah*?

A

1) If one only expresses love to others through physical acts, such as through hugging and the like, he is being superficial. But if it is a revelation of his deep feelings in his heart for others, he has fused together the external with the internal. It is appropriate for one to examine how much of an inner connection he is having with others versus how much superficial connection he has with others, and he should attain a balance [between how much external and internal connection he has with others].

2) Some people have a soul that is rooted in the realm of emotion expressed through physical actions. This particular soul root is called "*Yetzirah shel Asiyah*," the realm of emotion within action. However, in others, showing much physical affection can simply stem from the physicality of the body. Each situation should be examined.

Lonely In Yeshiva

Baruch Hashem, I have grown tremendously from listening to shiurim of the Rav, by absorbing the Rav's way of thinking. I have received so much light from the Rav's shiurim and *sefarim* and all the "Q&A" with the Rav. As a result of all this, I've become a more inner kind of person, Baruch Hashem. Although I am far from perfect, and I still have a long way to go until I can reach my *shleimus*, through the Rav's shiurim I have gained a space in my soul where I can draw forth *pnimiyus* (innerness), light, serenity, holiness, idealism, greatness, a path of thinking that is straight, and a sharp sense of the Ribono shel Olam in every situation of my life.

But, as a result, I have a certain difficulty in yeshiva now, because no one there is in touch with their *pnimiyus* the way I am. Their entire body language and way of talking belies a gross self-identification with their body, as opposed to their *neshamah*.

Maybe I see them this way because I don't see them as neshamos. Or, maybe it's because I'm also into my physical looks and I'm self-conscious of how I look in the eyes of others (and,

like the Baal Shem Tov says, a person sees faults in others because he has those very faults that he is seeing). But I'm not sure about that, and I suspect that the main reason is because I'm different from others and I'm more inner than them. I know about certain concepts in *ruchniyus* which they have no connection to, and therefore I recoil from people who live such physically-oriented and superficial kinds of lives, who mainly care about their physical situation and their various physical desires and lusts, the way they look, etc. I'm always in "judging" mode of others for being that way, and I feel like I hate them. I also feel very apart from other people, and this makes me feel lonely, and I feel like I don't have friends.

I should point out that, Baruch Hashem, I do have two friends in yeshiva who are very involved in the Rav's shiurim, and I learn the Rav's shiurim for a half hour every day with one of them. This solves my issue of finding friends, but I still feel distant from everyone else in yeshiva.

I feel a sense of separation from others when I'm learning in the *beis midrash* or when I go take a coffee and I hear people having empty conversations, and then I feel distaste towards them. But I don't want to hate them, I want to love them! I also wish to become more involved with others and to become a friend for everyone. But it's hard for me, due to the reasons I mentioned.

I am seeking the Rav's counsel on this and I apologize for being so lengthy in this . Much thanks to the Rav for everything.

A

There is a wise adage that says, "The world is entirely fools, and the sages are like strangers living amongst them." This is the meaning of the verse, "I am a stranger in this land." The more elevated that a person becomes, the more of a "stranger" he becomes towards this world, and he feels more emotionally disconnected from people who are materialistic. This is the suffering that *tzaddikim* experience, and a person is lucky and praiseworthy if he experiences this kind of suffering.

But at the same time, a person also has to be connected with other people, to a certain extent. Here are some ways.

1) One has to feel an inner love for other people, which goes beyond reasoning and intellect. This is because we must feel a love for each other which comes from the depth of our *neshamah*, for we are all rooted in one unit.

2) It is written, “You are children to Hashem.” and therefore all Jewish souls are connected to the Creator. Included in our *mitzvah* to love the Creator is to love His children. Just as a person loves his child or his brother, even when they are infants, so is it with the *mitzvah* to love other Jews. Understand this well.

3) Find a point of good in every person, even if it is only a little bit of good, and focus on that good.

4) Recognize that just as a person has a head, nose, heel, and etc., so is it when it comes to all the different souls that there are in the Jewish people: Every person has a different soul root [some have higher soul roots, corresponding to higher parts of the body, and others have lower soul roots, corresponding to the lower parts of the body. Those on the lowest level correspond to the heel, the lowest point of the body]. There is no place for disdaining any soul level, because they are all part of the greater human design.

5) Don’t judge your friend until you reach his place, and until you understand him entirely. The Kotzker taught that you will never reach your friend’s place anyway, so there is no justification in judging another person.

6) The more that a person is genuinely living in his internal world which is pure and calm, the less a person looks at his surroundings, and the less he judges others.

HEALING FROM A WOUNDED CHILDHOOD

Resentful Of My Parents & Grandparents

How am I supposed to view my situation? Why did the Ribono Shel Olam place me in a situation where I didn’t have a good childhood? Is it an atonement for my sins? Is it just a test on my *emunah*? Is it a *tikkun* (repair) for a previous lifetime? Is it simply that I need to just accept the suffering with *temimus* (simplicity) and not ask any s? Or is it because it was to show me that I have a personal *avodah* to acquire a “good eye” and avoid seeing faults in others? Perhaps I need to work on all of the above....?

A

1. Every person contains at least one point that is good. It is upon you to work hard to discover at least one good point in every person.

2. *Chazal* state, “Do not judge your friend, until you reach his place.” There is a well-known explanation of this from the Kotzker Rebbe, who said: “And indeed, you will never reach his place (so you can never judge him).” Think deeply into the life of another person and you will see that there are so many complex factors which shape a person and who he is today. Every person is born with a certain nature and with certain abilities and limitations in his soul. Every person had a certain situation in his home, as well as the environment he grew up in, as well as many different childhood experiences. A person has gone through all kinds of events which affected him.

Therefore, you aren’t able to fully know what another person has gone through – because you don’t have all the information on him. The more a person matures in his soul, he absorbs the simple truth that it is impossible to judge even one person. “A judge does not see except what his eyes see.” but our eyes only see a very partial picture of the situation. The only one who can completely judge another person is the Creator, Who sees everything. Even the Heavenly Court, which judges mankind, is only able to judge based on what they “see.” and from the *emunah* that G-d will guide them in the decision on a person – because it is really a decision that is beyond the comprehension of even the Heavenly Court.

3. Have *emunah* (faith) that this is your unique lot. It should also be viewed as a *tikkun* for the past, just like all other suffering which purifies a person. Also, be aware that whatever you went through in this lifetime is the beginning of many different experiences and situations which you will go through afterwards, which all contribute to your general development – whether you have gone through a little, or a lot.

Emotionally Immature Parents

How are we to understand what we see today that there are many parents who don’t have a love for their children, and they merely put on a show for others as if they love their children? There are even parents today who call their children by demeaning names. Is this like the generation of the Destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, when there were mothers who killed their own children [as we recite in the Kinnos in Eichah, that “Merciful women cooked their children”), and it’s just that in today’s times this [indifference] is manifest on

an emotional level? Or can we say that on the other hand, we also find this problem by the gentiles? Or does this problem stem from the evil of the *yetzer hora*?

A

In the inner nature within every parent, there is a self-love which extends to include one's offspring. However, sometimes this love is more revealed, and sometimes the love is more concealed. But the love is never completely covered over.

Here is a list of several reasons which “cover over” a parent's love:

1) When a parent is self-centered. 2) When a parent is bombarded with various responsibilities, or confusion, or a lack of peace of mind. 3) When a parent lacks self-awareness, and a lack of awareness to the surroundings. 4) When a parent has an emotional blockage. 5) When a parent has a faulty approach concerning child education. 6) When a parent falls short in the area of expressing love, whether in speech or action. 7) When a parent doesn't attribute any importance to the very idea of expressing love. 8) When a parent has a generally negative perspective and focuses on another's faults. This causes a parent to overly focus on the faults of a child, and thereby the parent deprives himself/herself of deriving satisfaction from the child. This causes the parent to “close up” his or her love for the child. 9) When a parent has any impaired or unbalanced *middos*. 10) When a parent has a coarse, unrefined nature which comes from being overly materialistic. 11) When a parent is coarse and unrefined, as result of his or her sins.

Deprived Of Emotional Nourishment

How does one straighten out a “messed up” soul? Ever since [my] childbirth, my soul was not given its basic needs. Even though I was nursed as a baby, my soul was undernourished emotionally, because I was not given any of the emotional warmth or natural love that every soul needs in order to survive. And, throughout childhood, not only didn't I receive love from my parents, but all I received from them were many physical and emotional blows to me, and this was due to their abusive behavior.

What can a person do in order to straighten out his soul and become emotionally healthy? What can I do to feel naturally good about myself, as opposed to getting pleasure from negative sources?

A

1) Discover any love that you did receive, even if it was only a little. In your, you state that your soul “did not receive any emotional warmth or love.” You need to think about this and see that you certainly did receive some love, even if it may have only been a little. But you certainly received a little bit. Then, focus on the little bit of love you received, and open yourself further towards it, so that this emotion becomes alive. This will be a seed which you can use to open yourself up further, as will soon be explained.

2) Open yourself up to Hashem’s love for you, and from that you can receive some pure love.

3) Open yourself up to the ability of healthy self-love, love which comes from your inner self. You can access your inner self-love and extend it to yourself. From your inner self-love, you can also develop the ability to feel loved from Hashem, an ability which comes from within yourself, and which does not come from outside of yourself.

When a person receives loves from outside of himself [i.e. from family or friends], this is a means to a greater end, which one can use in order to reach his own genuine and pure self-love. However, many times, a person remains on this “means” without reaching the greater end: A person feels fine receiving love from others, so he never reaches his own inner self-love, for the most part.

When someone is missing love from others, when he did not receive love from any source outside of himself, on one hand, he is missing the path to get to his own self-love. However, if he wants to, he can choose good, and he will be a lot closer to reaching pure self-love, without using any outer means to get to it. The more inner that a person is, the less he will be needy of love from outside sources, and it will suffice for him that he has a self-love that comes from within himself, as well as the love that he feels from the Creator.

One needs to love others, using this approach [of first discovering his own inner self-love]. One should identify his wish to love others, and then extend that love further.

Understandably, each of these points requires further discussion. If you have any specific s, I will try to elaborate further on these points, *b’ezeras* Hashem.

Feeling Orphaned

I have a father, Baruch Hashem, but I feel like an orphan. I don't have a warm relationship with my father. He never initiated a relationship with me. It's possible that he tried to and that he just didn't have the emotional energy to do it. But I'm not so sure about that. It's possible that he simply wasn't interested in having a relationship with me. Or, it could be that he didn't know how to form a relationship with me. (He certainly didn't know any of the skills that the Rav teaches in "Getting To Know Your Children.")

(1) How can I achieve a relationship with Hashem even though I don't have the analogy of the father-son relationship from my own life? (2) What can I do to create a relationship with my father? Am I supposed to just "let go" of this need that I feel?

A

1) There are many different kinds of relationships with Hashem. Every person has certain ways of connecting to Hashem that are more revealed, and every person also has other ways of connecting to Hashem that are more hidden.

For example, a Kohen's relationship with Hashem is obviously more connected with the fact that he has a certain uniqueness of being a Kohen. The same goes for a Levi, and the same goes for a melech (king). It's the same thing when it comes to relating to Hashem as a "Father." Not everyone has this kind of connection with Hashem. For example, someone who doesn't have a father, or someone who feels like an orphan in his father's lifetime, doesn't have a "father-child" relationship with Hashem. Therefore, if someone doesn't have a father or if he is missing a relationship with his father, there are other ways of connecting to Hashem which he can strengthen himself in.

To illustrate, it is well-known that when a person is weak when it comes to a certain sense, he will be unusually stronger when it comes to a different sense. It's the same when it comes to not having a father: Since it's harder for you to have a "father-child" relationship with Hashem, there are other aspects in which you are able to able a very strong relationship with Hashem.

2) However, in no circumstance should a person let go of the need for a fatherly presence in his life. There are different ways of how a person can gain a father-child connection with another: (1) One way is by becoming connected to those who were called our Avos (our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov). This is a more abstract kind of relationship, but we are able to have a more personal relationship with them somewhat, by *davening* by their graves. (2) Another way to gain a father-child connection is, if this is possible, to have a relationship with one's father's father. The

father of one's father is also referred to as a person's own "father." (3) A rebbi (Torah teacher) is also called one's "father." (4) One can also gain a little bit of a "fatherly" connection with his father-in-law. A father-in-law resembles a father on some level. (You can refer to the shiur of **בלבבידיה** – **מהשבה** on the topic of **אב** (av/father), where this is discussed further.)

3) It is also possible for a son to rise above the father [where the father receives from the son]. We see this with Yaakov and Yosef. At first, there was a natural father-son relationship between Yaakov and Yosef, in which Yaakov taught Yosef. But later, in the 17 years when Yaakov lived in Egypt, Yosef supported Yaakov. From here we see that there comes a point where the son gives to the father. Therefore, practically speaking, a son needs to be giving something to his father, and this furthers their relationship. And when a son awakens this kind of relationship with his father, in which he is giving to his father, the natural relationship between father and son is also awakened, where the father returns to his role of being the giver towards his son.

4) You need to discover any aspects of a relationship that you have with your father, and to become strongly emotionally connected to whatever relationship you do have with your father. This will enable the relationship with your father to slowly open up, more and more.

Practically speaking, you need to firstly remember any times in which you did enjoy a relationship with your father, even if it was only a little, and then you need to become emotionally connected to that. Even more so, you can connect to the "pure child" in you (tam, pure child), the point in you which is a little child, which receives a warm and natural relationship from a father. In that place in your soul you can find a fatherly connection, and you should awaken it and become connected to it. This is a lengthy discussion.

Regaining Masculinity

Is there such an aspect of the soul called "masculinity." meaning the personality traits of a man and acting like a man? For example, the power to be a giver, and the power to use logic over emotion, and other "masculine" traits. If a man is weak in any of these aspects, and he instead reveals "feminine" traits, more or less – would such a man need to learn how to build his masculinity, and to avoid feminine traits? For example, if a man is a more emotional type, or more reactive, or he cries often, or if he speaks in a more "womanly" tone of voice, does he need to learn how to distance himself from all of this?

Could this be a problem that stems from childhood, in which a boy felt closer in his soul to his mother, or because he had a stronger bond with his mother, or an unhealthy attachment

with his mother, and therefore he received more “feminine” traits due to his closeness with his mother, whereas he did not receive enough [manly traits] from his father, since he wasn’t that close to his father? If there is such a thing, how can such a person be healed?

A

Our Sages explained that Yitzchok *Avinu* at first had the soul of a woman. His womanly soul departed at the same time of the death of his mother, Sarah, which happened as he was being bound on the Altar. After this event, he received a man’s soul. Thus, for the first 37 years of his life before this event, his mission was to complete his womanly soul, and after that, his mission was to ascend to the level of the man’s soul.

However, this is not always the cause for a more feminine nature in a man. Sometimes, a more “feminine” nature in a man can be a flaw in his character, which he may have been born with. In that case, it is simply a trait of the “animal” part of his soul. Or, he may be this way due to the influences of his environment. Each situation needs to be individually examined, of what is causing a man to have a more feminine nature. Accordingly, one can then know how he can go about fixing it.

In a case where a boy grew up with a strong attachment to his mother and a lack of relationship with his father, one can fix this problem, either on an external level or an internal level. On the external level, one can fix this problem by becoming more balanced [between his masculine and feminine aspects], if possible. On the internal level, one can fix this problem by developing the soul’s masculine aspects within him.

That is all true on a general level, but individually speaking, each case needs to be examined well, by itself.

Inner Child Therapy

There is a kind of therapy today called “Inner Child” therapy, which is very popular. Without getting into all of the details, it is a kind of therapy where a person learns how to recognize his “inner child” which lives deep within him, to speak with this inner “child.” to ask s from the inner child, etc. Through this, a person can slowly heal issues in his soul, through the internal connection that is created with one’s “inner child.” I have heard that there is a source for this in the words of the Gra, but I don’t know exactly where the source

is. Is this true? And if it is an appropriate path to take, what are the boundaries of using this therapy?

A

A person develops throughout his life, like a structure being built. Therefore, every step of life that a person went through is not simply a part of the past, which has gone, but a part of his development.

Just as a structure is first built from the foundation, and the stronger the foundation, the stronger the structure will be – even the slightest error in building the foundation can prevent the entire structure from being built – so is a person’s childhood the foundation of a person’s lifetime, his “structure” which his life stands upon. Therefore, there is certainly a valid place for “returning” to one’s childhood and sorting it out, and to repair it.

There is a danger to this, however, because when one may “fall” back into his childhood in the process, if he doesn’t go about this in the right way. “Returning to one’s childhood” needs to come from an inner place in one’s soul, and it should not be done in a superficial manner. Therefore, the primary way to return to one’s childhood is by accessing one’s *temimus* (childlike earnestness), which is the nature of the child. The more earnest one becomes, the more powerfully he can return to the child perspective within him.

After a person has reached his “child perspective” [through accessing his *temimus*], there are several practical ways by which one can “return” to this place in the soul [of the child’s perspective].

1) Action: One way to return to childhood is in the active sense, by *playing* the games that one enjoyed as a child, or by revisiting the places one grew up in and played in, or studied in, or by reading the books that one read as a child, etc. Through these actions, one returns in his soul to his childhood state. However, this is a spiritually unrefined way, and it can bring a person down from his current adult level to his childhood level. Although one would be trying to repair his childhood, he would be “falling” back into his childhood [by *playing* childish games], and this is a spiritual downfall for him.

2) Speech: One can also talk about his childhood experiences, and thereby return, on some level, to this place [of the child’s perspective] in his soul.

3) Hearing: One can listen to songs that he heard when he was a child.

4) Memory: By merely remembering one’s childhood, one can awaken the memories of his childhood. This uses the soul’s power of memory (*zocheir*). An even more powerful experience is

when one uses the soul's imaginative faculty to vividly remember and pictures that have been imprinted on one's soul since childhood. This is called the soul's power of *shoimer*. This can be achieved either by looking at pictures of childhood, or by using one's thoughts to vividly picture one's childhood.

5) Imagination: By way of the power of imagination, one can "return." in his imagination, to his childhood. This is a fundamental power in the soul, because a child's imagination is very powerful. When one enters into his imagination, he is entering into an ability of his childhood, and in that way he draws himself closer, in a visceral way, to his childhood.

6) One can directly enter into the very first "beginning point" he felt as a child.

7) One can return to what one learned as a child, such as what he learned in *Chumash*, *Mishnah*, *Gemara*, etc.

When one returns to his childhood by using the aforementioned ways, or at least by using some of them, his *avodah* now is to experience his childhood in the proper way. Whenever any negativity becomes "triggered" from any childhood experiences, he should remind himself of the proper, "mature adult" perspective which he has now acquired, and reframe his perspective towards the situation.

Along with this, one also needs to clarify what's bothering him since his childhood, and to deal with it accordingly. One can do so by speaking about the issue and also repair the issue by making actual, practical changes regarding the issue. Just speaking about the issues alone, without making actual changes, can feel relieving, but it is not yet the complete repair to the issue. One needs to speak about the issues of his childhood and also to make actual changes of repair. One also needs to sort out his childhood by applying his "mature adult" perspective to whatever bothersome situations he went through in his childhood.

Understandably, the words here are brief, but they are the roots, based on inner wisdom, as explained in the writings of the Arizal.

When I look at pictures of myself as a child and I think about my childhood, I am reminded of negative experiences that took place, even when I was pure and trusting when I had *temimus* (innocence). Does this mean that my *temimus* became negatively impacted?

A

The point of looking at a picture of your child self is so that you should focus on the positive side of your *temimus* (your childhood innocence), not to think about any negative experiences associated with your childhood. If you had experiences when you were a child and you get reminded of it when you look at the pictures of your child self, then you can get rid of these emotional scars through slowly increasing your *emunah* in Hashem and that He was behind it all for your ultimate good.

Abuse

Healing From Childhood Emotional Abuse

Is there such a concept as “*tinok shenishbah*.” a “captive child.” with regards to one who suffered from abuse in childhood from his/her parents, family members, or community? And if yes, what is the person’s *avodah* (inner work) then?

A

Any concept can be manifest either on a complete level, or on a partial level. For example, a person can either become completely and totally incapable, wounded, or he becomes partially incapable. Death would be an example of being completely incapable, whereas illness is an example of becoming partially incapable. The same thing applies to the concept of *tinok shenishbah* (the “captive child”). On the total and complete level, a *tinok shenishbah* is a Jewish child who has been captured by gentiles and is raised like a gentile, with no knowledge of his Judaism. There is also a “partial” level of *tinok shenishbah*: Whether in the external sense, or in the qualitative sense. On a subtler level, every person to some extent is in the category of “*tinok shenishbah*.” externally and qualitatively speaking.

We will provide 3 different ways in how a person can repair the issue [the fact that he is a “*tinok shenishbah* in the sense that he is a wounded child because of his negative childhood experience]:

1. “Filling in the missing parts”: One should try to fill all of the missing “parts” which he didn’t get in his/her childhood – both in the “amount” of what he/she still needs, as well as in the qualitative sense.

2. “Repairing the experiences”: One should try to “return” to his/her childhood [via the imagination] and “re-experience” all that he remembers from his childhood, with a more inner and more precise perspective than until now.

3. “New beginning”: One can become like a newborn baby, like one who has newly converted to Judaism, like a *baal teshuvah* (penitent) – by reaching into the deepest place in oneself, and from there, to begin again anew.

I Am Not Being Treated Fairly

How do I deal with a boss who doesn't keep to the conditions of the workers, especially if he was intentionally planning to ignore the conditions to begin with? On a related note, how can I deal with my spouse or child when they intentionally cause me pain? Am I supposed to say that it's all from Hashem and it's all for my good, and to perhaps reflect on how I need to do teshuvah, and to make a self-accounting how it's all for my good – and to continue loving my spouse or child just as much as before? Or, in addition to *saying* that all that happens to me is from Hashem and it's for my good, is it also permitted for me to speak up, or at least come to a negative conclusion, about the person? For example, am I allowed to think that my boss is a liar, a thief, a stingy person, etc.? Also, if I have concluded to myself that my boss, or my wife, or friend, or child, has a certain aspect of personality that I detest and which upsets me, does that mean that I also have that negative aspect of character?

A

1) Calm yourself down when it bothers you. 2) Recognize that everything is from Hashem. 3) Do teshuvah, from the recognition that everything that happens is from Hashem as a means to awaken us to return to Him. Do this along with concluding that the other has a fault. 4) Recognize that everything that happens is for the good. 5) Try as much as you not to think that the other human being was the cause for your harm. Instead, view it as if the other person was basically forced to act this way. Try to judge the other person favorably. 6) Try to awaken a love towards the other person.

Honoring My Verbally Abusive Mother-In-Law

What is the obligation of a person towards his mother-in-law if she has a very angry and shame-inducing personality, and she is usually screaming her whole life at her family? She is constantly getting angry when people around her don't do things for her. She expresses hatred and bad language at almost everyone around her. Is one obligated to "love" such a person? Is it permissible to speak with one's children about the danger of being around her? Is there is an obligation to pray for such a person when he/she is ill?

A

There is still an obligation of *ahavas Yisrael* (love of the Jewish people), even towards a person who acts this way. We need to make a distinction between the person himself with his negative character traits, and to view the negative character as a “garment” upon the person. We should also *daven*, out of love, for such a person.

As for speaking with the children about this, the matter must be weighed, to see all of the pros and the cons involved. One should then see if he can attain the gains involved, to the extent that he lessens the losses involved, as much as possible. He should then weigh out the options with holy *daas* to see if it is proper to do this or not, and how.

MODERN THERAPY ISSUES

What Is The Role Of A Therapist/Healer?

I deal with natural healing [therapy on others] and I am always searching for the proper way that will make it possible for me to regularly accomplish true, deep healing on others. What is the way to do it? For as long as I can remember I have always had a desire to help others and ease their pain. I hope that my intentions to heal others are really coming from a genuine place in myself, but how can I know this?

A

There are many true approaches to take. You need to figure out which approach is most appropriate for you to use and which approach will work best for your client. The more spiritually pure that one becomes, the better one will recognize his or her personal motivations, and together with this clarity, one needs to learn about the soul in-depth, becoming clearer and clearer about the soul, together with constant prayer for every last step of the way. Each time that you help someone, try to discern if you have any ulterior motives in helping this person or if you are helping the other from a pure place in yourself. If you discover any ulterior motivations that you have, try to remove those agendas, and then awaken genuine *ahavas Yisrael* towards others, and from there you can work with them.

What's Wrong With Non-Jewish Psychology?

The Rav has said that a Jew should only learn about the psyche from Torah sources. What is the source for this? Also, *Chazal* state (in Pirkei Avos) that “The laws of kinyan (acquisition) and niddah are the main body of learning Torah, and the study of tekufos (astronomy) and gematria (number codes) are called *parperaos l' Chochmah*, “dessert for wisdom.” How does that fit into the picture of what the Rav is *saying*...?

Furthermore, our entire heritage is clearly filled with a lot of mathematics and wisdom from gentile sources. And, they say that Rav Elchonon Wasserman would read the philosophy works of Emanuel Kant in the restroom [therefore, why does the Rav always say that we should not learn psychology from secular sources]....?

A

The wisdom of the Torah is entirely good, with no traces of any bad in it, as *Chazal* state, that “There is no good except Torah.” However, all other wisdoms, which are the 7 seven different fields of wisdom of the gentiles, are mixed with good and bad. This is because it is a “fallen” wisdom. Therefore, anyone who learns the wisdom of the gentiles is mixing his mind into something that contains both good and bad in it, and a person needs great wisdom to sift out the good parts from the bad parts in their teachings.

Only the Sages, who had the wisdom and also the holiness to do this, were able to sift out the good from the bad in the wisdom of the gentiles. The way of the Torah was clear to them and therefore they had the true *daas* (understanding) to find any good that was contained in the teachings of gentiles.

But most people do not have the perfected kind of *daas* to be able to do this, because most people become mixed up in their minds between the good and the bad parts of secular knowledge when they learn the wisdom of the gentiles. And that is why a Jew needs to get his knowledge only from Torah sources.

Psychotherapy Through 4 Elements

I want to ask the Rav several s concerning the soul. How can we practically help a person who has O.C.D. (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)? I have seen the Rav’s response about treating O.C.D. where the Rav explained how to deal with the external and internal parts to this issue, but it is still not clear to me. In the psychiatric field, we see this issue as a neurological symptom, which can be helped through taking pills. I have actually seen in several instances where this helped. But is there a way to help the client on an emotional level, without pills? Even in more severe cases?

Although it's clear to me that the approach of using the 4 elements is the true approach (in the past, I have studied the soul from the teachings of Rav Ginsberg, and I gained a lot of knowledge about the soul from him), still, in the practice of therapy, it is very difficult to bring these approaches down to a practical level. It makes sense on an intellectual level, but it doesn't seem to be that practical.

A

In each lesson [of the 4 Elements series] I try to say at least one piece of practical advice to actualize the concept that is being explained. If there are any points in particular which you want to clarify more, I will be happy to elaborate on them, with *siyata d'shmaya*, and *bli neder*. Just make sure to be very clear in your question what exactly you are asking about.

Regarding severe cases [i.e. severe cases of O.C.D.], a person can take pills, along with doing the necessary inner work with his soul.

Can Studying Self-Recognition Be Overdone?

What would the Rav say if a person has a lot of emotional problems and imbalances in his personality and he requires a lot of "therapy." but, instead of going to a therapist (who uses secular approaches and reads all the goyish psychology books), he instead listens to the Rav's shiurim for many hours of the day, in order to heal his soul and to learn how to balance out his soul?

It seems to me that even a man, whose main obligation is Torah study, would need to spend more time today in learning about his soul and how to balance himself out, by understanding about the four elements in his soul, and the four elements of his spouse, children, and parents, etc.

A

Men [who have the *mitzvah* to learn Torah] may spend a bit of time in their day learning about the soul, but not for most of the day. First of all, for most people, spending a lot of time learning about themselves would make them confused and they wouldn't attain clarity anyway. Even more

so, however [this would be an imbalanced approach, because] a person always needs a balance between his actions, words, character traits, and thinking, etc. For most people, this [spending so much time on learning about the soul] would not create a proper balance in their lives. Even for someone who has a much bigger need to learn about the soul and to balance out his personality, it would throw him off balance if he would spend too much time learning about his personal soul.

This is the approach that most people need to take.

How Can A Therapist Not Be Harmed Spiritually?

How can I deal with inappropriate things which we encounter in life? To my chagrin, I have seen misconduct from a certain Rav, and other unethical behaviors, and I feel that it has actually damaged me. Sometimes there are people who seek my advice and they are involved in various kinds of inappropriate behavior, to the extent that I feel like I need to immerse in a mikveh afterwards....

I don't know how to deal with the evil that I witness in life. I am constantly trying to focus on the positive, and on spiritual aspirations, [but] these things have brought me down [spiritually]. I will be happy to receive the Rav's response.

A

- 1) In every aspect of evil you encounter, try to find the good in it.
- 2) View evil as a "garment."²
- 3) Don't let it affect your soul so deeply - and this is a matter which requires guidance. Generally speaking, you should listen to another person with your intellect, then with your heart [emotional empathetic listening], in a cycle, back and forth.
- 4) You need to believe that Hashem wants evil to exist [for the time being].
- 5) Accept your suffering you have at this fact, with love.
- 6) After this, enter into the good, positive aspects of the [other's] soul.

² Editor's Note: Refer to Da Es Atzmecha, Getting To Know Your Self

7) See the inner purity that is in that person, and be aware that his evil is only a “garment” on his soul.

8) Pray that evil should cease, and believe that it is only temporary.

9) Ideally, do not listen [to this other person] - only to the extent that you feel you can tolerate. There have been great people in the world who fell spiritually because of this.

10) Listen to him from a true desire to do good with him, for the sake of Heaven. The more that the listener’s intentions are not for the sake of Heaven (for example, the more that the listener’s intentions are about making money from his client], the more of a risk of spiritual danger there is.

Solving “Mild” Compulsive Behavior

How can a religious Jewish woman deal with the problem of O.C.D (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), from a practical Torah perspective? This is concerning a case where the compulsive behaviors are not that extreme, but which are bothersome to live with. The person in has tried different approaches and there has been some improvement. I am looking for a complete solution to the issue, even if it involves a long-term process.

A

The root of this issue is due to an imbalance in one’s element of earth. When “earth” is left unfixed, it can cause a person to act with compulsion and to feel forced to do certain things many times, over and over again.

The root of repairing the issue is for one to become aware that an external force outside of oneself is causing the person to feel obligated to do certain actions, and that the person himself doesn’t actually want to do this particular action or think of these particular thoughts.

Practically speaking, in order to repair the issue: Besides for *davening* from one’s heart to Hashem, and besides for thinking how it is not the will of Hashem to act this way, and that it is nothing but a bother to the person -

Whenever a person wants to do something several times over and over again, he should not do it right away, but wait a little.

He should engage in the act slowly, whether he's doing this act for the first time, second time, third time, etc.

Before engaging in whatever he wants to do, he should first do something else.

Before engaging in the act he wants to do, he should walk away and then return to his place.

One can create "opposite movement" in his soul, by engaging in the act very quickly, again and again, and consecutively, until one grows disgusted with acting this way.

Sometimes a person should use the method of acting very slowly in order to counter his compulsory thoughts, and at other times, a person should use the method of acting extremely quickly.

One should try doing whatever he feels a compulsion to do with funny, crazy moves, so that he can learn how to make jest out of what he is doing. In this way, he should reflect on the fact that not only is he performing in a laughable manner, but that the very act which he wants to engage in [i.e. excessively washing his hands or excessively counting and rearranging items] is laughable itself.

A person should try doing a little less of what he wants to do. Or, a person should do a lot than what he wanted to, but he should make sure not to exactly what he wanted.

One should engage in the act only partially, without completing it.

One should do the opposite of what he wanted to do. For example, instead of cleaning, he should make something dirty. Instead of closing [a window or door], he should open it.

Medication For Anger

If a person has problems with rage and he wants to calm down, should he take pills?

A

We don't need to go to any shiurim then – we should just give out pills to everyone! Taking pills in order to calm down – it depends. Some pills are made from natural herbs which are meant to aid the body's health, and that's different [it's okay]. But if they are pills that calm a person's emotional state, one must carefully consider whether he should go down that road or not. Usually when people take pills in order to ease their emotional issues, they have basically decided to work only

with their body and not from within themselves. It is living like an animal; animals also get angry [and they can also be calmed with tranquilizing drugs...]. There are a considerable amount of people in our generation today who aren't interested in working on themselves through the path of *avodah* (inner work) and therefore they work on themselves entirely through the body; they attempt to change their inner character by working directly with the body. Can we say that this doesn't work? Of course it can work - it is possible to cause changes in the soul by working with the body, because the body and the soul are interconnected. There is a definitely a part of our *avodah* to work with our body, but we also have to work directly with our *middos* (internal character traits) themselves. Now, if a person has such bad *middos* that he can't function properly unless he takes pills, then he may do so on a temporary basis and take pills to calm his body."

[From a response to a similar asked later:] When a person wants to be an oived Hashem (one who serves the Creator), but he wants do so through working with the body alone, this is contradictory behavior. He is searching to build his spiritual state but he is trying to do so through his physical body alone. This is a way that comes from the gentiles and it is only meant to be used by gentiles, and for the most part, it can only work for gentiles. In certain extreme situations, it may be used by a Jew who has fallen very low that for the time being, his life right now resembles a level that is very close to a gentile's way of living.

Understanding The Evil Within

[The Rav has explained that] there are three parts in our soul: a part that is totally good and pure, a part that is a mixture of good and evil, and a part that is completely evil. What is the part in ourselves that is completely evil? Is this the *yetzer hora* (the evil inclination)?

A

Study the *sefer* Tanya, chapters 2-7, who explains at length about the soul and its general design. To give a brief description, the actual essence of the soul is one piece, but it divides into two parts – our intellect and our character traits. Upon that, there are three “garments” of the soul: thought, speech, and action. The “G-dly soul” (*nefesh Elohis*) of a Jew is entirely good, whereas the “animal soul” (*nefesh habehaimis*) is called *kelipas noga*, which refers to permissible actions [which are neither evil nor holy]. The soul of a gentile consists of the three impure *kelipos* (li. “shells”). When a Jew sins, *chas v'shalom*, he is connecting his soul to the three impure *kelipos*. However, it is merely a

connection to the evil. Besides for this, there are also “evil” character traits which can be manifest in a Jew’s soul, but those character traits are only “evil” because there is a lack of balance in the Jew’s soul. When one’s soul is imbalanced, the result will be any of the “evil” character traits. However, it is nothing but an imbalance in the soul’s abilities, because there is never any intrinsic evil in a Jew’s soul.

If our true will is to do Hashem’s will, then what is our opposing will if it is not really our will? Is the will to do evil our will, or is it not our will?

A

The *Nefesh HaChaim*³ says that before the sin, man only wanted to do Hashem’s will, and the evil inclination was outside of him. After the sin, the evil inclination entered man, and it now appears as if it is the person’s will. The *Gemara* says that the wicked are ruled by their evil inclination, whereas the righteous rule over their evil inclination.⁴ The depth of this is that the wicked think that their very essence is their will to oppose the Creator, and that is why they are ruled by their evil inclination, while the righteous are aware that their evil inclination is only an outer voice and is not their actual voice. Our desire to do evil is not really part of us; it just pretends to be us. The true “me” only wants to do what Hashem wants, while our *yetzer hara* is not really part of you. It lives in you and makes you think that it is “you.”

***Chazal* state that “our will is to do Hashem’s will, but the sourdough in the dough (the *yetzer hara*) and our subservience to the government prevents us.”⁵ How does a person have *bechirah* (the ability to choose) not to sin, if he is being prevented by these two factors?**

A

The *yetzer hara* and the subservience to the government are two different forces which prevent a person from doing Hashem’s will. The *yetzer hara* convinces a person to go against Hashem, while the government forces a person to go against Hashem. Generally, when a person is prevented because of the government, the person is in the category of oness (forced) to a certain extent. Being in an impure environment also limits our choices somewhat, because it places bad influences on us.

³ 1:6

⁴ Berachos 61b

⁵ Berachos 17a

But there are always areas in which one can exercise free will, and if one chooses properly, he will be given more opportunities to exercise free will properly.

Marriage Counseling For Intimacy Issues

As a therapist who treats physical and emotional issues, people with all kinds of different problems come see me, and their issues are disruptive to their marriages. The conventional medical solutions [i.e. pills and taking medication] do not solve the issues, and perhaps they are even causing more issues, especially to people who suffer from heart issues and diabetes. From all the wide variety of all the many different issues there are, there are no good solutions to these issues – either that, or I am just not aware of the solutions. It is difficult to apply even natural solutions for these issues. When people don't have solutions to their issues, they are apt to commit all kinds of sinful behavior. Are there any professionals in this field who are G-d fearing, or are there any Rabbonim who can help people deal with issues in marital intimacy, that we can rely on and turn to for help? I want to know what the Rav's opinion is, concerning couples who are considered "*frum*," but who have no marital peace, due to their issues with intimacy. To what extent may we offer help to people based on new secular approaches, so that we can open up new horizons of hope in the area of marital intimacy for couples, but in a way that will not compromise on the sanctity and on the halachos of a Jewish marriage?

A

1. All of the parameters of *halachah* must be guarded.
2. Even concerning any behaviors that are permitted according to *halachah*, sometimes a certain behavior can be a contradiction to the entire spirit of *kedushah* (sanctity) of a Jewish home, and it comes close to the category of a "disgusting one who acts within the permission of the Torah."
3. The world is found today on the level of the "50th Gate of Defilement" (the *Shaar HaNun D'Kelipah*). Our Sages taught that a large amount of souls in our generation are soul-reincarnations of the generation of the Flood, the generation of the Dispersal, and Sodom. Therefore, there is *tumah* (defilement) infiltrating us from every angle today. Any of the new ideas which come from secular sources are getting their source from the "50th Gate of Defilement." Therefore, as a first course of action, we should never allow a person to enter into any of these ideas, at all.

However, sometimes a person's eyes have already seen everything out there, and he has already entered into this spiritual defilement. For such a person, we need to carefully consider, with great sensitivity [to *halachah kedushah*, which ideas this person should or shouldn't make use of, in order to be helped]. Each situation needs to be judged separately. On one hand, we need to make sure that any new ideas to help him will not be causing him to commit any additional sins. At the same time, we would also need to make sure that he strengthens his keeping to the proper boundaries of *halachah* and *kedushah*.

It is very difficult to find a Rav who can recognize all of the different factors involved in this area. If one does recognize all the different details involved, he is already in great spiritual danger, *chas v'shalom*, of falling into the *tumah* of the "50th Gate of Defilement]. Worse so, he may even have a foul-smelling spiritual "odor" on him from being involved with such matters, and even worse than this, *chas v'shalom*, is that he is already found "in" it – to varying degrees.

CHARACTER IMPROVEMENT

Middos

The Source Of Psychological Issues Today

Our generation is filled with all kinds of issues in the soul, such as anxiety, irrational fears, etc., and all kinds of issues in the soul. What is the root of these issues, and what is their remedy?

A

Issues in the soul stem from impaired *middos* (character traits). There are two layers to the *middos* – an inner layer and an external layer. The inner layer of *middos* is impaired because of *medameh*, the imagination, and this is fixed by developing the power *daas* [fusing of the intellect with the emotions]. The external layer of the *middos* is fixed through the various ways in how each particular character traits is fixed. (Whatever the *sefarim* describe about fixing certain *middos*, such as conceit, anger, lust, etc. are only addressing the external layer of the *middos*. In the external layer, it appears that there are all kinds of *middos* and issues in the soul, in a wide range of many different colors. But at their root, there is only one problem which is the *medameh*, the impaired imagination.⁶)

Why Is It So Hard To Work On Middos?

It is written in *sefarim hakedoshim* that the main task of a person on this world is to work on *middos* (character improvement). Why is this so? If Hashem has made this the main part of our task, why is it so far from reach of most people? For many years a person can go through all kinds of difficult tests in serving Hashem, as in the verse “Because I have fallen, I have risen.” and only after falling so many times does a person merit becoming close to true *tzaddikim*, where he can then learn the ways of *avodah* and he begins to do inner work.

⁶ Editor’s Note: The Rav explains how to repair “*medameh*”\imagination in the series דע אט דימיון, Da Es Dimyoncha (GTKY Imagination).

Fixing our *middos* is our main obligation on this world, as the *Vilna Gaon* says, that if a person doesn't break his negative character traits, there is no purpose in living. So if it is our main purpose on this world, why is it made so difficult? Why is it so difficult to understand the *middos*, and why is it difficult to actually change them?

A

The world is called "olam." from the word "*he'elam*." "concealment." which has the same letters as the word *amal*, exertion. There is a verse, "For this is all of a person, for exertion he was born." The more inner a matter is, the more concealed it is. The innermost point of the truth is concealed. This is a person's entire exertion on this world, in his *avodah* – to reach this point of truth. Only those who really seek the truth will reach it. That is why it is so concealed from people, because "Not everyone who wants to take the name [the honor] can take it" – only those who truly seek truth.

What If I Have So Many Bad Middos?

What should I do when I discover that I have many negative *middos* in myself and I see that I am very far from being close to Hashem?

A

If a person can only discover bad things about himself and he can't find any good in himself, it is a sign that he does not recognize anything about himself at all, and that he has never yet taken a deep look into his heart. This is because every person contains good qualities. As long as you reflect deeply into what is going on inside your heart, you will be able to find good qualities in yourself.

Of course, we must also discover our bad *middos* that we have too, but first we must reflect on the good *middos* that we have. When we begin to work on ourselves, we first need to work on our worst *middah*. The time now is too short to explain how to do this, because it a deep *avodah*. To say it briefly: we must first begin to work on our worst *middah*, or, we should first work on an area that is easiest for us to improve in.

I must repeat, however, that if you are only finding bad *middos* in yourself and you are not discovering any good in yourself, it is a sign that you are not reflecting properly into your heart, because every person contains good. There is always your best quality, but besides for this, there is also many other good points which you can discover about yourself, and you must discover all of these good points in yourself.

Beginning To Fix Bad Middos

Should we begin to work on our bad *middos* (character traits) when we discover them? Or should we leave that for later?

A

Absolutely do not begin to work on your bad *middos* right away. You have just started to get to know yourself, and before you discover lots of good in yourself, it is detrimental for you to work on your bad *middos*, because you will become overly focused on the bad in yourself and you are unaware of the good in yourself. You would be working on yourself with a lowly view towards yourself. Only after discovering lots of good about yourself can you begin a healthy kind of self-improvement. You must begin from a place of finding many good points in yourself, and if you have not yet found any good in yourself yet, you must keep looking for it. If you still cannot find any good about yourself, ask someone else to point out to your strengths. Either way, you can only begin self-improvement after you have found a lot of good parts about yourself.

Tackling A Bad Middah

The Rav explained that negative thoughts can come from bad *middos*. How can we go about fixing our bad *middos*?

A

As an example, when one recognizes that he or she has a certain lustful desire, he or she should firstly (1) Recognize that the trait of desire is holy at its root, since all the *middos* are holy at their root. (2) Then, one should see how he or she uses this trait negatively. (3) Then, one should seek an actual way to minimize the negative desire. (4) Then one should see how the lustful desire can be overpowered, by using the different elements of the soul. In the case of desire, which comes from the element of water, one needs to counter it with the opposite element, which is fire. In this way, one creates an internal war in the soul in order to overpower a negative trait.

Figuring Out My Worst Middah

I am learning “Getting To Know Your Feelings” and I see that I need to need to work on all of the *middos* (character traits). In what order should I work in? How can I know what my worst *middah* is (the “garments” that my soul inherited from my parents’ personalities), which is my main task on this world?

A

Generally speaking, the *middah* (character trait) that a person stumbles in the most is his worst *middah* and the one he has to mainly fix. The *middah* that a person finds the most difficult to fix is the root of all his bad *middos*. On a more specific level, it is recommended to hear the shiurim on “The Four Elements – Self-Recognition” and also the “Fixing” series. Slowly as you clarify your personality, with assistance from Heaven, you can understand and recognize what your main work will be.

Ahavas Yisrael – Start Loving Or Stop Hating?

If a person unfortunately feels a lot of hatred for others, and he hates anyone who disagrees with his views, etc. and now he wants to work on *ahavas Yisrael* (loving a Jew), can he work simultaneously on removing his hatred as well as on increasing his love for other Jews? Or does he first need to remove his hatred and only after that he can awaken in himself a love for other Jews?

A

The Rambam (*Hilchos De'os* 2:2) describes the way of fixing character faults: “What is the way for them to be healed? If one has an angry temperament, we tell him that if someone strikes him or curses him, he shouldn’t feel any excitement towards the other. Have him practice this for a long time, until the anger is uprooted from his heart.” The same rule applies to fixing all negative traits: if one is at one extreme, he needs to go to the other extreme, and behave like this for a long time, until he eventually returns to the good path, which is the “middle point” between the two extremes of each character trait.

With regards to the issue you are asking about, hatred – since the opposite of hatred is love, the way to heal the negative hatred is by working on acquiring love [for another Jew].

However, if you find this impossible to do, you can first keep your focus on ridding yourself from hatred, and along with this, you should also try to work a little bit on loving another Jew.

Majorly Turned Off By Others

In our generation, we can find evil [character] even amongst the most G-d fearing people. The general atmosphere in our society today reeks of people who are full of jealousy, desires, and honor-seeking. No one opens his mouth to speak out against this, and this makes me very angry inside, to the point that I am heartbroken over this. What is the proper perspective on how one can gain a more positive outlook about this generation?

A

Firstly, when one has *ahavas Yisrael* (love for other Jews) in his heart, his mind can easily change its perspective on the situation. But when a person is missing love for other Jews, he can only become intellectually aware of the following perspective, but it will be most difficult for him to truly absorb it: When one has love for others, the love covers over others’ faults. Love has a blinding effect on a person – when a person loves another, he won’t see the faults of the other person. For example, Yitzchok *Avinu* didn’t see the faulty character of Esav, because he had a great love for Esav. Even when a person is aware that the other has faults, if he loves the other, he will not think

about the faults, as it says in the verse, “Sin cannot be seen in Yaakov, exertion cannot be seen in Yisrael, for Hashem his G-d is with him.” When there is a friendship and a cherishing of the other person, the faults of the other are not seen. And even if one does see faults in the person he loves, he will not attribute it to the free will of the other person, and instead he will attribute it to Hashem’s orchestration of the world.

Ultimately, though, we still have a physical body, which is not able to love, and which is not able to desire unity with the world. Therefore, being that every person has a body, which cannot relate to loving others, every person will suffer to some degree, when he notices faults in others and he recoils from what he sees. Therefore, one needs to accept this suffering with love. This suffering itself purifies one’s body and heart. This is how a person can join with the pain of the *Shechinah*, for being in exile affects us not only regarding the place we are in, but mainly regarding our souls: the fact that the Jewish people, the “children” of Hashem, have fallen from their lofty spiritual level.

Changing A Stubborn Person

What can we say to a person in order to help him take a different course of action, when the person thinks he is doing the right thing and really he is not?

A

First we need to get the person to open up his inner world and to help him become aware that not all actions that people do are true to who they are. The first step is to get him to simply become aware of this, and then we can further work with him.

Beating Laziness

My main issue is that I am very lazy. I move slowly and I do things very slowly. I need the Rav’s advice on how I can do things quicker, so that I can actualize that which I know I need to do. I feel that I don’t have enough time [to get everything done] and I wish I could perform quicker.

A

Get up in the morning quickly. Eat a little less than you usually do, so that you will feel physically lighter. Every day, do 2 things quickly, with the awareness that you are trying to access the ability of acting quicker. Every so often, walk at a little bit of faster pace than you usually do. Every day, do a few small actions which gladden you and which make you feel lighter. Think a lot about the purpose of life, and repeat the words of the *Mishnah*, “The day is short, and there is a lot of work to perform.”

Difficulty With Physical Exertion

A person is obligated to do *hishtadlus* (practical effort) in order to get what he wants and needs. If a person doesn't do that *hishtadlus* – not because he's relying on miracles, but either because (1) he has inner fears and anxieties which make him feel “scattered” in his soul, or because (2) he is strong both intellectually and emotionally, but he feels very disconnected and unpleasant when he needs to involve himself physically in the material world, which requires physical action –

Is Hashem angry with such a person, and will He withhold blessing from such a person? Is there an alternative way for a person to receive blessing from Hashem?

A

Hashem loves you, always, and He desires all the time to do good with you. You need to exert yourself just a little beyond your nature – just a little bit and no more – and that is how you will become more connected with Hashem, and then He will give you all your needs.

Besides for this, it would be proper for you to clarify your personality and attain a balance in your soul. This will provide you with a proper connection to your true self, and it will give you much fulfillment, pleasure and joy, and it will bring you towards fulfilling your specific mission and purpose.

Think a lot about how Hashem loves you, and that you love Him as well, deep down in your soul. Through this, you will gradually become more focused and you will leave the “scattering” in your soul, and instead, you will become immersed in “Hashem's world.” amidst your love for Him.

It is certainly possible to receive blessing through the various *segulos* (spiritual charms) which our Sages have written about, but you should not make this into the most important thing. The main thing is for you to *daven*, from the depths of your heart, in simple words, to ask Hashem anything you want, like a child asking his father.

Terrible Temper

I learn both the simple parts of Torah as well as the hidden dimension of Torah (*pnimiyus* HaTorah), I *daven* and I do *hisbodedus* every day about how I can fix my *middos*, but I keep becoming angry. I keep losing my *emunah* and I take out my anger on others when I feel they deserve it. I have not succeeded in changing even though I *daven* so much about my issues. I make *kaballos* on myself to stop my destructive behavior but I have not succeeded yet do carry out any of my *kaballos* even once. Why can't I succeed at changing my behavior? Why isn't my Torah learning helping me?

A

Besides for learning the simple and hidden dimension of Torah, and besides for *davening* and doing *hisbodedus* on what you need to work on, you also need a practical order of *avodah* for yourself to follow.

Take upon yourself two small and practical *kaballos* a day and be consistent about doing them. This will lead to actual progress.

The Mesillas Yesharim says that Torah leads a person to all levels of growth, but usually a person will also need a practical order of *avodah* for himself to follow on a regular basis, which accompanies his growth. One needs to go step by step, consistently and gradually. This is the secret of success: By doing practical inner work that is gradual and consistent.

Your inner work that needs to accompany you throughout all of your striving for growth is essentially that you need to acquire self-recognition, by learning about the 4 elements in your soul (fire, wind, water, earth). In your case, for example, you are struggling with anger, which is a trait that comes from the element of fire. You therefore need to learn about the element of fire, by seeing the 16 primary subdivisions that come from fire, which you can learn about in the series Fixing Your Fire-Anger. Then you see what you will need to work on.

Simply accepting upon yourself not to get angry anymore is not going to work. It's like if a person were to swear that he won't go to sleep for 3 days. Such an oath is automatically deemed a false oath, because it isn't possible for a person to go more than 3 days without sleep.

A lot of people have the mistaken notion that they can fix their issues just by learning Torah and doing personal reflection on their shortcomings. But that is not how growth works. A person needs practical inner work which he needs to do consistently, which is aligned with his personal soul.

Another mistaken notion is when people accept upon themselves very "general" *kaballos* which are not practical for them to do, and this leads to failure. Their remedy is to learn about the personal inner work they need to do [based on learning about the four elements in their soul].

Irresponsibility

I know a 20-year old boy who keeps losing a lot of items. What can I do about this to help him?

A

There are many different reasons that can be causing it, and depending on the cause, a different balance is required. Here are some possible reasons that can be causing the issue:

- (1) He doesn't see the value of money. If that's the case, it would be worthwhile for him to consider that the *tzaddikim* were more careful with their money than their own lives.
- (2) Or, it could be that he lacks respect for his parents' money. This might be coming from a lack of respect for his parents, or it might come from a lack of respect in general.
- (3) It could be that he is simply disorganized.
- (4) He might have an emotional issue. Either he has a specific emotional issue that is part of his personality, or he is having the issue because of pressure that he's experiencing.
- (5) It's possible that his thoughts are in disarray.
- (6) It's possible that he is out of touch with reality, and he is somewhat disconnected from reality, which causes him to be imaginative and dreamy.

(7) It's possible that he was always losing things since he was a child, and he was labeled by others in his environment as having a personality of losing things.

Consider any of the above possible reasons that may be causing the issue, and then try to clarify which of these reasons is the underlying issue. Accordingly, you can then see how to properly deal with it.

The 4 Elements of the Soul

Balancing The 4 Elements

I have some question about the four elements of the soul:

1) The Rav has said that one needs to recognize his/her main element, such as by seeing what one's strongest character trait is and what his weakest character trait is. This shows a person what one's "root element" is. For example, if a person sees that he has a lot of displays of conceit or anger, it shows that his primary element is fire. How can a person identify this?

A

The process of clarifying one's personal soul is long, and deep. It does not begin with recognizing your worst character trait.

One needs to first recognize all of the abilities in the soul, first the positive powers and then the negative powers. One needs to identify his strongest point, and then organize the rest of the abilities in his soul, in order of how much they dominate.

After that, a person needs to analyze his strongest point and see what powers (*kochos*) and character traits (*middos*) are contained in it. Within this area, a person should see which koach/power is the strongest, which is second-to-strongest, etc. As part of this clarification process, a person also discovers what his worst character trait is.

Clarifying the strongest element needs to be done on two levels: How much it manifests (*kamus*), and the quality of much it manifests (*eichus*).

In order to figure out the first part (*kamus*), one needs to see which element, ability or character trait he encounters the most and struggles with the most, in his daily life.

In order to figure out the second part (*eichus*), there are many different ways to know. At first, one needs to figure out these two factors: How strongly connected you feel to a particular element or ability or trait in the soul, as well as how much stability you feel the particular element or ability

or trait provides for you in your life. Understandably, throughout each part of the clarification process, you should try as much as possible to uncover as many specific details as you can, so that you can arrive at a more precise conclusion.

2) Does a person also need to figure out his second-to-most dominant element in order to know his most dominant element?

A

Going deeper into the root of this matter, the main character trait of one's most dominant element [i.e. if a person's worst trait is conceitedness, which comes from one's element of fire] is also connected with one's second-to-most dominant element [i.e. if his second-to-most dominant element is water, his trait of conceitedness is also coming from his element of water], and so forth. However, when it comes to how the abilities are actually revealed in the soul, at the root, each element stands on its own, independent of the other elements. At the same time, the primary element also branches out and mixes with the other elements.

3) And how can a person figure out anything about his element of water, which only contains one character trait (lustful desire)?

A

Regarding your question about the element of water, you should know that lustful desire is not only the trait contained in water. Water contains many other additional aspects (which are explained in the series of "Understanding Your *Middos*." **מהות המידות – דע את מידותיך** [specifically, in classes 31-65 of that series], and in the series of **מים – דע את מידותיך הדרכה מעשית** ("Fixing Your Water"). Therefore, it is upon a person to clarify which ability contained in his element of water is his strongest.

Another possibility is that one's element of water is producing a negative character trait that is actually coming from his opposite element, fire, which can show up as either conceit or anger or any other fire-related trait.

Besides for this, Rav Chaim Vital in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah* lists other character traits that result from the element of water [such as jealousy and envy]. It is possible that one's worst character trait is coming from any of the resulting traits of his primary element.

4) In order to figure out one's worst character trait, does a person discover it from knowing his strongest character trait, or his weakest character trait? For example, if a person's strongest element is fire and his weakest is wind, on one hand he will have a problem of being highly conceited (fire), but on the other hand, he will also be very inactive, because he doesn't have that much wind and therefore he doesn't want to move that much. [So which of the above is his weakest area?]

A

Usually if a person hasn't worked hard to repair and balance the abilities in his soul, his worst character trait will become awakened by his strongest element. This is because one's strongest element is the most active and plays the leading role in the various factors that influence one's soul.

However, one needs to know that there are two possibilities. Sometimes a person's strongest element will awaken a negative character trait that stems from that element [i.e. if his strongest element is fire, his fire will awaken the trait of conceitedness, or anger, or honor, etc.]. And sometimes, a negative character trait will be stemming from his opposite element [i.e. his conceitedness or anger may be coming from his opposite element, his weakest element, which in this example would be water]. This is because there is a rule that "two opposites bear one root." and therefore, each element can either awaken its direct byproduct, or a byproduct of its opposite.

For example, if a person's main element is fire, his worst character trait may be conceitedness or anger. Or, his worst trait might be lustful desire, which is a product of his opposite element, water. And the same is true vice versa, as well as with all the other elements.

Therefore, even if a person finds that he has a certain negative character trait, that is not a proof of what his primary element is [i.e. if one's worst character trait is anger, it doesn't necessarily mean that his primary element is fire]. It's very possible that it's exactly the opposite [his worst character trait, anger, might be coming from his weakest element, which is water]. That being the case, a person needs to do thorough soul-searching, in order to discover what [element] is triggering each of his character traits.

After a person has worked hard at truly clarifying what his strongest element is, and he has also worked hard to uproot his worst character trait, he needs to repair and balance the other abilities in his soul, which so far haven't been balanced. He can be helped by making use of his strongest element, in order to do it.

5) The Rav has said that we balance out the strongest element through its opposite element, even though the opposite element is this person's weakest. From where does a person get the

ability to use his weakest element to create a balance in his soul, being that it is his weakest element? Furthermore, even if a person has two elements that are equally strong, one of them has to be the root, and the other one has to be the branch. How can the root element balance out the branching element, being that they are on two different levels?

A

Here are some reasons why and how a person can balance out his strongest element, by using his opposite [or weakest] element.

1- One way is by the rule of “Two opposites bear one root.” Therefore, a person can discover his strongest element by seeing what his weakest one is. [i.e. If one’s weakest element is wind, his strongest element must be earth]. This can be used to repair any ability in the soul.

2- Another way is through making use of the power of free will to choose. Through utilizing the power to choose, one can choose which ability of the soul he will use, and which one he will not.

3- An additional way is, sometimes, a person’s strongest ability isn’t yet repaired, while his weakest ability is already repaired (relatively speaking, when compared to the strongest ability which isn’t yet repaired). How do we know if a ability in the soul is repaired or not? Part of the definition is if a person is able to use the ability when the time and place calls for it, in a way that it doesn’t backfire on him. In this way, a person is able to use the ability as he wishes [and this shows that the ability is repaired].

4- Another reason is that a person’s strongest and weakest elements are not necessarily defined as the “root” of the soul verses the “branches” of the soul. Rather, it is because on one hand, the strongest and weakest elements in one’s soul are independent from each other, and on the other hand, they also mix with each other, as stated earlier. Therefore, it is possible for a person to use his weakest element, in order to attain a balance. And even if we do define the weakest element as the ‘branch’ of its ‘root’, the primary element – we can still ‘move’ the ‘branch’ and thereby repair the root.

5- Additionally, the ‘strongest element’ of the soul does not mean that this is an element which totally controls all of a person’s soul without any means of restraint. The other elements are certainly active and are also affecting the soul. So we can certainly use any of the other elements in order to repair any issue in the soul, according to their abilities.

6 – Each of the 4 elements is comprised of all 4 elements. Even the strongest element is comprised of the other elements, so the other elements will always be manifest to some degree, doing their respective work. When a person uses his opposite element in order to strengthen his strongest element, he is essentially balancing out the opposite element that is found within his strongest element, using it correctly. For example, if a person's strongest element is fire and his weakest element is water, his element of fire also contains an element of water. The "water" within his "fire" is called his element of "water-of-fire." When this person uses his element of water, he is really balancing out his "water-of-fire." From then onward, his "water-of-fire" will be of good use to him, because it has been balanced. Since his "water" is his opposite element, his element of water will still do its respective work, but now that it has been balanced, it will be beneficial to the person.

6) Are the four elements all 'wrapped' like a garment around each other, or are they mixed with each other? (The words of the Hagahos Maharitz on the beginning of *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* seems to imply the latter).

A

There are two different viewpoints. According to one viewpoint, the four elements are offshoots of the other [fire downgrades to wind, wind to water, and water to earth]. According to another viewpoint, the four elements are clothed in each other. According to another viewpoint, they are mixed with each other.

7) If the elements are all mixed into each other, is it like a physical mixture, i.e. that a person will have 50% fire in his soul, 30% earth, etc.?

A

Generally speaking, the soul cannot be defined as if it's a 'container' that holds 100% of various soul abilities, i.e. 50% fire, 30% earth, 15% wind and 5% of water. That is not the way to understand it. Rather, each ability in the soul is measured by itself, according to how it manifests and how much it influences the soul, and according to one's nature and temperament, as the Creator has designed the person.

It is only possible to view the soul in terms of "percentages" like this with regards to how much the various abilities of the soul are mixed with each other. The mix of the different abilities in the

soul is expressed in the relationship between the different abilities, in their amount and in their quality, as well as in how each ability influences the other.

Even more so, the mix between the different abilities in the soul is able to change, according to the amount of balance that exists currently in one's soul.

Alternatively, when one gives balance to different abilities in his soul, this also changes the mix. Meaning, even if we can measure the percentages of how much each ability in the soul is manifest, the balance between the abilities can change, and then the percentages will change, because the current relationship between the different soul abilities has changes.

Figuring Out My Main Element

I really want to know how I can know which of these dominant elements (water or wind) is my primary element. And, if for example my primary element is water, does that mean that my main personality is “wind-of-water”?

A

1) Write down the strong points of your personality. Make a separate list and write down your main weaknesses. Then, make another list: Your strongest point, your second-to-strongest point, etc. and your greatest weakness, your second-to-greatest weakness, etc. Accordingly, you will be able to see which of your elements is more dominant, wind or water.

It is recommended that you use the series of the “Four Elements – Self-Recognition” in order to become clearer about this topic.

2) Usually, that is the case (your second-to-most dominant is your sub-personality. Thus, if your main element is water and your second to most dominant element is wind, your personality is wind-of-water]. However, sometimes there is a separation between your elements, and each element is apart from the other and they don't overlap each other. For example, you element of water may act independently from your wind, and your element of wind will act independently from your water [and they don't interconnect.]

Why Emphasize The 4 Elements?

My understanding, based on speaking with a student of the Rav, is that the most important *sefer* of the Rav which I need to begin working from is the series of the “4 Elements.” so that a person can attain self-recognition.

(1) I am not sure if: (a) This is the ONLY *sefer* that I need, meaning that I don’t need any other *sefarim* to serve Hashem, such as a *sefer* of *Chassidus*, or *sefer* Mesillas Yesharim, and the like, or (b) if, from learning this *sefer* [on the 4 elements], I’ll know how to recognize myself and then I’ll know what area of Torah learning I need to be involved in, and what approach I need, and where all of this is bringing me to.

(2) Also, how does the Rav’s *sefer* on the 4 elements relate to the Rav’s other *sefarim* which explain *Chassidus* and Kaballah?

A

1) You need to learn the words of our Sages at their source, and to analyze the exact words which they taught. As you stated in your question, from learning about the 4 elements a person can recognize and know which direction he needs to go in, and which *sefer* he needs to learn, based on his personal soul. From learning about the 4 elements, you will see more clearly, with *siyata d’shmaya*, the words of our Rishonim and Acharonim, and you will have greater understanding in their words, knowing how to apply them to your own personal soul and to properly actualize their words.

2) The [series on the] 4 elements is a way for one to recognize his “personal soul.” All other *sefarim* are teaching the general fundamentals of Torah, and each person needs to find his “personal soul” within them.

4 Elements –Which Middah Do I Work On First?

What should I focus on? When I am learning about a certain *middah* [in my case, laziness], how do I know where to focus on in order to improve the *middah* or element in? Are there any additional exercises I can do, or are there any changes I need to make, so that I can gain the most progress?

A

Clarify the 16 subdivisions of each *middah* you learn about, and see which of them is mainly applicable to your situation. Then work on yourself slowly and patiently, and with consistency. Don't work on two areas at the same time. You can attain clearer self-recognition, with *siyata d'shmaya*, by *davening* for clarity about which particular kind of laziness you need to work on, out of the 16 general divisions of laziness [and the same goes for any other *middah* you are working on].

The 4 Elements And The Ten Sefiros

Does the Rav explain how we can practically use the Ten *Sefiros* in terms of our soul? And, why has the Rav chosen to teach about the 4 elements, as opposed to all other abilities of the soul (or at least the seven primary traits of the soul)?

A

There is a new series called **שורשי תנועות הנפש – ארבעת היסודות**, “Four Elements – Root Movements of the Soul” in which I explain [for example] the element of earth and how its defining characteristic is “contraction.” according the system of the Ten *Sefiros*. There are Ten *Sefiros* [*Keser*, *Chochmah*, *Binah*, *Chessed*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferes*, *Netzach*, *Yesod*, and *Malchus*] and there are four *Partzufim* (*Abba*, *Ima*, *Zeir Anpin*, and *Nukva*). A “partzuf” implies a combination of some sort. This new series (Four Elements – Root Movements of the Soul) explains the elements according to the system of the *Partzufim*.

Besides for the aforementioned series, the Ten *Sefiros* are explained on a person “soul” level in the series “Getting To Know Your Soul” and in the series “Getting To Know Your Feelings.”

The Relationship Between Mazal & The 4 Elements

It's known that a person is comprised of the 4 elements, and each person has a dominant element in his personal soul.

1) Is a person's dominant trait/element dependent on the *mazal* (zodiac) in which he was born in? (The month I was born in, Sivan, which has the *mazal* of "twins." corresponds to the element of wind. And indeed, I feel that this is my dominant element).

2) If a person, let's say, was born in the month of Adar, which has the *mazal* of "fish." and which corresponds to the element of water, is it still possible for him to have a different dominating element, which doesn't correspond to that month's *mazal*? Does a person born in the month of Adar (the *mazal* of "fish") automatically have a dominant element of water?

In other words, does a person need to identify what his strongest element is, or can a person just assume that his dominant element corresponds to the *mazal* of the month that he was born in?

A

A person's soul is comprised of its actual essence (atzmus) as well its outer garments (*levush*). The atzmus/essence of one's soul is always rooted in one particular element which is its primary element (fire, wind, water or earth). In addition to this factor, a person also has a levush/garment for his soul, which is called the *mazal* (zodiac sign). The word *mazal* is from the words "Yizlu mayim." "The water shall flow." With the Jewish people, the primary factor of the soul is the very essence of a Jew's soul, for the Sages state, "There is no *mazal* [dictating] over the Jewish people." Therefore, our main relationship with our soul is to relate to the very essence (atzmus) of our soul, and to relate only a little to our *mazal*. Therefore, a person needs to clarify his primary element, which is part of his soul's essence, and this is his primary inner work and unique role on this world.

Learning Sefarim According To Your Primary Element

1) I read the response of the Rav about the different ways of the *sefarim* according to the approaches of *Mussar* and *Chassidus*. The Rav has said elsewhere that a person needs to clarify what the main "element" is (from amongst the four elements of earth, water, wind or fire) of the particular *sefer* (of the particular author) that one is learning. Can the Rav give a list of some well-known *sefarim*, in the categories of both *Mussar* and *Chassidus*, and what the main element of the author of the *sefer* was? For example, can we say that the main element of the author of Sfas Emes was "water." since the Sfas Emes always talks about finding the

“vitality.” (corresponding to the element of water) which can be found in each thing? Does this make sense, and can the Rav give some examples?

2) Also, if my main element is “fire.” does that mean that I mainly need to learn *sefarim* of an author whose main element was “fire”? Or do I need to balance myself by learning a *sefer* whose author had the opposite element, which would be water or earth?

A

1. An example of a *sefer* whose author had a primary element of “earth” was the Rambam’s *sefer* Mishneh Torah. In this *sefer* - which was the primary *sefer* of the Rambam - the author establishes each *halachah* in its proper place and defines the boundaries of each *halachah*, which is a use of the element of “earth”: putting each thing in its proper place. This shows you that the root element of the Rambam’s soul was the element of earth. This is in contrast to the Rambam’s *sefer* Moreh Nevuchim, which is not written in any particular order.

An example of a *sefer* whose author had a primary element of “water” is *sefer* Chovos HaLevovos, for the central theme of this *sefer* is the idea of expressing gratitude, giving, love. It is a *sefer* which involves reflection and calm thinking, which is an outcome of a perfected element of “water” (i.e. calmly moving water). This is also because the element of water is rooted in the intellect, which is the ability of calm thinking and reflection.

The Ramchal’s *sefarim* show that his main element was wind, because the Ramchal’s *sefarim* are based upon the concept of yichud Hashem, which the root concept that “moves” all of the Creation to its purpose, reminiscent of the wind.

A *sefer* whose author’s main element is fire, is the *sefer* *Yesod V’Shores H’Avodah*, which gives a fiery, passionate approach that is meant to inspire and ignite a person to serve Hashem better. This “fiery” approach is manifest in the author’s other *sefarim* as well.

“Earth” is also the main element in the teachings of the Kotzker Rebbe, which reflect a constant demand for growth, not out of a fiery enthusiasm, but from clarifying the reality, to make reality very clear, which results in recognizing Hashem and serving Him. That is the element of “earth” – building upon a sensory reality.

“Water” is the main element of the Baal Shem Tov and his teachings, for the Baal Shem Tov’s underlying theme is to have a “calm love” to all Jews, even towards the wicked, and this calm kind of love is reminiscent of “calm waters.” Also, his teachings reflected a calm, pleasant form of *d’veykus* (attachment) in Hashem, which is like calm, pleasantly moving waters.

“Wind” is the main element of Reb Pinchos Koritzer’s teachings, which reflect the pursuit of truth, because truth encompasses the beginning, middle and end of a matter – the “movement” which connects everything together, reminiscent of the wind, which moves. This is in contrast to the “movement” of falsity, which moves everything to the side.

“Fire” is reflected in the teachings of Breslev, for Rebbe Nachman of Breslev said, “A fire will burn within me, until Mashiach comes.” The teachings of Breslev are essentially a “fire” of *bittul* (self-nullification), the nullification of the intellect, which is *temimus* (simplicity), by which wisdom can be drawn from *ayin* (nothingness/the non-ego state).

2. Yes, one should learn *sefarim* whose author shares his primary element. However, since each of the four elements contains aspects of all four, one’s “root element” subdivides into further divisions (i.e. one’s main element can be either earth-of-earth, water-of-earth, wind-of-earth, or earth-of-fire, water-of-fire, etc.). One needs to discover what his primary subdivision is, within his primary element [i.e. if his primary subdivision is earth-of-fire, or fire-of-water, etc.]. One should also try to discover further subdivisions of his primary element [i.e. earth-of-earth-of-fire, water-of-earth-of-fire, etc.].

There is also an additional clarification for one to make. There are four main divisions of souls: one category of souls is those who are more “action”-oriented, other souls are more “emotion”-oriented, other souls are more intellectual-oriented, and other souls are more spiritual. Since this is also a factor in self-discovery, one also needs to examine which of these divisions his particular soul is rooted in.

Besides for this [studying *sefarim* whose author bears the same primary element as yours], you also need to study the *sefarim* authored by one who bears your opposing element. This is because in order to understand your main element [and the path of *avodah* which corresponds to it] you need to learn about it by studying its opposite element [and its corresponding way of *avodah*].

Finally, one should also attempt to learn different *sefarim* corresponding to all of the four elements, because a person doesn’t see clearly until he sees the “full picture” [hence one should try to learn *sefarim* in which the main approach is “earth.” as well as *sefarim* which are mainly “water”-based, “wind”-based, and “fire”-based].

Elements Of The Emotions

Each person has seven primary negative emotions, as mentioned in “Getting To Know Your Feelings.” Do each of these emotions stem from a specific element in the soul, or is there a

branch of the soul, or several branches, which are motivating a particular emotion (i.e. fire-of-water, or fire-of-water-of-fire)? What are the elements behind each of the seven primary negative emotions?

A

Each emotion has a primary element behind it, and in addition, the other elements mix with it. Love (*ahavah*) comes from the element of water. Fear (*yirah*) comes from fire. Pride (*hispaarus*) comes from wind. Victory (*nitzachon*) comes from fire-of-water. Admitting (*hodayah*) comes from water-of-fire. Lowliness (*shiflus*) comes from earth. That is a general description, and there are further details.

Teshuvah & Clarifying My 4 Elements

After listening a lot to different shiurim of the Rav, and due to personal experiences I had from previous years, when trying to prepare for the *Yom HaDin* [Rosh HaShanah], I have come to the following conclusion. Although it is commonly accepted practice that a person should take on a “resolution” of improvement for the coming year, and those on a higher level make *cheshbon hanefesh* [self-accounting], I realized that none of this involves working on my *middos* and on balancing my “four elements.” This year, I am accepting upon myself to learn about the “four elements.” with their practical applications in my life. This will be in place of taking on specific resolutions of certain actions to do or any specific kind of self-accounting. As I explained, this is because from my personal experience, I am seeing that problems with *middos* can prevent a person from truly growing at this time of the year.

I want to hear from the Rav if my thinking is correct, or if the Rav doesn’t agree with this.

A

1. For any sins committed this year, you need to write down a self-accounting on them, and see how you can fix those sins. You cannot wait to do this until you understand yourself better [rather, you need to do this even if you have not reached deep self-recognition of yourself].

2. In addition to learning about the “four elements” and how you can apply them practically in your life – which is a very good direction to take – you should also take upon yourself a small resolution to do a certain action of improvement, according to your current level. Pick something that is currently appropriate for you to improve on. This is because you also need to implement the power of “action.” even if it is only a little.

So there are three parts for you to do: Make a self-accounting about any sins you committed this year, and write down how you can repair them. Learn about the “four elements” and how they can apply to your practically. Accept upon yourself to do a small action of improvement, which you are able to do on your current level.

Difficulty With The 4 Elements Series

I know someone who is having a difficulty with the 4 elements series, because it is a very deep approach and there is a vast amount of information to learn. Each *middah* contains 16 parts to learn about, and this is an endless kind of learning. Even to analyze one *middah* alone is too hard for her. She very much wants to understand her soul and use an inner approach, and she really wants to get self-recognition and work on *middos*, and she loves the whole concept of the four elements especially, but she is doubtful about the approach here. It's too overwhelming for her to learn so much information. Although she finds the material fascinating and interesting, she is simply overwhelmed from all of the information and depth and all of the details to learn about. I advised her that if so, this approach is not for her and that she needs a different approach, and that there's nothing wrong with that, because not every approach is suitable for every person. Was that the right suggestion to give to her, and what is the Rav's view on this?

A

[Studying the subject of the four elements in depth, length and breadth] is only for those who who are capable of depth and subtlety, who have the patience to build and develop themselves by breaking down all the details. It's recommended only for this kind of person to identify which particular one of the 16 subdivisions [of the *middah* in question] are applicable to him, and that particular area should become his focus. There is no need to focus on any of the other areas being learned about.

If one finds even this to be too difficult, for the time being he should not involve himself with this kind of self-work.

The 4 Elements In Smoking & Overeating

I would like to ask the Rav about the Torah's view on how to (1) quit smoking and (2) how to lose weight - so that I can help my clients who are trying to quit these bad habits.

A

The approach to any issue is by understanding the four elements of the soul, through which a person can attain a balance in his personality and thereby modify his behavior. The roots of smoking and being overweight are a result of imbalances in the distribution of the soul's four elements. Therefore, the solution is to balance the soul's abilities, and their roots, which are the four elements.

1) SMOKING: Addiction to smoking can stem from an imbalance in any of the four elements, or from several elements together. Therefore, the way to treat smoking issues will vary, depending on the situation.

Smoking can come from an imbalance in one's element of fire: when one feels a surge of anger (fire), he may be pulled towards smoking as a result.

Smoking can also come from an imbalance in one's element of water: When one feels a pull towards a "desire" for smoking.

Smoking can also come from an imbalance in one's element of wind: When one seeks an outlet of that involves various movements that are consistent and pleasant. The movements involved in smoking, such as inhaling the smoke and exhaling the smoke, are ways to calm one's desire for movement. When this is one's main motivation in smoking, his habits of smoking are stemming from an impaired element of wind in his soul.

Finally, smoking can also come from an imbalance in one's element of earth: If one got into the bad habit of smoking since his younger years, when he was acting silly and he habitually got used to it, to the point that it became a regular part of his schedule, his element of "earth" is weighing heavily upon him, expressing itself in the form of an attachment to the habit of smoking which has become a regular part of his routine.

2) OVERWEIGHT: Being overweight can also stem from an imbalance in one's elements – either from one of them, or from more than one of them. Accordingly, the way to deal with the overweight issues is to deal with the impaired element(s) causing it.

Being overweight may be stemming from an impaired element of fire in one's soul: when one feels inwardly empty, and he feels as if he is basically 'destroyed' on his inside [a result of too much dominant fire in his soul], he demands a relief to fill his inner void. This can manifest itself in the desire for overeating.

Being overweight may also stem from an impaired element of water in the soul: When one is simply dragged after a lustful desire for food.

Being overweight can also stem from an impaired wind in the soul: When one is chasing food because he desires the movements involved in getting to the food. The act of eating itself can also be a way for him to satisfy his need for movement which he is not getting enough of.

Finally, being overweight can stem from impaired earth in the soul: When one wants to eat because he wants the feeling of a "full stomach." which makes him feel heavy afterwards. In this case, a person eats until he feels heavy, and he doesn't feel satisfied from his eating until he feels heavy – i.e. "to feel full." after eating. He is ignoring the Rambam's rule about eating, which is that a person should only satisfy a third of his appetite when eating.

The 4 Elements Of Fear

In our generation we are finding two central causes for all personal issues: depression, and fear. There are therapists today who see these two experiences as the root of all issues in the soul that exist today. I want to ask: In the Rav's series of the Four Elements, the Rav explains at length about the element of earth as being the cause for sadness (and laziness). I see that the series on the four elements does not cover the issue of fears – why? Fear doesn't come from the four elements? Aren't fears a product of a certain element or trait? I am aware that the Rav addresses the topic in the series on *bitachon* (trust in G-d), but the many prevalent issues in our society related to fear have prompted me to ask why the subject of fear hasn't been addressed in the series about the four elements.

A

If a person fears [a situation that involves] destruction, such fears stem from the element of fire. If a person fears a state of becoming confined, such fears stem from the element of wind. If a person fears pain, such fear stems from the element of water. If a person fears a lack of stability, the fear stems from the element of earth.

The Elements Of Truth

Which of the 4 elements does the trait of truthfulness (*emes*) come from? On one hand, the element of wind corresponds to the trait of compassion, or *Tiferes* (beauty), the trait of Yaakov *Avinu*, whose main trait was *emes* (truth). Also, truthfulness “moves” a person towards his purpose, reminiscent of the wind, the element which gives movement and direction. However, truth “destroys” falsity, so that would imply that truthfulness comes from the element of fire. Yet we can also say that truthfulness comes from the element of earth, because it is the recognition of reality as it is (which is a trait of earth).

A

There is the *kav yemin*, the “right line.” which corresponds to *Chessed*, kindness. There is also the *kav smo’el*, the “left line.” which corresponds to *yirah* (fear) and *din* (judgment). There is also the *kav ha’emtza*, the “middle line.” When the middle line is leaning towards the right line, the middle line is called *rachamim* (compassion). When the middle line is leaning towards the left line, the middle line is called *emes* (truth). The *Gemara* says that the trait of Moshe was *emes*, and the *Gemara* associates this with *din* (judgment). But it is also known that the “pillar of truth” guides and moves each thing from its beginning point to its end point, and when this “movement” is revealed as a love for truth, it is coming from the element of water. This “movement” negates all falsity. In that aspect, truth acts like the element of fire, which negates and destroys (as you alluded to in your). Truth also reveals what the reality is, and that is the element of earth, because earth contains “truth” and through “truth” the earth can clarify what reality is.

4 Elements & Shemiras Habris

(1) Is there a connection between the 4 elements and damaging the Bris [the sin of wasting sperm]? (2) And, if someone has sinned in this area, can he rectify himself through improving his four elements?

A

1) [The sin of wasting sperm can be coming from an issue of one's personal four elements, either earth, water, wind or fire].

One's element of earth can be a source for *keri* (discharge) because the *Gemara* says that being weary from travel can cause a person to have *keri*, and when a person is weary from travel, he feels "heavy." a trait rooted in the element of earth. It can also come as a result of fantasizing [which is also a trait rooted in the element of earth, because *dimyon/fantasy* is linked with *adamah/earth*]. One's element of water can cause a person to commit this if it is coming from lust (*taavah*), a trait of the element of water. One's element of wind can cause a person to commit this sin because sperm "shoots out like an arrow" [the use of movement, which is an aspect of wind]. One's element of fire can cause a person to commit this sin when a person's body heat is increased, because heat is a product of the element of fire.

2) Yes [a person can rectify the sin of "damaging the Bris"] by seeing which of the four elements this sin is primarily coming from, and accordingly, one should repair the specific element that is causing the issue. However, in addition to that, a person will also need to engage in specific remedies to fix this sin. By repairing one's elements, one repairs the specific *middos* that can be the catalysts for this sin, but if one actually commits the sin of wasting sperm, one needs to engage in the specific remedies to repair the act of this sin.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The Paths of Avodas Hashem

How Can I Know What My Main Avodah In Life Is?

How can I know what my main, personal *avodah* (inner service to Hashem) in life is (Besides for the general mission that the Jewish people has)?

A

That is a very complex thing to know. Generally speaking, a person has to know his main quality and his main weakness in life, and these are the roots of his *avodah*. The rest are always details which one has to learn about himself, but the root of one's mission on this world is to know the depth of his main quality, and the depth of his weakest point.

Am I Supposed To Learn Many Sefarim?

Is a person supposed to learn a lot of *sefarim hakedoshim* or will this just confuse a person? Should a person peruse through a lot of *sefarim* without learning them in-depth and later go back to learning them in-depth, so that he can get a general picture of *avodas Hashem*? Or will this just confuse a person when he learns so many *sefarim* and he is trying to understand all of them?

A

This is relative to each person. Each person needs to discern how much he can handle, according to his level. Usually, a person needs to first read through *sefarim* superficially and later he should go back and analyze better what he has learned. There are some rare individuals who can first learn some *sefarim* in-depth and then finish a lot without analyzing them.

I have read other *sefarim* about how to do *hisbodedus*, in addition to hearing the Rav's approach on *hisbodedus*. Now that I've read all this information, how do I avoid becoming mixed up between all the different paths of *hisbodedus* that I have read about?

A

If a person reads many *sefarim* and attempts to practice everything he's read in it, like if he's gone through the *sefarim* of Chabad and Breslev, and the *sefarim* of Reb Yisrael Salanter, and another seven *sefarim* after that – although each of the above *sefarim* are all the true words of our Sages, the problem with reading so many *sefarim* is that it creates tremendous confusion. Compare this to mixing together a bunch of ingredients that should not be mixed. Although each ingredient is fine, mixing them together creates a horribly tasting food.

Let me emphasize the following so that this point should be very clear. Generally speaking, the deeper that a person becomes and the better he understands deep matters, he will be able to read many *sefarim* and hear many paths of *avodas Hashem* without becoming confused, knowing how to properly combine the information that he has learned, without damaging himself. If a person does not possess deep understanding, though, the more he reads and hears [about serving Hashem], the more he will become mixed up, confused, and he damages himself.

I cannot determine for each person how well he/she understands things. All I can say is this general idea: that if a person does not have deep understanding, it is detrimental for a person to read/hear about many different paths in *avodas Hashem*. It is this point which I emphasized here, so that you should be made aware of it. (And of course, if someone does possess deep understanding and he goes through all the information found in the many *sefarim* and shiurim that are out there without getting confused, and he knows how to properly combine the many details he has heard about - this is wonderful and praiseworthy.)

Finding My Path Of Serving Hashem

I see that the Rav has given shiurim on many, many *sefarim*, both *sefarim* of *Mussar* and *Chassidus*. My question is: How am I supposed to be involved with so many different approaches, especially when each *sefer* has a vastly different approach than another? In our generation a person comes across so many different paths in *avodas Hashem*. For example, Chabad and Breslev are always publishing different essays of Torah based on their respective

Rebbes, and there are also many other *sefarim* as well [by the Litvish] which bring stories of Litvish *Gedolim*, where there's a totally different approach. In addition to this, there are so many weekly parsha sheets that come out and a person comes across so many different approaches in them. In short, any normal person today can become totally confused by all of this....

A

A person should stick to one approach for a certain amount of time, and he should only be involved with that approach. During that period of time, one should become familiar with that approach very well, with the way of thinking that is behind that approach, and he should also act upon that way of thinking.

A person first needs to clarify the way of *avodas* Hashem which he was brought up with, or, he should become clear about the way of *avodas* Hashem that is closest to his heart. After a person has become very familiar with a certain way of thinking in *avodas* Hashem, he needs to think about it and see if it's for him or not. He should determine this based on contemplating it a lot and also *davening* to Hashem for help about it. The more a person searches for truth, and his motivations are pure, to that extent will a person be zoche to clarify if a certain path in *avodas* Hashem is for him or not.

If it seems to a person that a certain path in *avodas* Hashem is indeed for him, he should practically act according to that path. And, if it seems to a person that a certain path is not for him, he should continue to clarify other paths of serving Hashem and see which of them are meant for him. In addition to this [even if a person hasn't yet found his path of serving Hashem], one should determine, based on his intellectual and emotional abilities, if he has the energy to learn about another way or a different view. If one is able to do this, he should learn about it for a certain period of time. One can keep going like this, learning about another way and another way, throughout different periods of time. Like this, one can clarify to himself better and better which path is for him. By seeing a wider scope of the different approaches in *avodas* Hashem that exist, a person can clarify better which of them is the path that's for him.

Every person needs to clarify with himself how much he can encompass. This is because "Too much oil extinguishes the flame." And, even when a person does have the ability to encompass a lot of different approaches, he should only learn about one approach at a time, for a certain period of time, before moving on to learning about a different approach. (This is besides for one's current approach in *avodas* Hashem, which a person needs to be acting upon, in any case).

There are people who feel like they don't have the energy to learn more than one approach. Sometimes this is because a person is a very focused kind of person and he feels that learning about different approaches will scatter his focus. In other cases, it is simply because of laziness that a person doesn't want to learn about other ways of thinking. A person needs to thoroughly examine his intellectual and emotional capabilities and limitations, in order to know this.

What I Should I Mainly Spend My Time On

Baruch Hashem, Torah and *avodas* Hashem is endless. There is *Mussar*, *Chassidus*, *halachah*, *Gemara*, Kaballah, etc. In *avodas* Hashem, there is *hisbodedus*, *cheshbon hanefesh*, and so many other important areas. Can the Rav specify which points I need to think about so that I can know how to divide my time properly throughout the day, between all of these different areas of Torah learning and *avodas* Hashem? Is there a way for me to know which areas I should not be focusing on? Do I need to mainly concentrate on a certain area? I am certainly aware that this matter is different when it comes to each person, but what I am trying to figure out is if there are any points that are universally applicable, which I would need to think about, in order to know what my daily schedule should look like.

A

1. Learn *halachah* with the intention of fulfilling it.
2. There is an obligation to study all of the Torah [each day, break up your quest to study the entire Torah, into daily quotas].
3. Learn [*Gemara*] in-depth.
4. Build your power of deep and subtle intellect, and become connected with it.
5. Attain a balance between your intellect and your emotions in general, and in particular, a balance between involvement with your intellect and your times for prayer.
6. Attain a balance between your intellect and your actions, meaning that your actions should be stable.
7. Attain a balance between your intellect and your times of quiet. Alternatively, attain a balance between your intellect and the time you devote to *d'veykus* of thinking simply about the Creator.

8. Attain a balance between your intellect and your speech in general, and in particular, a balance between your intellect with the time you spend verbalizing words of Torah.

9. Attain a balance between the time you spend involved with your intellect with the time you spend working on your character traits.

10. Clarify what your personal area in Torah learning is.

11. Attain a balance between learning your personal area in Torah learning with the time you need to spend learning Torah, with your children specifically, and with others in general.

12. Attain a balance between the time you spend learning Torah with the time you spend on making effort to earn livelihood.

13. Attain a balance between your own personal learning with how much you need to spend on teaching others, and with benefitting others in general.

14. Attain a balance between the information you absorb from external sources, versus the information you get from within yourself.

15. Attain a balance between all of the above areas, and develop an orderly system to progress with, for the rest of your life.

Ways Of Being Close To Hashem

In *sefer* “Bilvavi” Part 5 (adapted in english as “How To Reveal Your Soul”) the Rav gives a number of ways of serving Hashem. Can the Rav please explain how a person gets close to Hashem through these different ways? And can the Rav list the different schools of thinking which followed each of those ways?

A

[There are three ways: Attaching to a *tzaddik*, attaching to the Torah, and attaching to *middos*.]

1) Attaching to a *tzaddik*. This was especially the way of Breslev, and it is the way of *Chassidus* in general. Through becoming attached with the *tzaddik*, one becomes integrated with the *tzaddik*, and the *tzaddik* is integrated with Hashem, as in the phrase, “Man of G-d.” [Thus becoming attached with the *tzaddik* is a way of becoming attached with Hashem].

2) Attaching to Torah [by way of studying Torah]. This was the approach of the *Vilna Gaon* and his student Rav Chaim of Volozhin [who authored *Nefesh HaChaim*] and other great students. Through becoming attached to the Torah, one becomes attached with HaKadosh Baruch Hu, because “Torah and Hashem are one,” and “His will and His wisdom are one.” Hashem’s will and wisdom are revealed in the Torah, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* explains.

3) Attaching to the *middos* (character traits). This was the school of thinking taught by Rav Yisrael Salanter, which developed the approach of *Mussar* (self-discipline), mainly by uprooting negative character. It was always the way of the *Chassidus* of Poland, which focused on connecting to one’s good character traits, mainly on the traits of love and fear of Heaven. (The word *Chassidus* is from the word *Chessed* (kindness), which corresponds to ahavah, love). From a deeper understanding, becoming connected to *middos* means to become attached to the *middos* of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and this is a form of *d’veykus* to Hashem. This is because we are charged to “resemble” Hashem, and we can only resemble Him when we become similar to Him through perfecting our character. But even more so, the *middos* of the Creator are imprinted within the Jewish people, and when one connects to the good *middos* found within him, he is really connecting to the *middos* of Hashem that have been implanted within him.

Are There Additional Ways Of Serving Hashem?

Are there additional ways of serving Hashem which a person should know about?

A

To give a general description, there are 10 *Sefiros* (Emanations or spiritual systems), and each of *Sefirah* specifically has its highest level, “*Keser*.” and by becoming connected to the *Keser* point within that *Sefirah*, one becomes connected to all of the levels within that *Sefirah* [because the *Keser* point is all-inclusive of all the points within that respective *Sefirah*]. Each of the 10 *Sefiros* also has their own school of thinking. This would need a very detailed chart explaining each of the general 10 *Sefiros*, each of the ten ways of connecting to Hashem [the *Keser* point] through each of those 10 *Sefiros* have different schools of thought to them – and each of those root schools of thought branch out further. (G-d willing, at another time this detailed chart will be made.)

Avodas Hashem Of Soul Levels And Sefiros

The Mesillas Yescharim says that there are five levels of perfection in serving Hashem. Is this a novel concept that the Ramchal formulated, and are there other systems of different levels of *avodas* Hashem?

A

The soul divides into five parts [*Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*], and corresponding to these five levels of the soul are the five levels of serving the Creator which the Mesillas Yescharim describes. There are also other systems of serving Hashem, such as the path which corresponds to the 10 *Sefiros*, which formulates 10 levels of perfection in serving the Creator.

Mussar & Chassidus - External & Internal

It is often said that a person shouldn't turn the study of *Mussar* (ethics) into the main part of the day. Instead, one needs to spend most of his time learning Torah. Is this also true regarding the study of *Chassidus* [that it should not become more important than one's Torah learning]? After all, studying *Chassidus* is a study of the *pnimiyus* (the inner dimension of Torah).

A

Mussar, at its inner essence, is a kind of wisdom. This is stated by the Ramchal in the beginning of Mesillas Yescharim: "Fear of Hashem is a wisdom [to learn about], and it, alone, is wisdom." Similarly the *Vilna Gaon* writes in the beginning of *sefer* Mishlei that the *sefer* Mishlei is entirely *Mussar*, and at its root, it is *daas* (understanding, or wisdom). *Chassidus*, at its inner essence, is also a wisdom. The root of *Chassidus* is in the spiritual area of *Chessed*, which corresponds to the *kav yemin*, the "right line," which also corresponds to *Chochmah*, wisdom. This is especially true about the very innermost depths of *Chassidus*, which corresponds to the secret level of wisdom, *razin d'razin*, the "secrets of the secrets."

A Kabalistic Explanation Of Mussar Vs. Chassidus

- (1) What is the difference in concept between the approaches of “*Mussar*” and “*Chassidus*”?
 (2) Is there a necessity to learn *sefarim* of *Chassidus*? (3) Why was there opposition towards *Chassidus*? (4) Is there still place today for opposition towards *Chassidus*?

A

(1) *Mussar* is rooted in the “left” line [in *Kabbalistic* terms]. The word “*Mussar*” connotes *gevurah*, strength. It reflects the statement of the Sages, “The left hand pushes away.” On a subtler level, *Mussar* is rooted in the number “five *gevuros* (emanations of strength)” within the sphere of “*daas*.” The *Vilna Gaon* states in the beginning of *Mishlei* that *Mussar* is rooted in *daas*. Specifically, it is the “*daas*” that differentiates (*daas ha-mavdeles*) and decides (*daas ha-machraas*).

In contrast, *Chassidus* is rooted in the “right” line. The word “*Chassidus*” is from the word “*Chessed*,” kindness. It reflects the statement of the Sages “The right hand draws close.” *Chassidus* is also rooted in *daas*. On a subtler level, it is rooted in the number “five *chassadim* (emanations of kindness)” within the sphere of “*daas*,” and specifically, its role is to connect different views together (*daas hamechaberes*).

Within *Chassidus*, the views of Chabad and Breslev specifically are a [different] *daas ha-mis-hapeches*, using *daas* to “overturn” knowledge [and uncovering an “opposite” or “inverted” view]. The view of Breslev specifically is rooted in the verse, “Wisdom, from where is it found?” which refers to the aspect of *Chochmah*/wisdom of the *Reisha d’lo isyada*, “the beginning that is unknowable.” whereas the view of Chabad is based on the viewpoint of *binah*/understanding, represented by “*Sefer shel Beinonim*,” the “The Book of the Intermediates,” which is the aspect of *binah*/understanding of the *Reisha d’lo isyada*.

Generally, all other views of *Chassidus* are rooted in the number “five *chassadim* (emanations of kindness) that are within “*daas*,” which is the inner dimension of the *middos*/character traits.

The root of the *avodah* of “*Mussar*” is to rectify oneself as a proper “vessel” (*kli*), via self-purification. It entails purifying the character traits of the “animal soul” (*nefesh hebeheimis*). It is based on the teachings of the Ramak [Rabbi Moshe Kordovo, author of *sefer Tomer Devorah*]. By contrast, the root of the *avodah* of “*Chassidus*” is to increase spiritual light, as a means of purifying oneself to become a proper “vessel.” It reflects the statement, “A little light can banish much darkness.” It is the spiritual light of the *neshamah* (Divine soul) which purifies the body. It is rooted

in the teachings of the Arizal. Even more so, it is rooted in the illuminations (*ohros*) of “tohu (emptiness)” through vessels (*keilim*) that bring about rectification (*tikkun*).

Mussar is the spiritual illumination of the 6,000 year era, corresponding to the Six Orders of the *Mishnah*. *Chassidus* is the spiritual illumination of the Next World within This World, a taste and resemblance of the World To Come available within This World. This is why the holiness of Shabbos is central to *Chassidus*, for Shabbos is a semblance of the Next World.

Mussar is rooted in “inner light” (*ohr pnimi*), corresponding to the “left ear.” “left nostril.” and the “left side of the mouth” of Primordial Man (Adam *Kadmon*), which also corresponds to the spiritual realms of *Beriah* (lit. “Creation.”). *Beriah* corresponds to the power of thought, Torah learning, and the “*neshamah*” level of the soul). *Yetzirah* (lit. “Formation.” corresponding to the character traits and emotions, and to the “*Ruach*” level of the soul). *Asiyah* (lit. “Action.” corresponding to deeds and *mitzvos*, and to the “*nefesh*” level of the soul). Whereas *Chassidus* is “enveloping light” (*ohr makif*), corresponding to the light of the Infinite (*ohr EinSof*), and also corresponding to the “right ear.” “right nostril” and “right side of the mouth” of Primordial Man (Adam *Kadmon*), and also corresponding to the spiritual realm of *Atzilus* (lit. “Emanation.” corresponding to attachment to G-d, *emunah*, and the “*Chayah*” level of the soul).

Mussar is a path “from below to above”, which entails effort and exertion to climb to higher spiritual levels. This is why the *Vilna Gaon* refused to hear Heavenly revelations, as Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes in the introduction to *Sifra D’Tzniyusa*. In contrast, *Chassidus* is a path “from below to above” - it is an approach of Heavenly revelation (*giluy*), and it is in the category of “gift” [attaining higher spiritual levels as a “gift” from Heaven, as opposed to effort and exertion to acquire higher levels].

(2) *Chassidus* was opposed because it was a revelation of Heavenly light on This World that could not be properly contained within the “vessels” below [in This World]. At the root, this was really the “light of the Infinite, which nullifies all limitations.” as the *Nefesh HaChaim* discusses [in Shaar III]. It was a light which nullifies the normal definitions of “vessels.” and the result of this is “Great is love, for it destroys rules.” When a great spiritual revelation cannot be properly contained in a vessel, the light oversteps the limitations of the vessels, and sometimes it will even interfere with the bounds of *halachah*. That is why there was much opposition towards *Chassidus*: because the challengers of *Chassidus* wanted to make sure that the Heavenly revelations would remain within their proper boundaries of their respective vessels, so that the revelations could be kept at some restraint and not cause any ruination to the “vessels.”

(3) The secret of wholeness (*shleimus*) is when there is all-inclusiveness. However, each aspect must remain in its proper boundary. In every argument, each of the sides enters into the other side’s

domain [resulting in strife]. Only when each person stands in his proper place [respecting the place of the other person's view] can there be peace.

Paths In Mussar And Chassidus

I have read the response of the Rav about the difference between the approaches of *Mussar* and *Chassidus*. However I didn't understand it entirely because I didn't grasp the Kaballistic terms. Can the Rav explain the Awithout using any Kaballistic terminology?

A

1. *Chazal* state that Hashem created a special light on this first day of Creation and hid it away for the *tzaddikim* in the future. It is explained by our teachers [in *sefarim hakedoshim*] that this light was hidden away in the Torah. Thus the main, complete level of this light has been hidden and concealed from the Creation. What remains from it are parts of its illumination, which are called "sparks." Today the "vessels" which are meant to contain this light are only able to contain "sparks" of the light. These "vessels," as they manifest in our world, are a mixture of good and evil, especially ever since the sin of Adam when he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

2. The *Vilna Gaon* explains a *Gemara* that "Where there is wine available, there is no need for any remedies." that it means that "Where there is Torah, there is no need for *Mussar*." The reason for this is because the hidden light is contained in the Torah. When this light shines completely, it banishes all evil, for the words of Torah cannot accept defilement. However, when the light of Torah isn't complete, there is a need for *Mussar*.

3. Therefore, *Mussar*, which is from the word "*l'yaser*." "to remove." is about removing evil, mainly through waging war with the forces of evil. This is by becoming more connecting to the sparks of spiritual light which shine on this world. That is why [in the approach of *Mussar*] the general *avodah* is to remove man's negative character traits. It is through reflecting into the depth of evil, which brings a person to *Gehinnom*. This was the way of Reb Yisrael Salanter. Corresponding to this reflection, one also needs to make use of the light of the Torah, as a spiritual power to remedy the particular evil one is facing, by studying the particular area of Torah which discusses the evil of a particular character trait. The way to actualize this concept in our *avodah* is by reviewing many times, with passion, with "lips on fire." a particular statement of the Torah or the Sages.

Correspondingly, one also needs to make use of the imaginative faculty, by imagining the punishment for unfixed character traits. At the core of this approach is to uproot the evil from within oneself, and in this way, one actually wages war with the forces of evil.

4. Reb Yisrael Salanter's disciple, the Alter of Kelm, expanded the idea of reflecting into the statements of the Sages, through the approach of "*Chochmah v'Mussar*" (wisdom and ethics). This is by learning the depth of the character traits, from reflecting into the statements of the Sages, and also by reflecting about the world and its ways. The way to actualize this concept in our *avodah* is through being orderly, precise, and serene, which is expressed through taking on small resolutions to improve.

5. His disciple, Reb Yeruchem Levovitz of Mir, expanded upon the above approach, through the approach of "*daas Chochmah u'Mussar*" (integrated knowledge, wisdom, and ethics). It is through reflecting into the ways of conduct of the Creator, as it pertains to the Creation at large. This approach is mirrored by the Ramchal in *sefer Daas Tevunos*. In this way, one reflects about each thing to encompass all the details. Then, a person takes upon himself small resolutions, to act upon what he has realized.

6. The Alter of Novhardok established that the concept of "*bitachon*" (faith in Hashem) is the pillar of our *avodah*. This represents the level of Adam before the sin. It is about letting go of the self, through working on the concept of *bitachon*. This approach is actualized through going to an extreme in order to act upon *bitachon*, so that a person is at ease with self-effacement and strongly pursuing truth. This path enables one to strongly connect to the sparks of spiritual light on this world, and even more so, to the light itself. However, this is mainly for the purpose of removing evil from oneself.

7. The Alter of Slobodka established the root of man's *avodah* as *gadlus ha'adam* (the greatness of man), or *tzelem elokim* ("in the image of G-d"). Through this, a person is able to distance oneself from all evil, because when one realizes his greatness, he will avoid evil. This path brings a person very close to becoming attached with the light itself. However, the purpose of this path was to replenish the spirits of those who feel lowly and crushed in spirit. Therefore, this approach makes use of the "light" for that specific purpose.

8. The *mashgiach* Reb Chatzkel Levenstein mainly took the approach of Reb Yisrael Salanter, but he was also very connected to the concept of "sensory *emunah*." He established clearly that the purpose of all his *avodah* was to live with sensory *emunah*, and that the entire purpose of banishing evil from oneself is to live a life of sensory *emunah*. From amidst this sensory *emunah*, he left to his eternal home.

9. Rav Dessler, the author of *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, integrated the approach of *Mussar* with *Chassidus*, by delicately fusing the light of *Chassidus* into *Mussar*.

Chassidus: The approach of *Chassidus* is based on the light which Hashem hid away for the *tzaddikim* in the future, and even more so, it is also based on the new spiritual light which will be revealed in the future. Its purpose is to bring a person to a sensory sense of being actually attached [to Hashem]. It is also about elevating the sparks to their root, which is in the light itself. That is why much of *Chassidus* contains the concept of “clarifying the sparks.” which is essentially about refining the character traits, such as misused love, misused fear, etc. It is about elevating the sparks of good that are contained within the mixture of good and evil. Even more so, it is about rectifying the “vessels.” mainly through the idea of “A little bit of light can banish a lot of darkness.” and to thereby wage war with the forces of evil. A large part of this *avodah* involves the concept of *ahavas Yisrael* (loving the Jewish people), “A Jew who sins is still a Jew.” no Jew will be left behind, etc. This is due to the light from Above which has descended to the world, which can illuminate even the lowest of the low.

2. In order to use this light – besides for connecting to the root of the soul in relation to this level, which is the *avodah* of becoming connected to a *tzaddik* – the approach of *Chassidus* focuses on the secret dimension of Torah, which are called *razin* (secrets), corresponding to the *Chayah* level of the soul, and the deeper secrets of Torah, which are called *razin d'razin* (secrets of secrets), corresponding to the *Yechidah* level of the soul. Through this, one is able to shine the light of “oneness.” When one accesses this illumination, one becomes connected to the Infinite, and thereby illuminates “unity” (*achdus*) onto the Jewish people - which is *ahavas Yisrael* - and also “unity” onto all of the creations, which include the non-living objects, the plants, the animals, all human beings, and all Jews.

3. The holy Baal Shem Tov mainly emphasized two parts in his *avodah*. 1) Corresponding to the *Yechidah* level of the soul, there is emphasis on *emunah*, simplicity (*peshitus*), and simply attaching oneself to the Creator, and through this, one becomes attached and integrated with the Infinite. 2) Corresponding to the *Chayah* level of the soul, there is emphasis on *yichudim* (certain intentions to have while doing to *saying* something). Through the above two - from amidst *ahavas Yisrael* – one extends the revelation of G-dliness in the world, and from this comes Heavenly sustenance to the Jewish people. The rebbi of the Baal Shem Tov was Achiyah HaShiloni, who is called “Baal Chai.” who corresponds to *Chayah* and *Yechidah*, as is well-known. Therefore his main path was more about increasing the *neshamah* as opposed to weakening the body and physical suffering.

4. The way of the Baal Shem Tov was explained through his students. It is known that he wanted 60 students, corresponding to 60 warriors that surrounded the bed of Shlomo. However, the one who filled his place was the Magid of Mezritch. His *avodah* was to reveal the source of

Chochmah (wisdom) which is in *ayin* (nothingness) – a wisdom that revealed G-dliness. His students, and the students of his students until today, are many, and it would require an entire series of *sefarim* in order to explain all of the details. But we will try to present the general description.

5. Each branch of *Chassidus* took a particular trait by which one can reveal G-dliness upon the world. This wasn't just to rectify evil character, but to reveal G-dliness, for all *middos* (traits) are really *middos* of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. From this, one can reveal the “sparks” of the trait that have fallen, and to elevate them, as well as elevate the “vessel” that contains the trait. On a practical level, one who learns all of the *sefarim* of *Chassidus* needs to clarify, based on the *sefer* as well as on the life of the author of the *sefer*, what the root trait is, by which the author is revealing all of his words of Torah and way of *avodah*. (This is also generally true about all *sefarim*). Based on this, one can then understand the way of thinking and the path of the author, and thereby know how to go about the ways of *avodah* of the particular author. This is deep and subtle, because one needs to know the particular world, path, and trait the *sefer* is based on.

6. Here are some general examples of the matter: a) The *sefer* **Noam Elimelech** is based on the trait of *Yesod-tzaddik*, meaning that it is about connecting to the root, and from this, to bestow good upon a Jew. (b) The *sefarim* of **Slonim** are mainly about *emunah*. See the *sefer* *Toras Avos* and the *sefarim* which form the root of Slonimer dynasty and onward. From *emunah* comes *kedushah* (sanctity) of the trait of *Yesod*, and the *kedushah* of Shabbos. (c) **Breslev** focuses on *peshitus* (simplicity), *emunah* peshutah (simple faith), by which can draw forth *Chochmah*, from its source in *ayin*. It involves having *emunah* peshutah in Hashem, and *emunah* peshutah in a *tzaddik*. The root of this is to guard the trait of the *tzaddik*, which is *Yesod*. (d) The way of **Chabad** is *hisbonenus* (reflection), by comparing two different matters with each other. The root of this is to compare the difference between Creator and creations, and from this, to bond with the Infinite. (e) The way of the **Sfas Emes** is to find the root that empowers each thing. (f) The way of **Rebbi Pinchos of Koritz** is to have an encompassing view, to see each matter from above and around the matter, thereby gaining a new perspective in each matter. This is why he stressed truth, to be aware of the beginning, middle and end of a matter. It is to gain an encompassing view of a matter, so that one can see the full picture, the full truth. (g) The way of the **Kedushas Levi** is the trait of *ahavah/love*, as is known. Therefore his *avodah* was to reveal a love that is above the boundaries of the vessel. This results in *ahavas Yisrael* and in judging others favorably. (h) The way of the **Kamarna** is to have *emunah* peshutah and to make oneself as *ayin* (nothing). It is to use the light of *emunah*, to become a “vessel” for *ayin*. Through this one can bond with a G-dly light and with spiritual bliss. (i) The way of **Reb Baruch of Mezbizh** is to use the power of *gevurah*, restraint. (j) The way of the **Reb Yisrael of Rizhin** is to have *d'veykus* above the world, to be like a king above his nation, and thereby enable sustenance to come from above down to the world. It is like standing above the

garden-maze – not because he has traversed the maze, but because he has been born above the maze, atop the tower that is above the maze. (k) The way of the **Chozeh of Lublin**, is as implied from his title of “Chozeh. ” “Seer” – as is known, he closed his eyes for seven years [and gained a high level of spiritual vision], which enabled him to see the details at their root. (l) The way of the **Ohev Yisrael** is described in the introduction to the *sefer* Ohev Yisrael: “Only through this *middah* (of *ahavas Yisrael*) will I be glorified in the Heavenly Court.” His *ahavas Yisrael* was firmly established in his heart. In the first section of the *sefer*, he writes that the main pleasure of man is to bestow good upon other people and give pleasure to others. Everything else follows.

The Roots Of Chassidus

It is well-known that the Baal Shem Tov said before he was *niftar* that he will return to the world for a certain amount of years (the exact amount unknown) if the redeemer (Mashiach) isn't here yet. There were certainly *tzaddikim* who were in the category of “sparks” of the Baal Shem Tov, who illuminated their path based on their individual soul roots. But was there any *tzaddik* specifically who taught the world the Baal Shem Tov's path in a way that was equally beneficial to every soul?

A

The Jewish nation is comprised of seventy primary soul roots, which branch out from two primary roots that preside above these seventy roots. [In the side of evil], this is countered by the seventy nations of the world, who are headed by two roots, Yishmael and Esav. It was the same with the path of the Baal Shem Tov. There are seventy facets to this path, with two primary roots above these paths: the teachings of Breslev, and the teachings of Chabad.

The way of Breslev is the “*Chochmah*” manifestation of the *Reisha D'Lo Isyada* (the beginning which is not known), and the way of Chabad is the “*binah*” manifestation of the *Reisha D'Lo Isyada*. The Baal Shem Tov's teachings were the root that was above these two, and all other paths are their branches [of Breslev and Chabad].

Starting To Learn Chassidus

For someone who wants to understand the fundamental teachings of *Chassidus* (including someone born Chassidic and raised Chassidic), what is a good *sefer* to begin with?

A

Learn *sefer* “*Chassidus Mevueres*” חסידות מבוארת.

Thoughts Under The Water Of The Mikveh

What specific thought or *kavanah* (intention) does the Rav suggest that a person should have when immersing in the mikveh? I have found many wonderful different *kavanos* to have when immersing in the mikveh: To immerse five times and to think that one is receiving a different soul level for each time he immerses (*Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah, Yechidah*), or for one to think that his life totally depends on Hashem when he is underwater, or to think that one is nullified to Hashem under the water, or that being underwater is like a fetus in its mother and so must one feel dependent on Hashem like an infant who depends on his mother. I have seen in a *sefer* of Rav Yitzchok Meir Morgenstern that one should think about the name of *havayah* under the water. But I want to follow a specific intention, so which thoughts should I have in mind when immersing in the mikveh, both (1) During the weekday, (2) On Erev Shabbos, and (3) On Erev Yom Tov?

A

All the *kavanos* you mentioned are good. Each person needs to do what's suitable for him, and this is different with each person, and it can also vary depending on the particular time period one is in, and it also varies depending on one's personal spiritual level. Therefore, there is no one Ato this. Rather, each person needs to find what's particularly suitable to him.

What Is The Sephardic Path In Avodas Hashem?

Much thanks to the Rav for explaining the ways of *Mussar* and *Chassidus*, both in the simple context and in Kaballistic terms. I want to ask the Rav: How do those of Sephardic descent fit into all of this? Being that I am Sephardic, am I able to find my place within *Mussar* and *Chassidus*? If yes, how? Also, is there a unique path in our generation for the Sephardim, which they need to be particularly connected with?

A

1. In *Sefer HaLikutim* authored by a student and colleague of the Ramchal, it is written that those of Sephardic descent are rooted in the *kav yemin*, the “right line.” which corresponds to *Chochmah* (initial kernel of wisdom) and *pashtus* (simplicity). In contrast to this, those of Ashkenazic descent are rooted in the *kav sm’ol*, the “left line.” which corresponds to *binah* (expanded thought), reflection, sharpness of mind, analytical discussion.

Understandably, this is very general. For every rule, there are exceptions. So there can be *binah* within *Chochmah* [and *Chochmah* within *binah*. The term *Chochmah* corresponds to *av/father*, and the term *binah* corresponds to *ben/son*.] There is a concept of *ben/son* that exists within *Chochmah*, and vice versa]. Understand this well. This is apparent by the Sephardic sages who were more interested in *pshat* (simple meaning), *cheshbon* (logical reviewing) and *dikduk* (inferring). This is true both about those who were immersed in *pshat* (the simple understanding of Torah), and also those who were immersed in *sod* (the secret level of Torah).

2. In our generation, where so many different kinds of Jews from all ends of the earth are gathered together in *Eretz Yisrael*, the Divine Providence [of G-d] has arranged that there be such a mixture. This contains good as well as bad. The deep purpose of all of this mixture is so that all of the different parts will become integrated with each other. There is an inner light shining which enables a connection and union between all of the ways together. On an inner level, this is the secret of unity (*achdus*). On the external level, it is a mixture of confusion. The inner implication of the term “Bavel” [the Talmud Bavli, which was composed in Bavel] is that it is all “*balul*” (mixed) with all parts of Torah: *Chumash*, *Mishnah*, and *Gemara* (as Rabbeinu Tam writes in *Tosafos* in Tractate *Kiddushin*). But on the external level, it is like the confusion by the Tower of Bavel, when Hashem confused their languages, causing them *bilbul* (confusion).

3. One should hold strong to his own way [the Sephardic path] and then connect the other ways [of *Mussar* and *Chassidus*]. Praiseworthy are they, and praiseworthy are their portion, in that they

[the Sephardim] merit to have simplicity (*peshitus*) and deep earnestness (*temimus*), for others need to have exertion for a long time, in order to get to such a level of *peshitus* and *temimus*.

The complete approach is for one to epitomize the teaching of the Sages [Talmud Bavli Chullin 5a]: “They are cunning with wisdom, and they situate themselves like animals [in order to acquire more wisdom].” [they have both sharp intellect as well as a simplicity].

A clear example of this was Chacham Ben Tzion Aba Shaul, who learned Torah from the sages of Porat Yosef, which was headed by Rav Ezra Attiah. However, he also combined the Torah teachings of the Chazon Ish with this approach. The result was an incredible integration of simplicity with cleverness, straight-headed thinking with sharpened thinking, logical review with insight, analyzing the nuances of the text together with inner creativity, in-depth thinking together with practical *halachah*, the *pshat*/surface understanding of Torah together with Kaballah/mystical parts of the Torah.

Ways Of Litvaks, Chassidim & Sephardim

1) What is the difference between the Chassidim, Litvish, and Sephardim regarding the different ways of learning the “inner dimension” of Torah? 2) What are the different ways of their *avodas Hashem*? 3) Which is the path that the Rav recommends?

A

1) WAY OF LEARNING [The inner dimension of Torah]:

The way of learning for Sephardim is to focus on the simple meaning of the text, from deducing the meaning of the words (*diyuk*). (When it comes to learning the writings of the Arizal, the commentaries differ regarding how much *diyuk* one needs to use). In addition, the Sephardim use the ability of *cheshbon* [following the flow of thought of the words], and sometimes in order to ask a question or in order to fill in a missing detail which isn’t explicitly written, the Sephardim also employ the ability of *sevara* (logic).

The way of learning of the Litvish is to learn with understanding (*havanah*) and intellectualizing (*haskalah*), to understand the very concept of each level, and accordingly, to understand the path of

the wisdom, with *sevara* and with *cheshbon*. A little bit of this is explained by the *Vilna Gaon*, in his commentary on Mishlei, and *Sefer Yetzirah* but mainly in his commentary on Tikkunei HaZohar.

Chassidim learn about each thing from a “soul” understanding, and from an understanding that relates to personal *avodah*.

2) WAYS OF AVODAS HASHEM

The Sephardim emphasize the specific *kavanos* (intentions) to have when performing *mitzvos*. The way of the Litvish is to become completely attached by contemplating the ideals. The way of the Chassidim is to do the *avodah* of the soul that pertains to each detail, for the purpose of achieving *d'veykus*.

3) INDIVIDUALITY

Each person needs to choose which path is appropriate for him, based on his personal soul root.

Avodas Hashem Of Roshei Yeshivos

Did the great Roshei Yeshivah also mainly strive for closeness to Hashem, as a living reality? Or can it be said that their emphasis on increased Torah learning, both in amount and in quality, was [a form of] *temimus* (earnestness), being that they do not spend that much time on reflection and self-recognition?

A

Each of them [served Hashem] according to his unique soul root and level of comprehension. Refer to the biographies about the Chofetz Chaim, Rav Yitzchok Hutner, and more.

Skipping Levels

1) Does a person need to go in a certain order of steps [in *avodas Hashem*], or is it possible for a person to skip and go straight to the desired level? 2) Did the *tzaddikim* throughout the generations reach the levels which the Rav describes?

A

- 1) By way of mesirus *nefesh* (self-sacrifice) a person can skip levels. This is only for individuals.
- 2) Each one reached it, according to his level and according to his soul root.

Ways of Avodas Hashem In The Rav's Sefarim

Are the ways of serving Hashem which the Rav writes about in the *sefarim* all of the ways that apply to our generation?

A

Generally, yes. If we get more specific, there are additional “branches” to each of these ways. (For example, I included the approach of the author of the “Sulam” [Rav Ashlag] in our shiurim on the *sefarim* of Kaballah.) If you have a different approach, I would be happy to hear of it.

How do all of these ways comprise the complete structure of serving Hashem?

A

Each approach is based on any one of the Ten *Sefiros* [*Keser, Binah, Chochmah, Malchus, Yesod, Hod, Netzach, Tiferes, Gevurah, Chessed*]. Through combining all of the approaches, a complete structure of serving Hashem is formed, so that one can become an Adam *HaShaleim* (complete man). One should trace the approach to its source in any of the Ten *Sefiros*.

Whenever the Rav gives an order of steps to follow in order to have spiritual growth, is this the recommended order for every person to go in?

A

There is never a specific order of steps that one must follow.

And can the Rav make an organized list that summarizes all of the different ways of serving Hashem (so that I can know what to focus on)?

A

There are many different ways in *avodas* Hashem, and there is also an all-inclusive way, as the Arizal taught, that there were twelve individual paths to cross the sea, for each of the twelve tribes, and there was also one path that included all of them together. The “all-inclusive” path is the root which contains everything [every path of *avodas* Hashem]. There are also “branches” of this “all-inclusive path.” and each of those branching paths contain a bit of each of the different paths that there are in *avodas* Hashem. An example of is the *tikkun* recited on the night of Shavuot, which contains a bit of each part of Torah.

Is The Rav’s Truthful Approach Also For Americans?

I have a general question about the entire deep, inner and truthful approach of the Rav, and I hear this from other people as well, who sometimes struggle with the Rav says and they have a hard time accepting what the Rav is *saying*. Could it be that the Rav’s approach only works for people in *Eretz Yisrael*, and not for Americans? Because after all, the Rav did grow up in *Eretz Yisrael*, where people there are generally made of ‘tougher skin’, and where the “Torah of truth” is more found, so perhaps we can assume that the Israeli audience can more easily handle the truthful approach of the Rav, whereas Americans have a harder time with the truthful approach of the Rav. Also, the Rav is speaking from a very truthful place in the soul, and the Rav often demands a lot of intense deep spiritual growth from people. Maybe Americans just can’t handle this? Because we in America grow up surrounded with *tumah* and mixed with the *goyim*, and we’re much more affected by secular culture than our Israeli

counterparts. And in America, the more popular approach that works for people here is to focus on the positive, to feel good about ourselves, to constantly get chizuk.

(For example, people here of all types and of all levels love listening to Reb Meilich Biderman, who knows how to give chizuk in a way that's very positive-focused and also through humorous stories. Everyone is drawn to him. That is the approach that speaks very much to the American crowd.) Now, getting back to the Rav's approach, though many people feel that the Rav is speaking the truth, a lot of people in America find the Rav to be too much for them, and they have a hard time accepting what the Rav says.

So, basically my is: When the Rav speaks, is the Rav mainly addressing an Israeli audience, who can better handle what the Rav is *saying*, as opposed to Americans, who can't really handle as much what the Rav says? And in particular, is the Rav's approach mainly for those who are bnei aliyah, who are far and few between? Of course, any person on any level can gain from the Rav's psychological insights about the human soul, but I'm asking about the very truthful and inner approach of *avodas* Hashem which the Rav talks about. Can this approach also apply for those in America...? *Yasher Koach* to the Rav for all of the holiness and purity which the Rav bestows us with.

A

Even in *Eretz Yisrael*, most people are not searching for this [truthful] approach. There is never any one way of *avodas* Hashem that works for everyone, and this way [the "Bilvavi" derashos and *sefarim*] is only one of the ways of *avodas* Hashem. Each person needs to find the way that is suitable for him.

Often, people who live in *chutz l'aretz* are not looking for a "way" of *avodas* Hashem, and they are instead looking for a 'compromise' – they are looking for a way to have the best of both This World and the Next World at once. But there is no such way.

The way of *avodas* Hashem which we [I] emphasize is not in order to "demand more growth" from people. It is just to clarify and become precise about what we face, and that, in and of itself, can demand something from us....

What Was The Approach Of Rav Kook?

What were the main teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yaakov HaKohen Kook? What can we accept from him, and what should we not accept from him? Are there any of his *sefarim* which the Rav recommends to learn as well as not to learn? Can the Rav elaborate on this please, because I am totally unclear about this matter.

A

[Two kinds of spiritual light exist]: There is "*ohr penimi*" "inner light." represented by the three [lower] levels of the soul called *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah*. There is also "*ohr makif*" "enveloping light." which does not enter inside the contents of any spiritual vessel (*kli*), and it simply "surrounds" the *kli*/vessel, entering into only half of the outer part of the *kli*/vessel. This part [of the *ohr makif*] is the "*Yechidah*" part of the *ohr makif*. The part of the *ohr makif* which enters the contents of the *kli*/vessel, and also exits it, is the *Chayah* part of the *ohr makif*.

The part of the *ohr makif* which is called the *Chayah* is a division of the spiritual realm of *Atzilus* [lit. "Emanation." connoting attachment with G-d, the highest of the four spiritual realms]. Part of it enters into the *kli*/vessel and descends all the way until the sphere of *Malchus*, the "four cubits of *Halachah*." It is a spiritual light which is constructed by the vessel, and it settles within the vessel. Therefore, there will only be a little bit of opposition towards it, as the Chazon Ish taught.

But part of the light cannot permanently enter into the vessel, due to the great intensity of this particular part of the light, so it cannot be properly contained. When this part of the light does enter into the vessel, it does not become settled in the vessel. This light, when it descends into *Malchus*, will manifest as an intense love for *Eretz Yisrael* which cannot become constricted by the boundaries of the vessel. Since it doesn't settle in the vessel, there is opposition towards it.

Furthermore, this light is the "*Chayah*" dimension of "*Atzilus*." a realm that is entirely good [where evil is non-existent], which is descending into the sphere of *Malchus* within the "realm of action." which contains a mixture of good and evil, and the light of "*Chayah*" within *Atzilus* will illuminate its light which is entirely good [upon our world of action]. Part of the good that exists below on our world will oppose this light that is entirely good when it is being shined into a place that contains evil, because the good light is ultimately confusing the boundaries and definitions of evil, and is becoming attached to the evil.

On one hand there is a great spiritual illumination here, but it is also very dangerous, for anyone who mixes with it. If one is on the spiritual level of *Chayah*, he is in less danger, because he can

enter and exit [the vessel], but if one is below the level of the *Chayah*, he may *chas v'shalom* become mixed with evil [when he accesses this light].

The spiritual illumination of the world that is entirely good, when applied to our realm which contains evil, is essentially meant to reveal an illumination of the good parts [on our world], meaning that the “288 sparks” within it can show the parts of good [that are on our world], and the evil parts then become “unseen.” as in the verse, “Sin cannot be viewed in Yaakov, and exertion [to do evil] cannot be seen in Yisrael.”

It should be understood that since this is the spiritual light of the *Chayah*, it is a light that enters and then leaves, and during the time that it leaves, the lower realm is then seen as it is, in all of its definitions. There are now two perspectives. There is a lower perspective which sees that there is evil which must be dealt with, and there is a higher perspective that sees an entirely good view [as mentioned earlier]. Sometimes the lower perspective must be used and the definitions of the lower realm are applied, when necessary. Or, the perspective will change based on the current level of the viewer. When one studies the surface level of understanding (*pshat*) he will then use the perspective of the lower realm, but when one studies the secret level of understanding (*sod*), he will view the lower realm through the higher perspective. This view can be reached through the mind, or through the current level of the soul, at the time in which one is having the view.

Understandably, since these concepts are very subtle, most will not absorb it well, and only rare individuals alone will be able to absorb the concept. This approach also existed in previous generations, but it was in the category of *ohr makif* [it was a perception that was on the “outside” which could not yet be acted upon], and it was never brought into the level of *ohr penimi*, to be practiced. For if this concept would have been brought into practical action, it would result in a mixture of a world that is “entirely good” with a mixture of good and evil.

The purpose of such a spiritual illumination was so that the light of the future could be shined within This World, which hastens the Redemption. There was an issue, however, of when it becomes the proper time to hasten the Redemption. The tribe of Ephraim tried to escape Egypt before the time of the redemption had arrived. They thought that the sound of song and redemption could be heard in *Eretz Yisrael*, and this was because there was already a spark of the light of the Redemption that was beginning to shine. But the illumination was not yet complete.

There exists a way to complete the illumination [of the Redemption] by way of “awakening from below.” which would increase the sparks of the light. On one hand, the side of evil opposes this awakening, for it will bring the light of rectification that will destroy all evil. But on the other hand, evil is nourished from this awakening, for it allows a mixture of good with evil. For if the light would only be shined as an *ohr makif* [it wouldn't enter completely into our world], the Other Side [of evil] would cease, but when the light enters [into our world], evil can now be nourished from it.

Therefore, the good on our world will also oppose [such an awakening to expose the light of the Redemption], both because it is a light that causes good to become mixed with evil, and also because shows that the good on our world is not complete.

On a practical level [one should have some access to the great spiritual light of *Chayah D'Atzilus*, through], connecting to the source which is entirely good, amidst silence, solitude, and "listening" to one's source. After this inner "listening" one gains a new perspective, of seeing the world from the perspective of an "outsider." like the view of the *ohr makif*, a perspective that is "entirely good." which is sourced in complete good and which brings one to a view that is completely good.

One needs to follow a cycle, back and forth (*ratzu v'shav* – "advancing and retreating"), between the boundaries of the Torah, the four cubits of *halachah* [with accessing this light of *Chayah D'Atzilus*], and then repeating the cycle. This concept of [*Chayah D'Atzilus*] should be accessed in three areas: in place, time and soul. In "place." it should be manifest in *Eretz Yisrael*. In "time." it should be accessed through reciting *Tikkun Chatzos* at midnight. In the "soul." it should be accessed through an unbounded love for all of the created beings. Then one should retreat back into the boundaries of Torah, the *halachah*, which we are bound to on This World, and to keep repeating the cycle. However, as mentioned, most souls cannot properly absorb this concept, and it would only cause them spiritual harm and destruction. The exception to this would be if they would nullify their own souls to this high *neshamah*. That is the root of why there was so much opposition [towards Rav Kook].

2) I am very interested in taking the path of Rav Kook. How should I learn his *sefarim* and in what order should I learn it in? Which of Rav Kook's *sefarim* should I focus on? Can I use any of the commentaries that explain his *sefarim*? What was his way of *avodas Hashem*?

A

In Rav Kook's *sefarim*, there is an external aspect as well as an inner aspect.

The external aspect of his *sefarim* is that he had a very unique way of expression. He formulated new words within his teachings, and he also spoke in a poetic, song-like language that was unique. In order to understand his style, one needs to become familiar with his language.

Also, even when Rav Kook explains certain fundamentals of our Sages, he does not quote their exact wording, and instead he interpreted it in his own language. One needs to be very wise to understand how his words correspond with the teachings of the Sages. Only a few individuals were able to understand that correspondence, and these individuals possessed a wealth of knowledge and

deep understanding. Therefore, most people who try to understand Rav Kook's teachings are not able to "get" what he's really *saying*.

In addition, his words are very encompassing of history, from the beginning of history until the end, and all of the *Gedolim* in the previous generation did not agree with his approach. That is why they forbade anyone from learning his teachings – as is well-known. There were some people who, according to their opinion, were able to "sift" out the good parts from the bad parts in his teachings.

The internal aspect in his teachings is that he had a very "all-inclusive" approach. He would say a teaching which was a lesson even for gentiles. He would also include in his teachings an approach that would combine together the simple understanding (*pshat*) with the Kabbalistic understanding. All of these different approaches were integrated into his language. His way of unifying different views together is what led him to have actual *ahavas Yisrael* to all Jews, even towards the most wicked. He was attempting to combine the *levonah* [the frankincense, the fragrant spice in the *Ketores*-offering, which corresponds to the *tzaddikim*] with the *chelbanah* [a foul-smelling spice in the *Ketores*-offering, which corresponds to the wicked sinners in the Jewish people]. He was attempting to equalize the righteous *tzaddikim* with the wicked *Erev Rav* and unify them all together. It was this aspect in particular in which the *Gedolim* of our previous generation fought against him.

His teachings are an expression of his way of thinking and his emotional pattern. In order to understand his teachings, one needs to understand the "*Chayah*" level of the soul. That is why most people who try to study his words are not able to, and they feel like they're groping in the dark, with nothing to light the way for them. They are only able to get some "sparks" of understanding his words, but not more than that. Sometimes people gain a more accurate understanding of his words, and sometimes a less accurate understanding. The main people who merited to understand his words are the "Rav *HaNazir*" (Rav Yishuv Cohen) and HaRav Charlap. You should also know that many people learned the teachings of Rav Kook and they veered off track, and this caused them to make many great errors.

His primary, innermost teachings are contained in the eight collections of his writings, which are called *Oros*.

Learning The Satmar Rav's Way In Avodas Hashem

I love to learn about different paths of *avodas* Hashem, *halachah*, and hashkafah and the different views of *Gedolim* on how to live life. I'm afraid of learning *sefer* V'Yoel Moshe [authored by the Satmar Rav, HaRav Yoel Teitelbaum zt"l] because I'm concerned that it will make lose respect for all other views of the *Gedolim* if I identify more with the Satmar Rav's views. Does the Rav think I should be concerned about learning this *sefer* or not? And what does the Rav think about this *sefer* in general, and its author?

A

Don't be concerned about this. It is all *kadosh*, *kadosh*, *kadosh* (it is a very holy *sefer*)!

Avodah of Elul Through Simchas Torah

There is so much to work on from Elul all the way through Simchas Torah and beyond. Can the Rav summarize the general avodah that we have during Elul, the days of Selichos, Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, the days between Yom Kippur and Succos, then Succos, Hoshanah Rabbah, and Shemini Atzeres & Simchas Torah?

A

The following is a very brief outline.

The *avodah* of Elul is all about "*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*", "I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me." It is a time when we become beloved, like a *kallah* who finds grace by her *chosson*, in our relationship with Hashem.

The days of *Selichos* (for the Ashkenazim who have this custom) is the time to feel pained for anything we have done that went against Hashem's will, and to ask Hashem for forgiveness over the past and for the damages we have done.

The *avodah* on Rosh HaShanah is to become close to Hashem - and thereby be deemed meritorious before Hashem.

The *avodah* during *Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah* is a time to fix the past, do *teshuvah*, and make resolutions for the future.

Yom Kippur is a time of spiritual cleanliness and purity, so that there are no barriers between oneself and Hashem.

The days between Yom Kippur and Succos are a result of a pure bond with Hashem which we have hopefully attained from the purity that we reached on Yom Kippur, and extending this pure bond with Hashem into the rest of the year as well.

The *avodah* on Succos is the time to live in the material world under “Hashem’s shade”, to dwell with Hashem’s Presence in all aspects of our life.

The *avodah* on Hoshanah Rabbah is to fuse this entire process [from Elul until now] into one unit [to bring us to a state of oneness with Hashem through all of the above points].

The *avodah* on *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is the joy that one can feel, in all of the above points fused together.

General Questions On Avodas Hashem

How Do We Reach Our Purpose In Life

Does reaching the purpose of life depend on your soul’s personal energies, or does it depend on simply knowing the words of *Chazal* about this and directing ourselves towards it?

A

In the words of our Sages we find many different opinions about what the purpose of life is. We can simply understand it as another argument of our Sages, such as how Beis Hilel and Beis Shamai argued. But the true way to understand it is that all of our Rabbis agreed that the purpose of life is to become attached to the reality of Hashem (which is *d’veykus*). It is just that there are several ways to get to this closeness, and the issue was, where to put the emphasis.

To be very general, there are three root paths, based on the three pillars of the world: Torah, *avodah* (prayer) and *gemilus chesed* (kindness). Some *neshamos* in *Klal Yisrael* mainly become close to

Hashem through Torah, some mainly connect to Hashem through tefillah, and others are mainly connected to Hashem through *Chessed*.

When it comes to how *Klal Yisrael* should act as a whole, it is Torah that must be the emphasis: the main way which *Klal Yisrael* connects to Hashem is through Torah. (On a deeper level, even the pillars of *avodah* and gemilus chassadim are included in the path of learning Torah, because everything in the universe ultimately comes from the light of the Torah.)

But when we deal with the ‘branches’ of our *avodah*, here, there is a dispute in the words of our Sages, about where to put the emphasis. We see that the sage Ben Azai and others would only learn Torah and do almost nothing else. We find that the sages Abaye and Rava were very involved with *Chessed*; they were the ones that said that one should learn Torah and do gemilus chesed as well. The entire issue is: which levush (garment) do we mainly ‘wear’ in order to attach ourselves to Hashem?

The A depends on each person’s individual soul root, and there is no *sefer* that can write the A to this issue. If you do find a *sefer* that gives an A, you should know that the A is based on the author’s personal soul root. You can have a very holy author of a *sefer*, but that does not mean that everyone must follow his path; even if other great people agree that the author is holy and a ‘reliable’ teacher; of course he is a ‘reliable’ person - we aren’t saying that. But he’s ‘reliable’ only for those who share the same soul root as his. One needs much inner clarification, as well as a lot of siyata d’shmaya (heavenly assistance), in order to find the path that is meant for his own soul.

In any case, the goal of life is clear, according to all of our Sages and Rabbis: the purpose of life is to reach *d’veykus* with Hashem. The only issue is, which levush (garment) of *d’veykus* one needs to use. It depends on each person’s unique situation, and it needs a lot of hard work on a person’s part in order to get to.

Practically Being Aware Of Hashem At All Times

Can the Rav please explain how we can practically fulfill the *mitzvah* of Shivisi Hashem L’negdi Tamid, “I place Hashem opposite me, constantly?”

A

[The *mitzvah* of Shivisi Hashem, to feel Hashem always, can be fulfilled in the areas of one's thoughts, speech and actions.]

IN THOUGHT:

(1) According to the external method, one can either visualize these words [Shivisi Hashem] in his soul, or one can visualize the words as they appear in a *sefer* Torah, and every so often a person should mentally visualize the words, or by looking at the parchment of a *sefer* Torah with these words on it, until it has become imprinted on his mind and he is consistently thinking about it, to the point that one can naturally visualize these words [Shivisi Hashem] and keep returning to this thought many time throughout the day. When this is done correctly, a person is then able to visualize "from within." the four-letter name of *havayah*, and then one can constantly envision it in front of him, because he has now revealed the nature of the soul. The more complete level of this is when one can naturally envision the four-letter name of *havayah* and it appears as white letters. On the less complete level, the name of *havayah* appears to a person in different colors.

It is written in Shaar *Ruach HaKodesh* [a *sefer* of Rav Chaim Vital which records the Arizal's teachings], "If the letter appears before his eyes in the color of black ink, he can know that he is at the level of Asiyah. If the letter appears red, he is at the level of *Yetzirah*. If the letter appears white, he is at the level of *Beriah*. If the letter has a white glow enveloping it and it is shining outward, one is at the level of *Atzilus*."

(2) The more inner level [of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of Shivisi Hashem] is by having a sensory sense of the reality of Hashem. There are four levels to this. The first level is when senses that Hashem is distant from him and that He sits in heaven, but that He is aware of all of his actions. (Refer to commentary of Metzudas Dovid to Tehillim 16:8). A higher level than this is when one feels how Hashem is next to him, that he is present all of the time in Hashem's world. This is described by the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim. A higher level is when one feels that Hashem dwells within him, as it were, since it is written, "And I will dwell amongst them." The highest level is to sense a oneness with Him, to feel that one is a "portion of G-d above." and as it is written, "For a portion of G-d is with him."

IN SPEECH:

(3) One fulfills this *mitzvah* by way of speech when one is always speaking about Hashem, and when is constantly speaking with Hashem. *Chazal* derive from the verse "Shivisi Hashem" that any blessing which does not mention Hashem's name is not a blessing. Rashi explains that this is

because “In all my deeds, I place a fear of Him in front of my eyes.” This is further elaborated in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah* (III:4)

IN ACTION:

(4) Besides for the above, it is proper for a person to make reminders for himself of Hashem. The *Gemara* (Sanhedrin 24a) teaches, based on the verse of Shivisi Hashem, that a king always takes a *sefer* Torah with him. The Rambam says that for this reason, we also put a mezuzah on our door and we attach tzitzis to our clothes, to remind us of Hashem wherever we are. Through looking at our tzitzis, we can always see the *Shechinah* in front of us. Similarly, the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Berachos* 2:3) teaches that when one would go to relieve himself in the lavatory and he was wearing tefillin, he would remove his tefillin and place it in a bag which he would place above his heart. The reason for this was based on the verse, Shivisi Hashem L’negdi Tamid. These are different actions which help a person fulfill the *mitzvah* of Shivisi Hashem, to be aware that one is always in front of Hashem.

Where Mitzvos, D’veykus & Torah Learning Meet

I had asked the Rav that if the purpose of doing all the *mitzvos* and learning Torah is to come to *emunah* and sensory closeness with G-d, why is it that lack of doing *mitzvos* is worse than lacking intellectual and emotional connection to G-d? Shouldn’t it be the opposite, since the main thing is how much we attach our heart to have thoughts of *emunah* and closeness with Hashem? Also, what’s the point of trying to attain sensory closeness with Hashem if a person is not 100% careful when it comes to doing *mitzvos* (i.e. missing a word of hearing megillah or wearing tefillin straps that aren’t totally black)?

The Rav answered me that it is can be compared to building a structure with many floors. The *mitzvos* are the first floor, and the second floor is the development of our world of feelings. So first we need to do all the *mitzvos* before we try to grow further. Additionally, the Rav answered that since we live in the “world of action.” the basis on this world is to do the *mitzvos*, whereas it is only in the Next World and Gan Eden that spiritual feelings are regarded as the main thing.

But I don’t understand this at all. I would like the Rav to explain more about this to me. I do not understand why actions (doing the *mitzvos*) is the basis. If anything, it would make more sense for a person to first develop his heart, by working on *emunah* and *d’veykus* in Hashem,

without doing the *mitzvos*— or at least not being so exacting when it comes to how he does *mitzvos*. Because we can see that there are people who seem to be closer to Hashem even though they aren't so careful in doing the *mitzvos*, and we can also see people who are very careful in their *mitzvah* observance but they have nothing to do with Hashem. And if a person learns works on the steps that are explained in the *sefer* Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh (Part 1) and he develops his *emunah* and closeness to Hashem, this doesn't entail doing *mitzvos* that carefully....

And regarding what the Rav said that we live in a “world of action” and that's why the main thing here is to do the *mitzvos*, I don't understand. According to that, the center of life is not feeling close to Hashem. Rather, the central point of life revolves around doing the *mitzvos* that we have on this world, and the world of spiritual feelings is just on the side and not as important. But as it is obvious, the *sefer* Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh (Parts 1 and 2) are crying out that the main thing and the purpose of life is to attain the feeling of closeness to Hashem, here on this world! And also because this world is an entranceway to the Next World. Therefore it seems that the main thing we need to work on in this world is to prepare ourselves for the Next World [by attaining a sensory closeness to Hashem], so how can it be that the main thing on This World is not the same main thing in the Next World? Please enlighten my eyes on this, because I really want to understand.

Also, how can it be that learning Torah, which is the *mitzvah* that brings the greatest closeness to Hashem (as *Chazal* said, that Torah learning is equal to all of the *mitzvos*), is also a *mitzvah* which contains the dangers of forgetting about Hashem and forgetting about fear of Him? The *Nefesh HaChaim* and also the Chassidim are all in agreement that if a person feels like he is forgetting about his fear of Hashem, he should interrupt his Torah learning to remind himself of being afraid of Hashem. Why doesn't Torah learning itself bring a person to strengthen his *emunah* and his fear of Hashem?

I'll be honest, I'm a bit weak in my desire to learn Torah. I don't feel that I get closer to Hashem though learning Torah, and neither can I think about Hashem while I'm learning Torah (except for when I take breaks in the middle of my learning), and it's because I need to concentrate on my learning. I certainly don't meet all of the conditions for learning Torah that the Rav describes in *sefer* Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh Part 3, which explains how a person can reach *d'veykus* through learning Torah. And when I don't have a sense of Hashem through my Torah learning, I am continuing to bring spiritual harm into the world, as the Ramchal says, about a person who learns Torah shelo *lishmah*....

A

[1- Doing Mitzvos and Feeling Closeness With Hashem]

The purpose of Creation is to reveal HaKadosh Baruch Hu not only in the Heavenly spheres, but throughout every level and plane of Creation. And therefore, we need to reveal HaKadosh Baruch Hu in the realm of actions as well. The “world of action” is the “vessel” which can contain the spiritual light of Hashem’s revelation on the world. Therefore any act of a *mitzvah* is another “vessel” that furthers the revelation of Hashem. Any aspect within doing a *mitzvah* is an additional detail to the “vessel” which adds to that revelation, adding on a specific aspect of revelation. That is why it is very important to be exacting to fulfill all of the details of a *mitzvah* – because without being precise in our *mitzvah* performance, we are missing a detail that could have brought more revelation of Hashem into the world of action.

If a person is close to Hashem but he isn’t that exacting when it comes to doing a *mitzvah*, this can be compared to a person who knows the general information of a sugya (section of *Gemara*) but he doesn’t know the exact details that are in the sugya. However, there are also some souls who are mainly rooted to be this way (of being close to Hashem without being exacting when doing the *mitzvos*), and that is their place. This applies both to Torah and *avodas* Hashem [meaning that there are some people who have a general understanding in Torah but they are lacking detailed information, as well as people who have the general grasp of *avodas* Hashem (they are connected to Hashem) but they are lacking the details of *avodas* Hashem (they are not being careful when doing the *mitzvos*). Their souls are designed to be this way because that is their root, and that is how they are meant to be.]

On This World, the main thing is to first build your “vessels.” which is by observing the *mitzvos* carefully. Without this, there is nothing to contain the spiritual light that could have gone into it, and it is like a tower hanging in middle of the air. That is why our first obligation to fulfill is to observe all of *halachah*. But it is not the purpose. The purpose of it all is to reach closeness with Hashem, and to reveal this closeness within our “vessels” – within our acts of *mitzvos*.

This World is a preparation for the Next World. However, in This World, our task is to reveal HaKadosh Baruch Hu within our physical “vessels.” while in the Next World, we reveal HaKadosh Baruch Hu by divesting these “vessels” [the *mitzvos*] and instead gaining “vessels” that are completely spiritual. The common denominator between This World and the Next World, though, is that we reveal HaKadosh Baruch amidst “vessels.” On This World, we are meant to reveal Hashem within the “vessels” of physicality, and in the Next World, Hashem is revealed within

spiritual “vessels.” That is why This World is a preparation for the Next World – it is because both worlds are essentially about revealing Hashem within different “vessels.”

[2 – Why Torah Learning Doesn’t Always Bring A Person Close To Hashem]

[Regarding the question of why Torah learning doesn’t always improve a person]: The entire Creation is about the concept of “something and its opposite.” Everything can either become spiritual or physical. On This World, in the world of physicality, the spiritual and the physical are separate. The soul is separate from the body. But in the Next World, the upper and spiritual world, spirituality and physicality are integrated at once.

The purpose of the entire Creation is to reveal HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The opposite of this is when Hashem’s presence is concealed. At the root, even these two opposite concepts [revelation of Hashem and concealment of Hashem] are actually integrated at once. That is why the Torah, which is the root of everything, is able to be the root of all levels of spiritual revelation, but is also able to be the root of all spiritual concealment.

That is where the root of our power of bechirah (free will) in. The root of the power of free will is to choose either to reveal HaKadosh Baruch Hu or, *chas v’shalom*, to conceal Him. The root of this matter is in the Torah itself [which is able to either reveal the spiritual or conceal the spiritual].

Closeness to Hashem contains two main parts: (1) Feeling – to feel the reality of Hashem, to feel His love, etc. (2) Recognition of Hashem. Part of “recognizing” Hashem is to recognize His will and His wisdom, which are both revealed in the holy Torah. This is the part of the closeness to Hashem that a person attains through Torah study.

Questions About Mesirus Nefesh

(1) What are the conditions for “mesirus *nefesh*.” when it comes to (a) *avodas* Hashem, (b) recognizing our soul, (c) learning Torah, and (d) doing *mitzvos*? Through mesirus *nefesh* a person receives siyata d’shmaya (Heavenly assistance) to skip levels. What is the simple meaning of mesirus *nefesh*? Does it mean that I have to be mentally willing to be killed al *kiddush* Hashem over something? Does it mean that I have to spend a lot of energy on something?

(2) The Rav has said that the *avodah* of our generation is mesirus *nefesh*. Is this referring to mesirus *nefesh* in *avodas* Hashem, in doing *mitzvos*, or in learning Torah? Or in all of them?

(3) I have heard from the Rav many times that the way of mesirus *nefesh* is only for individuals. If so, what is the Rav's intention that the *avodah* of mesirus *nefesh* is for this entire generation?

(4) In the *sefer* "Bilvavi" (Part 6), the Rav explains that the soul's power of "*lishmah*" (acting for the sake of Heaven) is the same power as mesirus *nefesh*, because it is the power to go above the "I" and act from a place in the soul that is higher than the "I." However, I once asked the Rav how a person is able to reach the "*Yechidah*" part of the soul through Torah study, and the Rav responded to me that it is reached through learning Torah with mesirus *nefesh* and *lishmah*. Did the Rav mean that they are two separate things? Or are they one and the same?

A

1) Mesirus *nefesh* in *avodas* Hashem means that a person works on an area which he finds personally difficult to work on, and he perseveres in that area, through self-sacrifice to succeed, no matter what comes his way. Mesirus *nefesh* should not be used when one is trying to recognize the soul, because one needs calm and quiet reflection in order to slowly recognize and understand the soul [hence trying to have "mesirus *nefesh*" in order to understand his soul would only deter him from reaching it]. Mesirus *nefesh* in learning Torah is that a person learns above his natural physical capabilities, and with mental exertion, until he exhausts his mind over it. Mesirus *nefesh* in doing *mitzvos* is that a person takes one *mitzvah* and does it as perfectly as possible, on his own level, according to the *halachah*, and with love and awe of Hashem, and with the conviction that he will never give up this *mitzvah* under any circumstance.

2) In this generation, there is a spiritual illumination of the ability to act with "mesirus *nefesh*." which is called the "light of Mashiach." the light of Dovid HaMelech, who is called a "stillborn." with no life support of his own, whose entire life source stems from acting on the level of mesirus *nefesh*.

3) In essence, the way of mesirus *nefesh* is applicable only to individuals. However, as mentioned above, since we are currently in a time period where the "light of Mashiach" is shining strongly, the light of mesirus *nefesh* is also present, and it exists in order to aid us in contending with the evil of the "50th Gate of Defilement" that is rampant today. The only way to spiritually survive the "50th Gate of Defilement" is through mesirus *nefesh*.

4) *Lishmah* and mesirus *nefesh* bear the same root. However, there are two ways to nullify the “I.” One way is to do it from within oneself, and this is called *lishmah*, which applies to the proper intention that one needs to have in Torah learning. This is experienced through the faculty of thought: learning Torah with the intention of *lishmah* [for the sake of Hashem]. There is also a way to nullify oneself through external means, through action, which is accessed through exerting oneself in Torah beyond one’s natural physical abilities, through losing sleep over one’s Torah learning, through physical frugality, etc.

Practically Connecting To The 50th Gate Of Holiness

The Rav explained in a derashah that the way to be saved in the final generation is by becoming connected to the shaar HaNun d’*kedushah*, the “50th Gate of Holiness.” I have these questions:

- 1) How can the “50th Gate of Holiness” become practically manifested in the daily life?
- 2) Also, how can one connect to the “50th Gate of Holiness” while learning Torah? Is this level only for those who learn Torah *lishmah*?
- 3) If indeed it is possible even for a person who doesn’t learn Torah *lishmah* to connect to the “50th Gate of Holiness.” what is the way to achieve this?
- 4) And can the Rav can an example of how the “50th Gate of Holiness” can be accessed at the simplest, lowest level?

A

1) One needs to become connected to the innermost depths of the spiritual, cycling back and forth between one’s inner world and the outer world. One needs to be involved with the outer world when he needs to, and then revert back to his inner world. As the Baal Shem Tov taught, the true bnei aliyah (those who truly grow spiritually) are those who “dwell” above, in the inner, spiritual dimension, who “descend” back down to the world when they need to, and then revert back to their spiritual base above.

2) Yes, it is primarily so [the “50th Gate of Holiness” is primarily a level accessible to those who learn Torah *lishmah*]. However, as long as one learns Torah with all of his energy, especially with

regards to mentally exerting himself in Torah, this is in the category of mesirus *nefesh*, which is rooted in the 50th Gate of Holiness.

3) By learning Torah with the attitude of “unifying” all contradicting opinions together. In every machlokes (argument) that one studies, one should see the differing views and then see how all of the views can be unified together, by seeing how each of the views form the “complete picture” [of a sugya of *Gemara*]. One needs to see all of the opposite views towards a matter, and then see how all of the views form the complete picture of the matter.

4) One can begin thinking of any concept as well as the opposite of the concept (dovor v’hipucho), from the understanding that the “other side” of the matter completes the view of the matter, in the same way that the back of the hand and the palm are really one entity. For example, the opposite of light is darkness, and there is a rule that “There is no light except after darkness.” Another example is that the opposite of joy is sadness, and the Sages state that on Tisha B’Av [the saddest day of the year] there is the birth of Mashiach [the greatest cause for joy].

Transcending The Ego

What is the recommended advice on how I can lessen my involvement with my own self? How can I treat egotism at its root? Understandably there are many different ways to lessen the ego, such as to avoid external honor and conceitedness, and that is certainly a self-purification, but is there a way to minimize the very ego itself?

A

Just as everything in the Creation has roots and branches to it, so does the soul contain roots and branches. So there is always an *avodah* (inner work) at the level of the “root” and also at the level of the “branches.”

The *avodah* that is on the level of the “branches” [of fixing egotism] here can be divided into the areas of action, emotion, and thought. In the area of action, a person should observe all of *halachah* and also to “go above the letter of the law.” with the intention to become attached with the will of Hashem. In the area of emotion, a person needs to rectify the character traits, which include sadness and laziness, the pursuit of desires, idle chatter, conceit and anger – and all of their branches. In the area of thought, one needs to build a holy mind, through knowledge of Torah, both in breadth and depth.

The *avodah* here at the “root” level [of fixing egoism] can be achieved in four different ways.

One way is through nullifying the *ratzon* (will) – through nullifying one’s personal will. This is a very fundamental kind of inner work: to become used to nullifying your desires, slowly and gradually. This *avodah* purifies the soul very much and returns the soul to its root, which prevents expansion [of the ego].

A second way is through the avoidance of physical *taanug* (pleasure): by abstaining from physical pleasures, one disconnects from expanding the “I.”

A third way is through *emunah* peshutah, simple faith in Hashem, which enables one to leave his own existence and only be involved with thinking about the Creator. The more a person attaches the thoughts of his mind and heart with the Creator, one is not living within his own private existence. This is an awesomely deep way of nullifying one’s ego at its root.

A fourth way is through *havayah* (accessing a higher mode of existence), to live in the simple reality of Ain Od Milvado (there is nothing besides for Hashem). This a total exit from egotism.

These four kinds of *avodah* are the root of how to leave egotism, at its root.

Letting Go Of Ourselves (Leaving The Ego)

How does a person “let go” of himself?

A

One way is through the emotions: by gradually learning to think about others and tending to their needs, awakening *ahavas Yisrael* toward them. This helps one leave the ego by becoming focused on others. A deeper way, as explained in this lesson, is through the power of thought. But if one cannot do the first way, one will not be able to do the second way, which is deeper.

Practical Way For Inner Change

What practical point can the Rav suggest we work on every day from now on, in order to improve ourselves?

A

Every day, seek to become a more truthful person.

Which point should a person work on to become more truthful in? In learning Torah? In doing *mitzvos*? Which point exactly?

A

Each person must become more truthful in his own unique circumstances in life and on his own level. This is a which cannot be answered on a general level, because I would have to know the individual person who is asking it, in order to see how he needs to become more truthful. But there is something to this which can apply to all people no matter what situation: no matter what your situation is in life, every person needs to try to become a more truthful person each day, in general.

Advice For Overcoming Sinas Chinam

Can the Rav offer some brief advice on how I can remove my *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred) for others? When I walk by certain people in the street and I pass by other Jews, I feel animosity towards them if they don't return a greeting or if they don't say Gut Shabbos back to me, or when I smile at others and they don't bother smiling back at me, etc. If I'm Litvish and the other is Chassidish, I will immediately feel that the other isn't responding to my greeting or isn't smiling back at me because I'm different than him, I look different than him and I dress different than him and I have a different *hashkafos* than him, and I will immediately jump to the conclusion that he dislikes me, and then I will feel dislike towards him in return. Sometimes I'm probably just imagining that the other doesn't like me but at other times I'm pretty sure that the other really feels some hatred towards me for some reason because I'm different from him, and then I hate him back. Please help me overcome these negative feelings towards others.

A

Learn about the ways of how to reveal *ahavas Yisrael*, and when you “do good”, that is how you “keep away from evil.” This concept was explained by the Baal Shem Tov, that “*sur m'ra*” (keeping away from bad) happens through *aseh tov* (doing good).

In addition, try to figure out what is motivating your dislike towards the person. Generally, disliking others stems from egotism, and more specifically, each person can clash with another's personality, so try to figure out which aspect of the other's personality is clashing with your particular personality.

Furthermore, it is important to change the way you view people. Stop wanting and thinking that everyone needs to be how you think they should be, and also, stop wishing that everyone was perfect. Hashem created every person with his particular flaws, and everything Hashem made is perfect, so Hashem wants the world to be full of imperfect people.

Finally, train yourself to like things that aren't perfectly your taste [and this will also bring you to like people who aren't your taste].

Emunah & Bitachon

Believing In Hashem

How can a person know if Hashem believes in him right now or not?

A

To the extent that one believes in the Creator, that is how much the Creator believes in him. *Chazal* state,⁷ based on the verse, “Hashem is your shadow,”⁸ that having *emunah* in Hashem works like a shadow, a reflection—according to the level of your *emunah* in Hashem, that is how much Hashem will reflect back to you, in the same way that a shadow reflects a person.

How does a person develop the ability to always believe in any situation that Hashem believes in him, even when he is feeling down, and he feels like Hashem doesn’t believe in him?

A

One should always try to focus on any small point in which he can increase his *emunah* in Hashem. By strengthening yourself even a little bit in your *emunah*, you will find that Hashem believes in you. Another way to strengthen your *emunah* in Hashem’s belief in you is to realize that even when Hashem doesn’t believe in us and He allows for punishment and destruction, that is only in the external dimension, but there is an inner dimension where Hashem always believes in us. So even when a person finds himself in a spiritually low situation, he can tell himself that Hashem’s frustration with him is only on an external level. On the inner level, Hashem always believes in him.

⁷ Midrash VeHizhir, Mishpatim, quoted in Ramban to Shemos 3:13

⁸ Tehillim 121:5

Is there any advice for us to help us raise our current level of *emunah*?

A

To be brief, first we believe intellectually, by learning the words of the Sages about *emunah*, and then thinking about these words more. A second way is to internalize our *emunah* is by verbalizing it with deep thought and feeling. A third way is to act upon what we learn, by doing something small that actualizes our knowledge and words of *emunah*.

Can the Rav explain more about the external and internal dimensions of Hashem's belief in us?

A

This is a very subtle concept. There is always a concept as well as the revelation of the concept. Does Hashem always believe in us? Yes. That is the reality, and that is the inner dimension. Is it always revealed to us? In the inner dimension, it is revealed to us, but in the external dimension, it is not revealed to us, so we do not see it.

Does Hashem not believe in us if we are not in touch with the inner dimension?

A

You can always have *emunah* that Hashem believes in you right now, and that is how you can always be in touch with the inner dimension, where Hashem always believes in us. Here is an analogy: When a father is angry at his child, right now, does he love his child? Externally, he is not showing love to his child, because He is angry at him. But deep down, the father still loves his child (even if he isn't conscious of it). On the inner level, the father always loves the child. So too, on the inner level, Hashem always loves us and believes in us, even though externally He is showing anger at us.

Can a person manipulate how Hashem feels toward him right now?

A

Absolutely. We have explained here a very powerful concept, which has tremendous repercussions. Awareness of this concept can bring a fundamental change to a person's entire life.

How Can We Thank Hashem In The Worst Situations?

How do we thank Hashem for situations that are impossible to change according to *Chazal*? For example, if a person is blind or childless, he is considered to be dead while alive, according to *Chazal*. How can such a person be thankful to Hashem even if this is his situation?

A

The Ato this contains two aspects. First of all, we know that *Chazal* say that "Everything that Hashem does is for the good." First we must realize that everything is good, since everything comes from Hashem, and this is how we can thank Hashem for anything. Included in this is a deeper belief we need to internalize, that even the "bad" things are also for the good, since they were all done by Hashem. We do not understand this with our intellect, yet we have an *avodah* to internalize with our heart that everything is really good, that even the "bad" things are really good, and thus we can thank Hashem for even the "bad" things.

Why Isn't Hashem Aing My Tefillos?

After a person *davens* again and again for something, and his prayers don't get answered, he naturally stops *davening* so hard. It's only natural that when you keep asking for something and you aren't getting it, you stop asking for it. You stop trying that venue and you turn to

other alternatives, or you give up. Why does Hashem do things this way? Why does it take so long for my tefillos to get answered?? How can a person take all of this in stride and not give up from *davening*, when he's not being answered?? Is a person supposed to keep *davening* and just never give up, or does there come a point where a Jew is allowed to stop *davening*, because he understands that his requests from Hashem for a certain thing are not just being answered...?

A

There are several reasons [why a person's tefillos aren't being answered] and I will mention a few of them.

(1) It may be because [by not getting answered] he is acquiring more *emunah* (faith) in Hashem. (2) It may be because [by not getting answered] he is acquiring more and more depth to his *davening*. (3) It may be because he needs to go through a certain amount of pain which is purifying him more, and one needs to learn how to accept this with love. (4) It may be because it's not the right time now to get answered, and it will not be good for him if he gets answered now. (5) It can all be a test that he should learn how to not despair. (6) It can all be a test that he isn't supposed to be turning so much to doctors [and instead he should be turning more to Hashem for help].

A person always needs to *daven*, unless he requires a miracle, because the *Gemara* at the end of Tractate *Berachos* states that it is pointless to pray for a miracle.

Prayer should always be accompanied with *emunah* and accepting the painful circumstances with love, and then returning to prayer, in a cycle.

May you receive the blessing of "And I will remove all sickness from your midst." may you receive a complete recovery amongst all our other brothers in Yisrael, quickly, and with ease.

Effective Prayer

Is there a way that our requests to Hashem should be accepted by Hashem?

A

There is much advice written about this in the *sefarim*. But there is one root way: the more you *daven* from the depths of your soul - and on a more subtle note, from a more truthful place in your soul - the more your prayer is readily accepted by Hashem. The more superficial the tefillah is, the less it is answered.

Needs Vs. Wants

If a person doesn't have access to something that will give him pleasure and he feels like he needs it, does that mean he doesn't really need it since he doesn't have access to it?

A

As we said before, a person suffers when he doesn't get what he needs, and he must accept this suffering with love. A person also suffers when he doesn't get something that he imagines that he needs, when he doesn't really need it. In that case, a person must accept that these are just wishes that he has, not actual needs, and that is why he didn't get them.

Struggling In Emunah

To my chagrin, I am struggling all the time with doubts in *emunah* (faith). Either I have s that bother me, or I simply lack *emunah* and my mind cannot be settled by thoughts of *emunah*.

A

1. It would be worthwhile for you to purify yourself a bit from the connection to permissible materialism.

2. Talk to the Creator whenever you have the opportunity to do so. Talk to Him as a child talking to his father.

3. Cry out to Hashem, from the deepest place in yourself, that He should remove the murkiness from upon you.

4. Choose an area in Torah which is close to your heart, and study it.

5. Every day, do something good for other people. Do at least one favor a day for another person, from the depths of your heart.

6. Immerse your thoughts for practically all of your time in either Torah learning or in ways to do good things for others.

7. Once a week, make this reflection: "My mind is so small and feeble. It is not within my ability to decide on how to Athese deep s. Instead, I will just rely on the holy Avos (the forefathers), Moshe Rabbeinu, etc. [and all my other ancestors]."

How Much Hishtadlus To Make

What is the proper amount of *hishtadlus* (effort) that a person should make to earn a living?

A

On one hand, one needs to *daven* and increase his *emunah*. Simultaneously, a person also needs to make *hishtadlus* until he feels somewhat calmed, and that is what determines the amount of *hishtadlus* he needs to make. However, a person should always minimize his amount of *hishtadlus* and increase his *emunah*.

How Can You Keep Having Bitachon?

What is the way to reach *bitachon*? What does a person need in order to keep having *bitachon*? What prevents a person from having *bitachon* and how can a person overcome those obstacles?

A

Externally, it is by being stubborn, and internally, it is to have pure, trusting, uning *emunah* in Hashem. Lack of inner resilience and lack of *emunah* prevents a person from holding strong with his *bitachon* (and “go and learn the rest”).

Why Doesn't Bitachon Always Work?

If Hashem didn't allow a person to get what he wanted, is it because he didn't really need it and he was only imagining that he needed it?

A

Either this happened because (1) He didn't have complete *bitachon*, or (2) because he wasn't on the level to do so, or (3) It's because Hashem knows that it wasn't good for him to get what he wanted, and therefore he was prevented by Heaven from having complete *bitachon*.

How Do I Know If My Bitachon Is Real?

How can a person know if his relaxed and worry-free attitude about doing *hishtadlus* (making effort) when things aren't going well for him is really coming from truly having *bitachon* in Hashem, or if it's just his *yetzer hora* fooling him and causing him to run away from reality and just be lazy? Maybe he's really supposed to be doing more *hishtadlus*...?

A

The better a person can “listen” to what's going on in the different parts of his soul, the closer he is to acting truthfully, and the further he will be from being deluded by fantasies. Generally, one's *bitachon* depends on how well he is doing in other areas of his *avodah*. If a person is being realistic and responsible in all other areas of his *avodah*, then he will be more realistic and responsible when it comes to his *bitachon*. There are always elements of truth and fantasy that are affecting a person, and the only question is, how much. But a person cannot know the percentages so perfectly. It is a

“holy doubt” that we have [which we need to be at peace with]. We need to always *daven* and cry to Hashem that He should guide us towards the truth.

Practical Bitachon

I’m learning for half a year already about *bitachon* and I really want to acquire *bitachon* very much. I am prepared to spend a half hour every learning about *bitachon* for many more years so that I can attain this goal. What is the best way for me to get to my goal of acquiring *bitachon*?

A

The series “Actualizing Your Faith” (Da Es *Bitachoncha*) explains about this subject, and if you have any s on these lessons, I will try to Athem, with siyata d’shmaya. Along with this, you should learn *sefer* Madreigas HaAdam, especially the chapter about *bitachon*. You should also learn about *bitachon* in the *sefer* Shomer Emunim.

Practically speaking, each day you should practice having *bitachon* in Hashem when it comes to a small thing, and don’t do any *hishtadlus* (effort) when it comes to that area. Or, at least minimize your *hishtadlus* in that area, from an awareness that you are trying to work on your *bitachon*.

Furthermore, it is appropriate to clarify the entire spectrum of this subject. Learn all the sources for *bitachon* in *Chumash*, Mishnayos, *Gemara*, Rishonim and Acharonim, as much as you are able to. Organize all the material in a notebook, as if you are trying to prepare for print as a *sefer*. This will help you become immersed in it, consistently and fundamentally, as you study this part of Torah and apply it to your *avodah*. It will also give you increased clarity on the topic, and it will also give you the gain of both learning and practicing it together.

Hisbodedus/"Meditation" According To Torah

Listening To Your Heart

How do we write down what's on our heart? Should we just write down whatever thoughts come into our minds?

A

In order to understand yourself, you need to sit with yourself quietly and listen to what's going on inside your heart. This is the general concept, and it is hard to say exactly what to do. Basically, try to see if you feel happy or sad, as well as your other feelings. As time goes on, you will discover more and more about what you are feeling and you will come to better understand yourself.

Should a person first talk to Hashem and then write down a list of how one feels, or should it be the other way around?

A

It is better to first write down the list of what you are feeling, because first we need to calm ourselves down before we talk to Hashem, so that we can talk to Hashem from a calmer place in ourselves. In order to be able to *daven* properly to Hashem, we need to first be calmed, and then we are speaking with Him from a more genuine place in ourselves.

Even when we have "heart time." how do we know if we are understanding ourselves from our heart? Maybe we are only understanding ourselves from our mind?

A

Excellent. Even listening to our heart is problematic, because the *yetzer hora* resides in our heart (in the left chamber). The question is if what we are hearing from our heart is coming from the external layer of the heart (which contains the *yetzer hora*), or if it is coming from a more inner place in our heart that tells us the truth. But certainly we must be concerned that what we are hearing is perhaps coming from the *yetzer hora* present in our heart.

The general Ato this issue is that all good in our soul stems from either the “light of the *neshamah*,” which is present in our brain/mind, or from the “*Ruach*” that is present in our heart. All evil present in ourselves stems from the *yetzer hora* in the heart, and to be more specific, from the *nefesh habehaimis* (the animalistic layer in the soul), which contains the negative trait of *shiflus* (lowliness).

Our *avodah* is to get used to listening to what’s going on in our hearts. As you get used to listening to your feelings, you will be able to discern it as a physical sensation, and there are usually two places where you can feel it. There are feelings you can feel coming from your heart, and there are feelings you can feel coming from the lower section of the stomach, which is closer to the liver. When you feel it coming from this lower half of the body, it is usually a feeling stemming from the body, and if you feel it coming from your heart, it is usually a feeling linked to your *middos*. This is a very subtle matter. The you asked was very good, and the Ato it is not always so clear.

It is entirely a matter of getting used to it. As you get used to listening to your heart and writing down its feelings, you will slowly be able to discern better what it is telling you, just as it took time for Shmuel HaNavi to discern the voice of Hashem and he had to get used to hearing it in order to recognize it.

When we starting to do this, should we write down everything that comes to mind, and not try to discern where the thoughts are coming from?

A

At first as you begin to get used to this, just write down everything that comes to mind. Only afterwards will you be able to discern which thoughts and feelings are coming from the *neshamah*, and which thoughts and feelings are coming from the *nefesh habehaimis*. Some things you can clearly identify as *nefesh habehaimis*.

For example, if you discover that you like to be lazy, you know clearly that this stems from the *nefesh habehaimis*. You can write it down on the list of negative desires you have in yourself. But as

for any other thoughts and feelings that come to you which you don't know if they are good or bad, write them down in a middle column on the page and come back to it later, when you will be able to better discern if it came from the *neshamah* or the *nefesh habehaimis*.

In summary, your list should include three rows. One row will contain all the good *middos* and desires you discover in yourself, another row will contain bad *middos* and desire you discover in yourself, and a third (middle) row will be the parts of yourself which you're not sure about if they're good or bad.

Disconnecting From Others To Connect With Ourselves

What are the limits to how much we need to disconnect from social life?

A

First of all, you need to make sure that you have a deep love for other Jews before you attempt to have more solitude. Secondly, you need to make sure that you actually feel pain over other Jews' problems and that you are able to cry about other's problems. Thirdly, see if you're doing things for other people. If you have met all these three conditions, then you are able to work on *hisbodedus*. How much time does a person need for *hisbodedus*? It depends on each person, and it depends on each personality.

Why Isn't Hisbodedus In The Torah?

If this is so important, why isn't it written in the Torah?

A

It doesn't state in the Torah that you have to have good *middos*, and it doesn't state in the Torah anything about reward in Olam HaBa. Our great rabbis of the past already asked this , and the Ais

because the Torah speaks to us in our language. When a person lives a more inner kind of life, he sees more things in the Torah.

Should One Learn Sefarim About Hisbodedus?

Is it possible to learn about *hisbodedus* from any *sefer*, such as learning the *sefarim* of Breslev, or other recent *sefarim*?

A

The problem with learning *sefarim* is that when people learn them, they usually do not know what the author means, and they end up easily making mistakes. Of this, *Chazal* say, “You shall not learn Torah from sofrim (scribes), and not from *sefarim*.” We need the “sofrim” (teachers) in addition to the *sefarim* we have, because the material contained in our *sefarim* needs to be taught to us in order for us to understand what to do.

Paths Of Meditation In “Da Es Hisbodesecha” Series

In the Rav’s series on *hisbodedus* (meditation), “*Da Es Hisbodesecha*.” the Rav explains that the series is explaining one out of many possible paths in *hisbodedus*, and that this is the path which some of the Rishonim (Torah sages ranging from 10th-15th centuries) traversed. The Rav further explained that this is a series about *hisbodedus* which is partially based on the Rambam’s approach, and partially from the approach of Rav Avraham Abulefia. Can the Rav please explain a bit more about each of these approaches?

A

The way of the “Maimoni” [Rabbi Dovid HaMaimoni, a grandson of the Rambam] is to attain *hisbodedus* (meditation) by disconnecting from action, emotion, turning the senses inward, connecting to G-d via the intellect, and silencing the actions, emotions and intellect via being in the dark. Through all of this, a person can reach the most desired state of *hisbodedus*, which is called “Encounter” [pegiah, to “encounter” G-d, as it were] – first by attaining a revelation of the *neshamah* (Divine soul) and later by attaining a revelation of G-dliness.

The way of Rav Abulefia is to reveal the *neshamah* (Divine soul) by way of the breath. This is based on the verse, “And He breathed into his nostrils, a breath of life.” The verse is *saying* that the main revelation of the soul is via the nostrils. For this reason, when one connects himself inwardly to the power of breath, in the proper way, he becomes connected with his soul. According to this approach, one reaches the body through the soul. This [connection] does not happen through the intellectual faculties of the soul, but through the soul’s connection to the body. As the verse teaches: “And He breathed into his nostrils” – which implies the soul’s connection to the body.

An additional part contained in Rav Abulefia’s approach is for one to reveal the “active intellect.” meaning that one reveals the intellect from its potential state into an active state. The intellect divides into three parts: (1) Seichel pashut, the “divested intellect” [the part of the intellect that is removed from physicality, hence it contains a simplistic view]. (2) Seichel murkav, “the complex intellect” [the analytical part of the intellect]. (3) The “intermediate” level between the divested and complex intellect.

An example of the “intermediate” level is when one views a combination of Hebrew letters which do not translate into anything understandable, such as looking at the tagim [the crown-like symbols which protrude from some of the Hebrew letters in a *sefer* Torah]. This is a bridging level between the “divested [non-analytical] intellect” and the “complex intellect.” and it corresponds to the concept that wisdom comes from “nothingness” (*ayin*), which is based on the verse “And wisdom, from where does it come?” [implying that the true source of analytical thinking (“complex intellect”) is really drawn from the higher, non-analytical part of the intellect, the “divested intellect”]. This is how one can combine the “complex intellect” with the “divested [non-analytical] intellect.” together: by revealing “divested” [non- analytical] intellect” in the complex [analytical] intellect.

Through this [contemplating the tagim of the Hebrew letters], one reveals the intellect from its potential state to its active state. Through this, one can arrive at “simple, non-analytical reflection.” This is not referring to actual “simplicity” itself, but to simple, non-analytical reflection.

The “*Da Es Hisbodesecha*” series which explains *hisbodedus* is partially based off this concept of simple, non-analytical reflection, albeit the fact that the series does not elaborate on how to reflect on the various combinations of Hebrew letters and words.

No Time For Hisbodedus

If we only have 1-2 minutes a day to do *hisbodedus*, what should we do during that time? What should we be aiming for?

A

Try to attain as much tranquility during that short minute, as much as you can.

Quiet Time Every Day

What should I do if I am trying to live a life of quiet, but this just doesn't let this happen, due to my environment and all the various events of my life?

A

If a person makes time every day for having some quiet, whether it's 30 minutes or an hour, and during this time he is connected to that place [of quiet], even if this doesn't change his life on a practical level, the fact that he has some time of the day where he connects to a very pure place is what will give him renewed energy.

As an analogy, all of us sleep every day, but does that mean that we need to sleep the entire day? No. It is just that we have some time for sleep, which renews us for the rest of the day. So too, when one has some time to connect to a pure, inner place which is not mixed with any of the troubles or pressures of life, this is enough to give a person a strong renewal.

Will this Aall of a person's problems? No. Will it bring about a meaningful change, and provide a balance in one's soul? It certainly will.

Ways Of Preparing For Hisbodedus

In the series on *hisbodedus*, the Rav recommends several ways to calm the soul, mainly through smelling an item of a *mitzvah* such as besamim, and deep breathing, and hearing a deep niggun from a pure source. Is this advice only an *avodah* to begin *hisbodedus*, or may it be practiced outside of *hisbodedus* as well, such as when a person simply wants to calm his soul from any anxiety or pain that comes from the external aspects of life? Or is this dangerous, since it may cause a person to run away into a fantasy? Especially music, because I find that when I listen to music, I feel as if I am running away from reality and entering into fantasy.

A

These methods can be used [outside of *hisbodedus*], but make sure that you stay balanced between reality and fantasy.

The Rav once suggested that listening to music can help you attain inner quiet; how can such a superficial action like listening to music help you reach your soul, which is a totally inner world?

A

Excellent. The Ais that there are two ways to reach our inner worlds: either through working directly from within the inner world itself, or by using our outer, physical world as a portal into our inner world. Thus, we are able to use external, superficial tools (such as listening to relaxing music) as a way to lead ourselves into our inner world.

Quieting The Mind

What should a person do when he's trying to quiet the mind but he keeps having troubling thoughts? How can a person quiet those thoughts?

A

First a person needs to identify that all thoughts which enter the mind are essentially a “garment” of his soul, and that the thoughts are not the very essence of the soul. After that is clear, a person should allow the thoughts to wander. Then a person should imagine, palpably, as if the thought is entering his forehead and leaving through the back of the head. Slowly a person can create for himself a mental “pattern” of how thoughts enter and exit his mind. Then a person will gradually see that his mind has been quieted.

If it's very hard to disconnect from the world in my thoughts and feelings, does that mean that trying to quiet down my thoughts in order to do *hisbodedus* is not going to work for me? And is there a way for me to get past that issue?

A

It doesn't mean that *hisbodedus* is not meant for you to do. There are some people who have a hard time with detaching from troublesome thoughts and feelings. It is hard to know this, but there do exist some people who simply have a harder time detaching from their thoughts and feelings. But it is not a sign that they cannot achieve the method of *hisbodedus* here. They just have to learn how to get by that side issue.

Either you can speak to a professional who can help you get by these bothersome thoughts and feelings you're having. Or, you can try the following advice.

When it comes to avoiding **bothersome thoughts**, you can learn the art of focus, such as by training yourself to keep focusing on a certain object for a long amount of time; this will train you to avoid your thoughts from wandering around and to instead keep them focused.

As far as your **bothersome emotions**, what you can do is focus for a long amount of time on someone you love and make sure that you're holding onto your love for that person, for as long as possible. This trains you to calm your emotions. This is just general advice, but there are much more details to this therapy. For example, if a woman feels that her life is very dysfunctional, what she can do to remedy this is to organize her house a little each day, and this will help her attain at least an external orderliness (*seder*) in her life. The external orderliness will help her give orderliness to herself internally, and this will calm her down inside.

How To Reach Ayin

What is the simplest way which is attainable for most people, to reach the place of “*ayin*” (nothingness) in the soul? I was thinking that the way to reach it is through listening to a niggun that calms the soul, or by smelling something pleasant or by tasting something pleasant, as the Rav describes in the “*Da Es Hisbodesecha*” series. But I was wondering if these ways will be enough to reach “*ayin*.” being that “*ayin*” is a very deep point in the soul.

A

The deeper of an inner silence that one reaches in the soul, to that extent, will one touch upon the point of “*ayin*” in the soul. That is why listening to a calming niggun or smelling something pleasant can possibly help a person reach inner silence in the soul.

However, usually, if a person hasn’t yet given a balance to his worst character trait and he hasn’t yet calmed his desires, he will not be able to reach a deep and subtle inner silence, and thus he won’t be able to penetrate into the place of “*ayin*” in the soul.

Hisbodedus Through Inhaling & Exhaling

It is said that Reb Tzvi Hirsh of Zeditchev (a student of the Chozeh of Lublin) would breathe in and focus on the name of *havayah* on the exhale, thinking of the letters yud, heh, yud, and heh, and upon exhaling, he would concentrate on the word Elokim, thinking of the letters aleph, lamed, vov, kuf, yud, and mem. Is this something we can do nowadays? And if so, when should a person do it and for how long?

A

Yes. It depends on how much time each person has, but it is proper to do this three times a day, by Shacharis, Mincha, and Maariv, and to exhale and inhale three times by each time that one does it.

Drawing & Writing During Personal Reflection

Sometimes I find that when I do *hisbonenus* (reflection) on subjects of *emunah*, *bitachon*, and *niflos haBorei*, I find that when I write it out on paper, the ideas are more structured and they make a deeper impression on me then if I speak them out. When I write them out, I generally do not speak as I write, rather I just write. It puts me in a very engaged state of mind, and I feel like the concepts really take hold in my heart. Another similar idea: I am a bit of an artist. Sometimes I will draw a picture of Niflos HaBorei, such as a bird or a spider or an apple, and as I draw I think about the real item and I think “if this drawing cannot come about without an artist, certainly the real thing cannot come about without a creator.” this also drives very deep into my heart.

Does the Rav shlita recommend that I continue in this approach of *hisbonenus*, or should I focus on just speaking out the concepts? Or both perhaps? Should I make the writing and drawing part of my daily routine?

A

This is excellent and wonderful. Don’t ever leave out the part of talking out your feelings, and every so often you can also make use of the writing and drawing.

Can Inner Silence For Women Also Be Used For Men?

1) Is the series of “Inner Silence” only a path for women, or can it also be applied to men (in order to discover the inner self)? 2) If a man committed the sin of spilling seed, will this prevent him from reaching his inner self?

A

1) If a man is drawn more towards *temimus* (non-intellectual simplicity) and not as drawn after intellect, he can make use of these lessons, at least as an entranceway to reaching the inner self. 2) Through *mesirus nefesh* [unceasing devotion in order to achieve a higher level], one can reach any level [no matter how much he has sinned in the past]. However, one still needs to purify his physical desires, and his imagination, and attain clearer thinking abilities.

Having A Rav Or Rebbi (Torah Mentor)

Choosing A Rav

I would be happy if the Rav can direct me on the best possible path in how I can find a Rav for myself, and what am I supposed to look for in a “Rav.” Thank you.

A

“Make for yourself a Rav” (teacher): *Chazal* state, “Yehoshua ben Perachya said: Make for yourself a teacher” (Avos 1:6). In Avos D’Rebbi Nosson (ch.8) they said, “One should make for himself a teacher on a permanent basis, and learn from him *Chumash*, *Mishnah*, Midrash, *halachah*, and aggadah (homiletics). This is for the purpose of having a Rav who will teach him Torah. (See the Maharal’s novel interpretation of this in *sefer* Derech Chaim to Avos 1:18).

Besides for the above, one needs a Rav to rule the *halachah* for him, and he also needs a Rav to give him advice. Of this *Chazal* said (Avos 1:16), “*Rabban* Gamliel said, “Make for yourself a teacher and be removed from doubt.” This refers to having a “Rav” who will rule the *halachah*, as explained in the commentary of the Raav (ibid). The Meiri (ibid) writes that even the wisest king needs someone to give him advice. Furthermore, *Chazal* state (Talmud *Avodah* Zarah 19a) that “Anyone who learns Torah from one teacher will never see blessing. This is with regards to *sevara* (logical thinking), but in *Gemara* (the teachings of the Torah), it is better to learn from one teacher.”

So, altogether, a person needs 4 Rabbonim: 1) For *Gemara*, a person needs 1 teacher. 2) For “*sevara*” (to learn how to think properly), one needs several teachers. 3) A person needs a Rav to give him advice. 4) A person needs a Rav to rule the *halachah* for him. (And, according to the Maharal, a person makes each person into his “Rav” in the sense that he can learn things from every person.)

Practically speaking, when making for yourself a Rav: the Yalkut Shimeoni (Mishlei: 938) says that you should become like dust to a Rav and make him like a king over you. The *sefer* Merkeves Ha*Mishnah* says that “make for yourself a Rav” means that you should be in awe and fear from him. The Alshich (Vayikra 9) says that you should not wait for a Rav to come to teach you – rather,

it is you who should seek the Rav to teach you. And if it should happen that the Rav doesn't want to accept you, you should still go to him and try to appease him very much, and beg him very much, and fall at his feet, until he eventually agrees to become your Rav.

Besides for making for yourself a Rav in the simple sense, you should also make your friend into your "Rav" [when it comes to a certain matter], as mentioned earlier [in the name of the Maharal]. The *sefer Avodas Yisrael* (Likkutim: Avos 1:6) says that every person should make his friend into his teacher, meaning that you should allow others to reprimand you if they notice a flaw in your behavior. The *sefer AVilna Gaon D'Kallah* (parshas Lech Lecha) says that you should run by foot, from city to city, in order to merit finding a Rav who you can learn from.

Who is fitting to be a Rav? The Rambam (Avos 1:6) says that even if someone is not befitting to be a teacher to you, you should make him a teacher over you, because learning from oneself is not as good as learning from another. Learning from another person makes you retain your wisdom better. Furthermore, the Rambam says that one should make another person into his teacher even if the other is equal in wisdom to him, or even if the other is not as wise. A person also needs to make another person into his Rav so that he can be removed from doubts. Rabbeinu Yonah writes (ibid) that one should make his friend into his Rav, even if he is wiser than the friend, so that he can remove himself from doubt. The Talmud Yerushalmi explains, "Go bring for me an elderly person from the marketplace so that I can rely on his word and permit it for you." Therefore, one should make his friend into a "Rav" for himself and ask him about anything he is doubtful about.

Taking this further, *Chazal* state "Who is wise? One who learns from all people." The Maharal (Derech Chaim 1:6) explains that "Make for yourself a rav" does not refer to a rebbi muvhak (your primary teacher), for that wouldn't require a teaching that you should make him into your teacher. Rather, "make for yourself a rav" means that even if another isn't fit to be a rav, make him into your teacher, because it is not possible that you won't learn something from him. It is enough to make him a rav over you if you will learn just one thing from him. Similarly, the *sefer Toldos Yaakov Yosef* (parshas Kedoshim) writes that you should make every person into a Rav over yourself. Even more so, he writes that "Make for yourself a rav" means that you should connect with many people just as you would with a Rav [in order to learn things from many different people]. *Chazal* (Beraishis RAbbah 61:1) said about Avraham Avinu that his two kidneys became like two Rabbonim who advised him, and he learned Torah from them (another version reads "From himself, he learned Torah."

However, all of the above is not referring to a rebbi muvhak (primary teacher). Of a rebbi muvhak, it is said (Talmud Bavli Moed Katan 17a) that he must resemble angel of G-d, and if not, one should not seek to learn Torah from him. Finally, one should view Hashem as his main "Rav." For we are called "children" of Hashem, and He is called *Avinu*, our Father. We are also called His

talmidim (students), and He is our great Teacher who taught us the Torah at Har Sinai, and ever since. The *sefer Avodas Yisrael* (Likutim: Avos 1:16) says that when one is learning Torah or *davening*, he should make Hashem into his teacher, by visualizing in his thoughts that Hashem is present and is teaching you. This is the level of one who has *d'veykus* in Hashem.

Practically speaking: To find a rebbi muvhak (primary teacher), one needs to seek a truthful person, and he should be someone who, according to your current level of understanding, is close to the root of your own soul. One needs to *daven* and cry to Hashem for this, because it is not possible to decide [who one's rebbi muvhak is] based on human logic alone. One also needs to know what the qualities of this Rav are, and what he is able to receive from him. Sometimes a person needs a few Rabbonim, as mentioned earlier.

Besides for having a Rav to learn *Gemara*, *sevara*, *halachah*, and advice, one also needs a Rav to acquire a *daas* (thinking) that is aligned with the Torah: a truthful perspective on the world at large, the many different details and ways of the world, according to a Torah lens. One also needs to acquire a rich treasury of knowledge about the inner, spiritual world, and about character, and holiness, etc.

One can learn about this from the Rav's actions, words, and thinking process, and from [becoming more aware of] the very *havayah* (being) of the Rav.

Having A Rebbi

How can a person know what his current level is, being that our inner world is so hidden from us, and our level keeps changing?

A

Part of the solution to this lies in having a rebbi (Torah teacher). *Chazal* say to “make for yourself a rebbi, and be removed from doubt.” When choosing a Rebbi [to guide you in matters of *Avodas Hashem*], either choose a Rebbi who has the general picture (‘hekef hakelali’) about life, or, choose a Rebbi who has already traversed the particular issues that you are struggling with.

But in addition to this part, there is also your own “inner teacher.” Man's *avodah* is to internalize his mind's knowledge about truths, into his heart. As it is written, “And you shall know today, and you shall settle the matter upon your heart.” A person's brain/mind is considered to be like the

inner ‘teacher’ of man, which gathers all the appropriate knowledge about life and sees it (aware of it intellectually), and the ‘student’ within him that accepts the teacher’s information, is the heart.

With some people, their problem is that their brain and heart cannot understand beyond a certain point, and this shows where that they are not yet holding at that level. Others have a disconnection between the heart and brain, which means that they know a lot but they don’t act upon their knowledge. This problem is referred to by our Sages in the statement, “One whose wisdom is greater than his actions.” Others do have an integration between their mind and heart, but even so, their mind is aware of more knowledge than what their heart has internalized, so they are still not holding at the levels which they know of.

But if a person is always seeking to internalize his mind’s knowledge into his heart, before the mind has seen enough knowledge, although this is also an imperfect kind of *avodah*, such a person is still closer to acting upon those levels he knows about. It is not yet perfect, and he will still need to ask advice from another who can guide him to reach higher levels, or, he can get to those levels within himself and be able to reach those levels accurately, to some extent.

Why should a person ever ask another for advice, if he can just discern his own level?

A

If I have understood your question clearly, the A is as follows. Although *Chazal* say that we must have a Rebbi, this obviously does not mean that we need to have a Rebbi for every last nitty-gritty issue that comes up in your life. Should a person spend the whole day on the phone trying to get through to his Rebbi whenever he has an issue? Obviously, there is some kind of deciding that each person needs to do, himself, without having a Rebbi at his side.

But the issue is: How indeed does a person know if an issue he’s facing is one that requires a Rebbi to A, or if he should decide it on his own? This is a fine line that one must figure out himself - and there is no *sefer* that can define the rules of this.

Basically, the more a person matures in life, the more he can decide on his own without having to ask a Rebbi for an A. If a person is not that mature in life, either he will always decide quickly, because he is immature and he does know how to really think properly, or he is a kind of person who will have to ask a Rebbi a lot for advice. Those are the two options that he will always find himself with.

Every person ultimately has situations where he will have to decide, on his own, how to act. These include the various situations throughout the day which force you to decide what to do, or, the situations where you have no idea how to decide on, yet even so, you have no choice but to make some decision. There are always situations which force us to decide on our own where we can't ask anyone else. All of us go through such situations, some more and some less. So although we must have a Rebbi, there will always be situations where we have to decide on our own, and there is no Rebbi to ask.

When it comes to such situations, where we are forced to make a decision, we can decide using the power of *daas*. Our *daas* is actually a point above our own soul. We must use our *daas* and decide on things. Although we cannot ever be sure about our decisions, we have no choice sometimes, and we must decide. But if one makes sure to act more and more with purer intentions, he is granted more Heavenly assistance (a light of Hashem that guides him) to get to the truth.⁹

How Do I Find My True Rebbi?

How do I find my true Rebbi?

A

Chazal taught, “Make for yourself a Rav (teacher) and be removed from doubt.” But there is a doubt as to who your Rav or Rebbi should be. There are a lot of factors for a person to think through, before deciding who his Rebbi is. When a person finds himself in this very fundamental kind of doubt, he needs to feel dependent on Hashem with all his heart, and if he searches for truth earnestly, he will merit that Hashem will show him the way that he needs to go in. This decision cannot come from any human being. Only from the Creator, Whose “Name is certain.” can a person find completely certainty to his doubts. When one feels suffering because he is in doubt about who his Rebbi is, he needs to be happy that this suffering is purifying his being, because this is the primary doubt that is experienced by anyone who searches for Hashem. That is the balance which you need at this point: On one hand, you are in doubt about who should be your Rebbi, and you can be happy that you have pain because of this doubt, but at the same time, you should feel completely dependent on Hashem that only He can clear up this doubt for you. Keep maintaining

⁹ For more on the power of *daas* and how it relates to making decisions, see **Getting To Know Your Thoughts_08_ Connecting To Your Decisions**, and **Fixing Your Wind_013_Bragging Part 1 – The Need For Approval**; see also **Utilizing Your Daas_02_Deciding**.

this balance, back and forth between rejoicing with your doubts and feeling dependent on Hashem, until you are totally connected and dependent, with absolutely certainty, on Hashem.

Can A Tzaddik Go "Off The Derech"?

What is the right attitude to have when *tzaddikim* suddenly have a fall into troubling behavior? How can we rely on any *tzaddik*? Are we supposed to "honor him, but suspect him"? And if we can be suspicious about a certain Rav, how is it possible to receive guidance from him?

A

Throughout all the generations there has always been reason to suspect that this can happen. An example was Yochanan Kohen Gadol [who was a *tzaddik* and became a heretic on the last day of his life]. One needs to cry to Hashem that He place him on a path of truth, because it is impossible to decide in every situation just by using our human logic alone.

Difficulty With Listening To A Rav

I didn't grow up in a "Torah" home, and I returned to Judaism. Some of my biggest problems are when it comes to making a Rav (rabbi) for myself. It might be because I have a problem of *gaavah* (conceitedness). I also have a problem trusting others. How can I solve this issue? (I have heard that once you ask the Rav a , you need to be prepared to do whatever he says, but that you first need to clarify what you're in doubt about, and after thinking it through, you should then nullify your understanding to a Rav's and to do whatever he says. What's the correct approach?)

A

The more earnest and simple that a person is, to that extent he will nullify himself to a Rav. However, if he is more of the intelligent type, he should first try to clarify the Rav's words and try

to understand, and then he should nullify his understanding to the Rav's. This is like what the *Gemara* says (Talmud Bavli Chullin 5b), "They are clever in understanding, yet they make themselves like an animal [to act uningly]." This means that an intelligent person should first clarify a matter in his own mind, and after that he should nullify his understanding to the view of the holy Torah, to one who possesses holy *daas* (understanding) of the Torah, which can uplift him from his current level.

Learning Kaballah

Conditions For Learning Kaballah

I want to ask a question concerning one who wishes to begin learning *sefer* Eitz Chaim. What are the necessary prerequisites that a person needs for this? What inner work and what knowledge does a person need to have, before he begins learning [the study of Kaballah]? What soul preparation does one need, and which *sefarim* does one need to learn, in order to gather the necessary amount of knowledge before entering this study?

And, after that, can a person begin right away with learning the Rav's shiurim on Eitz Chaim? Or should a person first learn alone, using commentaries? For beginners, which commentaries should a person learn? I have read the Rav's preface to the *sefer* Eitz Chaim, and I am aware of the Rav's prerequisite conditions [before beginning to study Kaballah], but I am asking this question for the sake of gaining greater clarity. Many thanks, and a gmar chasimah tovah.

A

There is a way to learn [Kaballah] in a manner of emotional awakening [meaning that one studies the *sefarim* of Kaballah] in order to awaken his soul to holiness, but without plumbing to the depths of its wisdom. This manner of study has been deemed by many as a permissible manner in which anyone can learn [Kaballah]: when one is aware that he is involved in something that is lofty and wondrous.

The other way [to learn Kaballah] is through in-depth study of its wisdom. There are several conditions for this manner of study: 1) Repaired deeds. 2) Repaired character traits, especially the

repair of one's worst character trait. 3) To be immersed in learning the depth of the wisdom of the holy Torah. 4) One needs to have an integrated approach (tefisas achdus) towards the wisdom of the Torah, meaning that he is aware that all of the Torah is one piece [Ed. Refer to Bilvavi Part 8]. The entire Torah shapes man. All opposing concepts in the Torah bear one root. 5) In every "garment" [manifestation of any given concept], one needs to see its root wisdom. 6) To see each thing as a potential force, as opposed to an active force. For the word "*Chochmah*" (wisdom) stands for "koach mah": to know "what is the potential force" here? 7) One needs to be aware of the concept of "movement" in each thing, from where it has moved and to where it is moving towards [Ed. To better understand the Rav's As of 5-8, refer to Da Es Nishmatecha, "Torah Way To Enlightenment"].

On a practical level, the order of one's learning should be: *Sefer Otzros Chaim*, with one of the contemporary commentaries. One should review it several times, until he is intellectually aware of the general picture of the information, even if he doesn't remember all the details. It is possible for one to make this review through learning *sefer Pischei Chochmah V' Daas* of the Ramchal. Then one can learn *sefer Eitz Chaim*, with the commentaries "Yafah Shaah" and "Shemen Sasson." Along with this, one should listen to the shiurim on Eitz Chaim for beginners, and one should make a summary of each section. It should all be done from a desire to grow, deeply, whenever one is learning these *sefarim*. It is also proper to do teshuvah before each learning session.

What Is Pnimityus Hatorah?

What is "*pnimityus* haTorah" (the inner dimension of Torah)? Is it the same thing as learning Kaballah? Is there a difference between the conditions that are necessary for learning "*pnimityus* haTorah" with the conditions necessary for learning Kaballah? Also, where do we find the source for this terminology called "*pnimityus* haTorah"?

A

Pnimityus haTorah refers to the "inner point" which is found in each thing, which unifies each thing together. Kaballah is all about unifying everything together, showing how each thing is a part of the completion of man.

In order to learn Kaballah, one needs the ability to unify information together on a collective level. In order to learn *pnimityus* haTorah, one needs the ability to unify together all the information

pertaining to a particular topic. When one purifies his being on individual level, he can attain a specific kind of unifying, and when one purifies his being on a more collective level, he can attain a more all-inclusive kind of unifying.

The term “*pnimiyus* haTorah” is mentioned a lot of in the words of our Sages, and here are a few sources: See the words of the *Vilna Gaon* in Aderes Eliyahu to Hoshea 2:16, and the commentary of the *Vilna Gaon* to *Tikkunei HaZohar* seventy. See Malbim on Beraishis 3:21, Ohr *HaChaim* to Beraishis 18:4, Midrash Shmuel to Avos 3:14, and the words of the Ramchal in Kitzur Ha*Kavanos*: Tekias Shofar and in Kinas Hashem Tzevaos part II. See also Pischei Shearim: Nesiv Olam H*Atikun*: 22, and the words of the Leshem in *Sefer* HaDeiah: 4:20:4.

Learning Zohar

If one learns Zohar with the explanation of the “Matok M’Dvash.” does this also purify and sanctify his soul, or does it merely provide certain spiritual benefits, without purifying one’s soul?

A

[There are two different ways to learn Zohar:] To read it simply, using the power of *temimus* (earnestness), as well as studying it in-depth, using the power of the intellect. One should combine these two together.

How Should A Yeshiva Bochur Be Introduced To Pnimiyus?

A yeshiva bochur asked me that he wants to really serve Hashem and work on his *pnimiyus* (internal world) and he would like to learn some of the *kavanos* of the Arizal. What does the Rav think about this, and which *sefer* about *pnimiyus* does the Rav recommend for a yeshiva bochur who wants to serve Hashem?

A

It is recommended to learn the *sefarim* of Reb Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, such as *sefer* Tzidkas HaTzaddik, and also *sefer* Michtav M'Eliyahu. After learning these *sefarim*, one can move on to learning *sefer* Nefesh HaChaim, and also *sefer* "Chassidus Mevueres." It is appropriate to begin with these *sefarim*, and at a more mature age one can go further from there.

When entering into the study of *pnimiyus* haTorah, it is more appropriate to enter into this kind of study through developing one's emotions of the soul, as opposed to studying kabalistic *kavanos*. At a later point, only if it is suitable for the person to do it, one can eventually learn the *kavanos* of the Arizal.

SOUL MATTERS

Free Will & The Subconscious

1) Is the “subconscious” synonymous with one’s true bechirah (free will)? The Rav describes that one’s subconscious contains the personality makeup which one receives from one’s parents, and that it contains memories from previous lifetimes, and from one’s past. Are these factors which cause a person to choose certain things in his current lifetime? It would seem that these factors are not the deepest part of the person, and that they are closer to the physical side of one’s life.

2) What about the concept of going “above” one’s conscious (as the Rav describes) – is this the beginning of the revelation of one’s *neshamah*? Does it include all of one’s lifetimes, one’s comprehension in Torah, and one’s ability to see patterns on the forehead?

A

1) In one’s “subconscious,” all one’s past is contained, and it consists of the many complex factors of the reality that is in one’s soul. When one uses his power of bechirah (free will), on a very basic level, he is using a power contained in the “animal” level of the soul, no less than how an animal chooses to do something. There is a more inner motivating factor behind one’s bechirah: the G-dly “spirit” contained in the soul. Even if a person is not conscious of it, it influences his free will.

2) When one goes “above” one’s conscious, this is the free will of the *neshamah* which is choosing to do the will of its Creator, as it was made to do at the time of its inception and when it stood at Sinai. Ever since then, the power of free will is experienced on the “*Ruach*” level of the soul. It can be experienced either in (1) the “*Ruach*” level within the “*Nefesh*” of the soul, or in (2) the “*Ruach*” within the *Ruach* of the soul, or in (3) the “*Ruach*” within the *Neshamah* of the soul, or in (4) the “*Ruach*” within the *Chayah* of the soul, or in (5) the “*Ruach*” within the *Yechidah* of the soul.

In every person, according to his level, there is a conscious and a subconscious level within one’s comprehension. Above one’s comprehension is the area “above” the conscious. Every person, on his own level, has bechirah, on a conscious level as well on a subconscious level.

Getting Into Our Subconscious

How can a person know if his motivations are pure or not?

A

This is a complicated matter, and there are two factors involved with this. Part of our motivations we can clearly identify as holy, and we can clearly identify other motivations that are not holy. All of that is found within our conscious (*muda*, or *hakarah*). However, we also have subconscious motivations (*tat-muda*, or *tat-hakarah*), and even deeper than that layer is the area of above our conscious (*al-hakarah*, or *al-muda*).

The areas of subconscious and above-conscious are hidden from our consciousness and it is subtle *avodah* to get to know them, and there are several methods explained of how to access it. Firstly, though, we need to begin with identifying our conscious motivations. We can know clearly what we want and what we don't want, what we like and what we don't like. Using this area of our consciousness, we can feel if we are having a pure motivation for something or not.

Now, in order to tap into our subconscious and above-conscious, this is a very deep and complicated matter to know, and our greatest leaders worked their entire lives at uncovering their subconscious and above-conscious. In general terms, Rav Dessler zt"l explained that we are able to know what our subconscious motives are by *paying* attention to our quickly passing thoughts. These include thoughts that we like to push away sometimes because we are uncomfortable with such thoughts. Those thoughts make their appearance sometimes and we tend to quickly push them away, and all of this takes place very quickly and we often don't register it. But if we pay attention to those quickly passing thoughts, we are able to discover the thoughts that are coming from deeper in our soul – the area of our subconscious. These are thoughts which we usually think have nothing to do with us. They can be either be positive and holy thoughts, or they can be more shameful and evil kinds of thoughts. When we discover those thoughts, we gain an entirely different awareness towards what's going on inside ourselves.

Most people only recognize themselves from the most superficial area of their conscious. There is almost no one who completely recognizes his true self. However, the more a person goes deeper into himself, the better he can recognize himself. There are many other ways as well (besides for the one we mentioned here), that are explained by our Rabbis of how a person can get deeper into his subconscious.

There is another way brought by our Rabbis of how one can know his deeper motivations: through our dreams at night¹⁰, which show a person his deepest desires that he had during the day. This is based on the verse, “On my bed at nights, I sought that which I loved.” Dreams show us what we thought about during the day, as *Chazal* state, that a person only dreams about at night that which he fantasized about during the day. In addition, they show us what our deeper subconscious desires are. Even when we dream at night of total fantasies, those fantasies are like the ‘waste products’ that are produced from our thoughts and desires, so even the fantasies tell us a lot about ourselves. However, getting to know ourselves through dreams requires much specific guidance.

There were other ways as well which our leaders used in order to know their subconscious. Reb Yisrael Salanter writes about several different ways of how to know it. But these are very subtle matters.

Using The Power Of Breathing To Access The Soul

When a person supposedly “feels something” when he breathes in and out, how does he know if it’s a real feeling and not it in his imagination?

A

Usually, nothing is ever a total fantasy, nor is anything a totally real feeling. There is always some degree of fantasy in everything we feel, and there is always some truth to what we are feeling in every feeling that comes to us. This is because everything we come across in our feelings is always a mixture of fantasy and feeling, and the only issue is in the percentages: How much of the feeling is real, and how much of the feeling is just being imagined. We always need to sort out what we are feeling and try to discern which parts of the feeling are real, and which parts of it are in the imagination. In order to do this, we need to try to name precisely what we are feeling and refine our perception.

¹⁰ See Rosh Chodesh Avodah_009_Kislev_The Meaning Of Our Dreams

What's the connection between breathing and the sense of smell? Is it simply because both of these come from the nose?

A

A very good question. The sense of smell utilizes our nose, and then we are better able to deepen our breathing, which comes in through the nose. Before you begin the breathing exercises, it is indeed recommended to first inhale the scent of something holy, such as an esrog that was used on Sukkos, or besamim that was used for havdalah. This opens the nose in the first place, and then we can deepen the sense of smell, and from deepening the sense of smell we can develop a deepened breathing. Through a physical smell which is found on this world, one can tread its path to open the nose, and then enter the depth contained in breathing. It is therefore very recommended to start with inhaling a scent [of something holy] and use it as a way to enter into our breathing.

How much time is needed for this breathing exercise? Also, after we have already gotten past the first step and we are at the second step, should we still begin each day from the first step, or can we begin immediately each day from the step?

A

At first when you begin to get used to this it should not be more than 3 minutes a day. After that, the amount of time you will need to spend on it depends on how far you have advanced in the *avodah*, and if you are doing it correctly. However, no one should be spending more than 30 minutes a day on it. If you can try this *avodah* in the beginning of the morning, this is even better, as long as your schedule allows it.

What does it mean to reach a 'more inner place' in oneself? Does it mean that you feel calmer? Does it mean that you feel more connected to yourself?

A

Just like when you wade through a pool you feel yourself getting deeper and deeper into it, so do you experience yourself going deeper and deeper the more you try to enter your *pnimiyus*. The more you feel yourself, the more you can discern where you are. When a person becomes connected to *pnimiyus*, it is an experience, and you can feel it, and then there is no room for this .

Difference Between A Jew's Soul And Gentile's Soul

As the Rav has taught based on *Chazal*, a gentile only has a *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul), whereas a Jew contains a more complex soul, which contains five levels: *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*. How can we see the differences between the spiritual abilities of a gentile's soul and a Jew's soul? Can the Rav please explain how the five levels of *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah* are unique to a Jew's soul and how they are not found in a gentile's soul?

A

A Jew's "*Nefesh*" is capable of keeping the 613 *mitzvos* of the Torah, whereas a gentile's *Nefesh* is only capable of keeping the 7 Noachide laws.

A Jew's "*Ruach*" level of the soul is able to access refined character traits which are rooted in the Jew's "G-dly soul." which are entirely good, as well as *middos* that come from *kelipas noga* in the Jew's "animal soul." which are able to become transformed into good *middos*. A gentile's *Ruach* level of the soul is only able to access character traits that come from the "three impure husks." which are based in evil, and which do contain some "sparks" of good.

A Jew's "*Neshamah*" level of the soul is able to attain understanding and comprehension of Torah, whereas a gentile's "*Neshamah*" level of the soul is only able to understand how to keep the 7 Noachide laws, a limited kind of comprehension, which the philosophers succeeded at attaining. Their lower level of understanding is able to comprehend how to fulfill their obligations, whereas their higher level of understanding is able to reach abstract thought, and that was what the philosophers reached. Where their intellect ended, that is where understanding in Torah begins, as the *Vilna Gaon* taught.

A Jew's "*Chayah*" level of the soul is able to draw wisdom from the deeper spiritual source of thought, which is called *ayin* (nothingness), also known as *Ruach HaKodesh* (holy spirit, a state of

enlightenment), whereas a gentile's "*Chayah*" level of the soul is only able to attain logical comprehension, philosophy, abstract thought.

A Jew's "*Yechidah*" level of the soul is able to attain attachment and integration with G-d, cycling back and forth between spirituality and physicality, whereas a gentile's "*Yechidah*" level of the soul is only able to attain "either or." either spirituality or physicality. A gentile cannot harmonize the spiritual and the physical together, because a gentile's soul is fragmented at the root [with no unifying force to hold all the faculties of the soul together].

The Rav explained in a previous response that a Jew's soul can alternate between the spiritual and the physical, whereas a gentile can only do "either or." but it seems that a Jew is also either spiritual or material. What is the difference between a Jew's soul and a gentile's soul?

A

A Jew's soul is able to deal with two extremes at once, unifying together the two extremities at the same time, whereas a gentile cannot unify two extremes together at once.

It is explained in *Chassidus* that every Jew is sent to the world with a specific G-dly mission, and that he receives specific abilities to accomplish his G-d given task. Does a gentile also have a specific mission from G-d?

A

A gentile can have a specific mission from G-d, but it is more external, and his actions cannot become connected with his essence.

Soul-Repair Of Goyim

1) What is the task of the goyim? Is it only to keep the 7 Noachide Laws, and they just have to keep it by rote, with no one to teach them the meaning of the *mitzvos*, since it's forbidden for them to learn Torah? What about the rest of their lives?

2) According to the *sefer* Tanya, the souls of gentiles are rooted in the “three impure shells.” How then are gentiles able to have all kinds of spiritual paths of becoming connected to the Infinite? How are gentiles able to repair their souls, since their souls do not come from *kelipas noga* which is able to be repaired and turned holy, from the three impure shells which cannot be made pure, as the *sefer* Tanya teaches?

A

When a gentile keeps the 7 Noachide laws, this develops his character. Above that level, gentiles are also obligated in any behavior that basic human logic obligates people to do, as Rav Nissim *Gaon* explains in his introduction to the Talmud. This develops the “mind” for gentiles. By keeping the 7 Noachide laws and keeping to all that logical human thinking dictates, they are able to fuse their *middos* (character and emotions), mind, and actions, together. Above that level, they can connect themselves to the Jewish people. A few of them become converts, but the larger amount of them become servants to the Jewish people, as *Chazal* state, that in the future, the gentiles will become servants for the Jewish people.

Gentiles have “sparks” of spirituality in their souls, and that is what enables them to have any spiritual energy. In contrast, the Jewish people have souls that contain both spiritual light and spiritual sparks. The spiritual “sparks” that a gentile can reach are able to illuminate the physicality of the gentile, but this is not strong enough to integrate their physicality with the spiritual. This is because their spirituality is trapped in an imprisoned state. Only in the future will their physicality return to holiness. When gentiles serve the Jewish people and they nullify themselves to the Jewish people, that is precisely their *tikkun* (soul repair).

Identifying What Soul Level I_M At

Is there a way to identify if something is stemming from my *Nefesh*, or from my *Ruach*, or from my *Neshamah*?

A

This is a deep point to know. Most people have not reached beyond the general level that is called “*Nefesh*.” In order to be on the level of *Ruach* (the level of the soul higher than *Nefesh*), a person would have to be in a constant state of feeling emotions. In order for a person to be on the level of *Neshamah*, he would have to be constantly connected to deep thought. There are some people who can live on this level, but they are few and far between. All other people live at the level of *Nefesh*, and they can move up and down within the *Nefesh* itself, but they do not reach the general levels that are called “*Ruach*” and “*Neshamah*.”

Becoming More Spiritual

Does a person become spiritual only after first developing a yearning for the spiritual? Or can even a materialistic kind of person also have a yearning for the spiritual?

A

Every person, even if he is materialistic, has a ‘crack’ by which he can penetrate through to his soul and discover his yearning for the spiritual. The bigger this ‘crack’ is, the greater of a yearning he can access.

How Can I View Spirituality As Real?

I heard the Rav say in a shiur that a person needs to recognize spiritual life just as he recognizes physical life, and that spiritual life is more real than our physical life in front of us. My question is: How can I reach this recognition? The Rav says that this is the way it should be, but how can I truly view spirituality as real as the table in front of me?

A

It is a general way which is all about touching upon the *neshamah* (Divine soul), which feels the spiritual just as much as the body can feel the physical. All of the ways are all about touching upon the *neshamah*. However, the most important thing is exertion in Torah study, with mesirus *nefesh* (intense devotion), and a little of what is explained in *sefer* Da Es Nishmasecha (Torah Way To Enlightenment).

Building The Inner World

1) The Rav has said that the more that a person builds a “world” of his own, the easier it will be for him to learn Torah by himself. What does it mean to build a “world” for yourself? How does a person do this? 2) Is there any *sefer* one can learn which can help one do this?

A

1) When a person needs to be around other people all the time, whether it's family or friends, and he cannot “find himself” unless he is around others, this is an example of a person who has no “world” of his own. In contrast, when a person is able to sit with himself each day and reflect about the purpose of his life and he make an inventory on what he has done until now, and what his aspirations for the future and how he would like to actualize them – this is an excellent way to begin building one's own inner “world.”

2) It is very recommended to learn ‘Da Es Nafshecha’, “Getting To Know Your Soul.”

Knowing Your Personal Mission

What is the perspective that every Jew needs to have towards himself/herself, and how can we become more in touch with it? [How can I know precisely what my main, personal *avodah* in life is (besides for the general task that the Jewish people has)?

A

That is a very complicating matter. Generally speaking, a person has to know his main quality and his main weakness in life, and these are the roots of his *avodah*. The rest are always details which one has to learn about himself, but the root of one's task on this world is to know the depth of his main quality, and the depth of his weakest point. Then one can see the two extremes of his personality, and from then onward, one can figure out the rest of the details that are in between.

Temporary Enlightenment

Since the “*neshamah*” (Divine soul of a Jew) is very far from one's is it possible for a person to feel a closeness with Hashem after gaining a more basic level of self-awareness? Or is this not possible until a person reaches the “*neshamah*” level of the soul?

A

It surely is possible. We have described a path in which we build our way upwards, beginning from the bottom levels and working our way upwards [see Rosh Chodesh *Avodah*_09_ Kislev_ Sleep and Dreams]. It is definitely possible for a person to feel “sparks” of higher levels even before he is there, because the light of the higher levels sometimes shines itself onto the lower levels. However, we will not be able to understand the sparks of the higher levels until we have actually entered more inward.

Every person contains a spark of the *neshamah*, which enables him to feel a deep closeness to Hashem at times, even before he has risen to the higher levels of his existence. There are several ways of how it is experienced. Sometimes it happens when a person has a deep feeling of simple faith in Hashem (*peshitus/temimus*), sometimes it is experienced through a deep experience of *davening*, sometimes it is felt through talking to Hashem, sometimes it can come from feeling a deep love for Hashem.

But it still does not mean that the person's actual soul level is there. There is a ‘crack’ in the soul which enables us to connect deeply to Hashem through those places, as we mentioned earlier, due to the light of the redemption which is closer to us now, which enables the light of the *neshamah* to be more easily accessed. That is why it is easier these days for a person to feel deep experiences in his soul, long before he has entered within.

However, as we said earlier, it doesn't mean that person is actually there at that level. It is just that sometimes, the light of the *neshamah* penetrates into the lower layers of the soul and enables a

person to connect to it easily. Thus, generally speaking, we must work our way upwards, starting from the lower levels of our soul. That is why when we work on our *middos*, we begin working with the lower levels and we work our way upwards, as opposed to beginning from a higher plane. We need to start from the bottom upwards. First we need to recognize the lowest parts of our soul and work our way upwards. We work to ‘build’ ourselves in this organized manner.

It is certainly possible for one to begin with the “*neshamah*” level, but it is a dangerous to do so. There are some people who begin with this path because they cannot deal with their weaknesses, and if they were to begin analyzing their weaknesses, they would do nothing to improve themselves, so they instead begin to enter the “*Neshamah*” level as an alternative. For such people, there is no realistic alternative, so they feel no other option other than to begin with the “*Neshamah*” level. Others are inclined to begin with *Neshamah* because there’s a strong portal available in their souls that enables them to reach their *Neshamah*, and they would have a hard time descending to the lower levels of the soul and working from there. Others want to begin with *Neshamah* simply because they want to see success right away and they wouldn’t want to deal with the failures of their weaknesses that are present in the lower layers of their soul. So it is possible for a person to begin with the *Neshamah* level, but in all of these cases, it is always risky to do so.

The path which we must mainly use to traverse in our *avodas* Hashem is to work in a step-by-step manner, beginning from the lower layers of our soul. This was the main path which our great leaders traversed throughout the generations. There were always exceptions to this who began to work on themselves from the higher plane [of *Neshamah*], but they were still taking a risk, and it is usually dangerous for us to take that unusual route.

Getting To The Innermost Point

How can a person reach the “innermost point” in the soul? Can the Rav explain to us a simple approach of how to do it?

A

Figure out which point is the most open for you, personally. Then keep expanding the point that you’re already opened towards. The point you are already opened to is the “small opening that I found” [an expression used in the *Gemara* in Tractate Kesubos 9a] which you can keep expanding, in order to get to your innermost point.

This is a very important and fundamental basis: To establish that the main part of your *avodah* is to expand upon the point that is already open to you. Otherwise, you would be trying to creating a “new opening.” which is very difficult.

Besides for this, there is also a way for certain individuals: To use the power of *mesirus nefesh* [completely dedicating the soul to service of G-d].

Figuring Out My Soul Root

Is there a way to know which “world” my soul comes from?

A

The world of “Asiyah” corresponds to action. The word of “*Yetzirah*” corresponds to emotion. The world of “*Beriah*” corresponds to intellect. The world of “*Atzilus*” corresponds to *d’veykus* (attachment to G-d).

Each of these four “worlds” also has its own four subdivisions. For example, in the souls that are rooted in the world of *Yetzirah* (emotion), there are souls who are mainly (1) Asiyah within *Yetzirah* – their emotions are mainly expressed in their actions, for example, by doing acts of *Chessed* (kindness) and love. (2) *Yetzirah* within *Yetzirah* - people who are entirely emotional. (3) *Beriah* within *Yetzirah* – people who are aware of the wisdom within their feelings and *middos*. (4) *Atzilus* within *Yetzirah* – people who have *d’veykus* (attachment) in Hashem by way of their *middos*, becoming attached to the *middos* of Hashem.

The other “worlds” can also be divided into any of the 4 worlds. One should clarify where his soul comes from, based on the above. One can know this by identifying what his soul is mainly drawn towards, at his current level. There is a series of 3 shiurim on this topic called Olamos (Getting To Know Your Soul Root).

Are Deathly Ill People More Spiritual?

People who become sick and are deathly ill – are those people more spiritual and disconnected from this physical world?

A

Sometimes you can see how connected deathly ill people are more connected to the Next World. There are all kinds of ways to communicate with deathly ill people when they are unconscious and you can see what's going on inside them. If the illness is making them totally unconscious, it's very possible that they are very much connected with the spiritual, being that they are disconnected from physicality.

Elevating The Soul Of A Deceased Parent

I finished *saying* the Kaddish for both of my parents who were *niftar* (passed away) two weeks apart from each other. When can I do for them in my thoughts? Should I imagine them in Gan Eden, surrounded by their parents and relatives? And - how can I feel them right now?

A

Continue learning Torah and giving tzedakah (charity) and doing various acts of *Chessed* (kindness) on their behalf. Every good deed which you do on their behalf causes an elevation for their *neshamah* (Divine soul). From that, their souls receive Hashem's light.

You don't need to use your power of imagination for this. However, if you feel that it's very important for you to involve your imagination somehow, you can visualize that there is a clear, pure light (a container that houses the "light" of Hashem), and visualize that this light is surrounding and enveloping them. You can do this especially when after you have finished learning Torah or after you have done a good deed on their behalf in order to elevate their souls, and this is because it is through this purity [which comes about through your Torah learning and good deeds] that Hashem's light will be shined upon them.

Go from one accomplishment to another, increasing the light of *kedushah* (holiness) as an elevation for their souls, through your good deeds, words, and thoughts, every day. This is the complete fulfillment of the statement [regarding the *mitzvah* of honoring parents], "He honors him in his life, and he honors him in his death" (Talmud Bavli *Kiddushin* 30b).

GUIDANCE IN TORAH LEARNING

Why Is Gemara So Important?

1. Why does most of a man's time need to be spent on learning *Gemara* in-depth? What do we get out of it that's so important? Why don't we instead spend our time delving into spiritual discussions, as well as learning *halachah* l'maaseh (practical *halachah*) and also hashkafah (Torah ideology)? What do we gain from learning Shas?

2. As a separated, unrelated question to the above, it seems that each of us is bound to stumble in prohibitions of the Torah, since we didn't learn *halachah* properly. For example, we know that if one doesn't learn hilchos Shabbos properly, he is bound to transgress on Shabbos. Doesn't this obligate us to halt our entire daily schedule and learn *halachah* properly? Only after learning *halachah* properly would it make sense to move on to learning Torah for its own sake, with all the analytical and in-depth understanding involved. Isn't it an obligation us to study *halachah* [since ignorance of the *halachah* causes us to stumble]? And isn't there a rule that "Ignorance is not an excuse – you should have learned about it"?

And, if a person learns *halachah* for an hour every day, is he fulfilling his obligation? If he sins out of ignorance, are his sins not regarded, since he is at least in the process of trying to learn *halachah* and fulfill it...?

A

1. *Chazal* state (in Tractate *Kiddushin*) that a person should divide his Torah study into three different areas: Mikra (*Chumash*), *Mishnah* (Mishnayos) and Talmud (*Gemara*). Most of our *Gedolim* did not have the view that a person should spend most of his day on s about the spiritual, or on matters of hashkafah, etc. Our *Gedolim* also did not say that a person should first learn *halachah* until he knows them well, so that he won't stumble upon prohibitions. The truth is that the *sefer* Chovos HaLevovos was of the view that a person shouldn't spend time on pilpul (analytical discussions of the *Gemara*) if it didn't lead to any practical outcomes, and instead, a person should only learn *halachah* that has practical relevance, as well as any matters that are relevant to one's personal *avodah*. However, the Chasam Sofer vehemently opposed the view of the Chovos HaLevovos, arguing that none of our Sages of the Talmud or any of the Rishonim ever had such a view. Be that as it may, it was certainly the view of the Chovos HaLevovos.

Another likewise view is stated in the *sefer* Igros HaRamchal, where the Ramchal wrote in a letter that a person should mainly spend his time on inner wisdom, and not on pilpul. This is also alluded to in the version of Mesillas Yesharim which we possess nowadays, and it was elaborated

upon more in the more recently discovered “version” of the Mesillas Yescharim, entitled Maamar HaVikuach, under the format of a and A.

Most of our *Gedolim*, and practically all of them, were of the view that a person should mainly spend his times of Torah study on learning *Gemara*, and Tur, Shulchan Aruch and the commentaries. This is actually a multi-colored field of study. Some are more drawn towards the practical *halachah* that is derived from learning *Gemara*, while others are more drawn towards becoming immersed in the in-depth, analytical discussions on the *Gemara*.

The truth is that every person has his root area in Torah learning, and therefore each person needs to learn Torah in accordance with his particular area in Torah. It is upon every person to exert himself and clarify what his main area in Torah is – as we *daven* for each day, “And give us our portion, in Your Torah.”

2. Since we don’t find that any of our *Gedolim* held that a person should first learn all of *halachah* and only after that to learn the rest of the Torah, it is apparent that our *Gedolim* were of the view that there is no such obligation. That is why they did not learn in such a manner, and certainly they did not rule that their students should learn in this way, nor did they write about such a way of learning in any of the *sefarim* they wrote. Therefore, it is apparent that the *mitzvah* of learning Torah defines for us what the order of our learning should be, and accordingly, we are able to learn about the defining parameters of each *halachah*.

How Do I Develop My Analytical Abilities In Torah Study?

The Rav speaks about developing the ability of “subtle analysis” and other such intellectual abilities, and how we are able to reach these intellectual abilities through Torah study. How does a person actually get there? All of us learn Torah yet we don’t reach this ability of “subtle analysis” that the Rav is describing.

A

Practical guidance on how to develop your analytical abilities in Torah study is given in the series of “Darkei HaLimud” (Getting To Know Your Way In Torah Learning). To learn how to actually apply your intellectual abilities in Torah study, there are currently over 200 “Bilvavi” shiurim that are available on *Gemara* [currently available on tractates Bava Basra, Beitzah, and other tractates] and on Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat) which may be beneficial to you. However, you mainly

will need to find the approach of in-depth learning that is particularly suitable to you, and the above shiurim (on *Gemara* and Shulchan Aruch) are just examples. Anyone who is used to learning the style of Reb Chaim of Brisk, Rav Shimon Shkop and the Rogotchover are able to recognize very well what “subtle analysis” is.

When it comes to learning agadta parts of *Gemara*, the ability of “subtle analysis” can be discerned, for example, in the *sefarim* of “Pachad Yitzchok.” When it comes to learning Kaballah, an example of “subtle analysis” can be seen when learning the *sefarim* of the Leshem. And when it comes to learning *Chassidus*, this can be discerned for example in the teachings of Chabad *Chassidus*, especially in *Sefer HaErachim* of Toras Chabad.

Learning Alone Vs. With A Chavrusa

Regarding learning with a chavrusa (Torah study partner), I find that when I learn with a chavrusa, my learning goes well and I am concentrating, and I almost don't think about anything else. But when I learn alone, it does not feel like it has much quality to it, it is hard for me, and I am not focused. I feel that if I were to learn alone like when I learn with a chavrusa, I will grow with the help of Hashem and understand better. What advice is good for me – should I learn alone, with the same quality as when I learn with a chavrusa?

A

The more a person generally builds a “world for himself” in all aspects of his life, the easier it will be for him to learn alone. Practically speaking, one needs to specifically do the following. 1) He should get used to learning alone, for a few minutes a day. Slowly, he should increase this time, throughout his progress. 2) He should train himself to think about what he is learning, when he has extra time, and review and make conclusions about what he has learned, as well as through thinking about s and searching for As, on what he is learning. 3) He should get used to having some time of the day in which he makes self-accounting, etc.

Can I Focus On Gemara

I have a lot of difficulty when it comes to focusing on my learning. The moment I try to concentrate, all kinds of thoughts enter my mind and confuse me. This especially happens when I learn *Gemara*. When I learn *Mussar* or *halachah*, though, this doesn't happen as much.

A

Spend some time on learning *Gemara*, and give it your best. The rest of your times can be spent on learning *halachah* and *Mussar*. Gradually, and with a lot of patience, you should increase the amount of time you spend on learning *Gemara*, to the best of your ability.

Unsuccessful In Torah Learning

What is the definition of “a student who doesn't see any blessing in his Torah learning”?

A

1. When one is very drawn towards physical action, as opposed to matters of the intellect.
2. When one is not seeing any actual progress in his learning even when he learns in the correct way, and not simply because he is slackening off in his learning.
3. When one doesn't have a soul connection to learning Torah, after he has deeply clarified the abilities of his soul.

D'veykus While Learning Torah

In *sefer* Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh (Part One), the Rav says in parenthesis that “*d'veykus* (bonding with Hashem) is only for outside of the time of one's Torah learning.” However this wasn't explained in the *sefer* [Can the Rav elaborate on what this means]?

A

The view of *Chassidus* is that a person should interrupt his learning every so often, for a bit of time, and remind himself of *d'veykus* with Hashem, so that he shouldn't forget about Hashem while he is learning. This is written in the *sefarim* which record the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov. The view of the *Nefesh HaChaim* is that a person should interrupt his learning only when he feels that his fear of Hashem has become weaker in his heart.

Self-Absorption While Learning Gemara

When I learn in-depth, and I am involved with trying to understand a certain logic, it is difficult for me to feel that I am learning the words of Abaye and Rava. I feel instead as if I am immersed in myself, trying to reveal my own thinking. Do I need to change my approach?

A

In this case, one needs to internalize the fact that he is learning the Torah of Hashem. There are three levels of this. The highest level is when one is aware that he is learning the Torah of Hashem, the intermediate level is when one is aware that he is learning the Torah that has been explained by the Sages, as the Talmud Yerushalmi states, that when one learns Torah, he should imagine the one who taught those teachings in front of him. The lowest level is when one is aware that he is involved with his own thoughts. One should rise from the lower level to the intermediate level to the higher level, and if it is too difficult to rise to the intermediate level, he should at least rise to the first level.

How Does A Person Learn Pnimityus Hatorah?

1) The Rav explains in the shiurim that the only way to be saved from the “50th gate of defilement” is through the way of the inner dimension of Torah, which means to become connected to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. On a superficial level, I understand this to mean that

people need to learn more about the inner Torah. So the question then becomes: Which holy *sefarim* can the Rav recommend that we learn, which address the inner part of the Torah, so that we can begin and continue the process?

2) How much time a day does the Rav recommend we spend on learning the inner dimension of Torah? And how much time needs to be spent on the external part of learning, such as *Gemara*, *halachah*, *Chumash* and *Mishnayos*?

A

Everything contains an external and inner aspect.

The external aspect of a matter is always about “disparity.” On an impaired level, disparity is epitomized by the dissension of Korach and his followers and all that resulted from their dissension. On the repaired level, disparity is epitomized by the arguments between Hilel and Shamai, of which it is said, “Their words and their words are the words of the living G-d.” Getting more specific, “disparity” is used on a repaired level when one sees all of the parts in something. Rav Chaim Soloveitchik would split every concept into 2 different parts, and the Rogotchover *Gaon* would split everything into 3 different parts. Getting even more specific, one uses “disparity” on a repaired level by seeing all of the different factors and aspects of a matter. One can split every matter into two different points, right and left, or into 3 different points: right, left, and middle. The idea is to take one concept and split it into either 2 or 3 parts – to see all the different parts to the matter.

The inner aspect of a matter, however, is always about unification and oneness. It is to see how all the different details are rooted in one matter, and how all of the details can be returned to their root. This is epitomized by the rule of “kelal, prat, klal” – the inclusion, then the exclusion, then the inclusion.” It is to begin from the klal/whole and then return to the klal/whole. It is to take 2 different concepts and unify them into one. This way is explained often by the Rogotchover *Gaon*, author of *Tzafnas Paneach*. There is a statement in the name of the Chazon Ish that Rav Chaim Soloveitchik turns 1 matter into 2 matters, and the Rogotchover turns 2 matters into 1 matter. This is part of his way in Torah learning. He would also turn 1 matter into 3 different matters, as mentioned earlier, but instead of splitting 1 matter into 2, he formulates two extremes and then a third middle point which connects them together. This is what it means to learn the Torah on an inner level.

Therefore, there is an external layer as well as an internal layer when it comes to the surface understanding of Torah (*pshat*), the hinted understanding (*remez*), the homiletic interpretations of

the Sages (derush), and the secret understanding (sod). This is what we mean when we say that a person should also learn the inner dimension of the Torah.

Since there are different levels of souls, each person has his own root in Torah. Therefore, each person needs to learn his own share. Included in one's personal share is to learn the Torah both on an external level as well as on an internal level, as explained above. How much time does one need to spend learning the external part of his Torah learning, and how much time should he spend on the inner way to learn Torah? This is subjective, for it depends on each person's unique soul root and each person's share in the Torah. But all people will need to touch upon the inner method of learning Torah, even if only a little, for that is where one will become unified, with his soul, with the collective whole of the Jewish people, with all of the creations, and with his root – with the Creator.

The 12 Root Ways Of Learning A Sugya

1) In the Rav's series of practical guidance in the ways of learning Torah, the Rav mentions how there are different ways of analyzing a sugya of *Gemara* which are rooted in the 12 tribes. Can the Rav explain briefly what these 12 different ways are and how each path is rooted in one of the 12 tribes? 2) Also, is it possible for a person to learn a sugya according to the way of thinking of a certain tribe if he doesn't descend from that tribe? For example if a person descends from the tribe of Reuven can he still have a personality and a way of thinking which is rooted in a different tribe?

A

1) The following is a brief explanation, and it is only one side to this matter.

The approach in Torah learning rooted in the tribe of "Reuven" is when one can see the possible outcomes. Reuven's name is from the word reu, to see, a hint to the teaching of the Sages "Who is wise? He who sees the outcome."

The approach of Torah learning rooted in the tribe of "Shimon" is when one can develop a sevara (comprehensible logic). As the *Gemara* says, "You don't hear me, you don't comprehend like me." Shimon's name is from the word shemiah, to "hear." and in the aforementioned statement of the Sages, "hearing." a hint to Shimon, is linked with developing sevara (comprehensible logic).

The approach of Torah learning rooted in the tribe of “Levi” is: Formulating a logic that is aligned and connected with a corresponding view of his. The word “Levi” means to connect together.

The approach of Torah learning rooted in the tribe of “Yehudah” is: When one comprehends the very essence of a matter. The word Yehudah contains the four-letter name of *havayah*, which is a name of Hashem that is more connected with the very essence of Hashem.

The approach of Torah learning rooted in the tribe of “Yissocher” is: When one uses the power of *binah* (detailed logic), which can be used to figure out matters of astronomy, as the *Gemara* says regarding Yissocher, that Yissocher’s blessing is that he “understands the knowledge about the times [the knowledge of astronomy].”

The approach of Torah learning rooted in the tribe of “Zevulun” is: Connecting distant sugyos of *Gemara* together. This is because Zevulun’s blessing is that he brings his sustenance from afar, which also refers to bringing Torah knowledge from afar [i.e. sugyos of *Gemara* that are seemingly very far from each other] and connecting it to the current sugya.

The approach of Torah learning rooted in the tribe of “Gad” is: Extending abstract, theoretical ideas into the materialization of the ideas. [This is because Gad’s name is from the words Ba Gad, Ba *Mazal*, and *mazal* means to flow and extend]. An example of this was the way of learning of Rav Shimon Shkop.

The approach of Torah learning rooted in the tribe of “Asher” is: Having a clear, organized picture of the sugya, leaving no room for one to make mistakes in. This is the meaning of Asher’s blessing that his produce brings “delicacies for the king.”

The approach of Torah learning rooted in the tribe of “Dan” is: Gathering together all the views on the sugya. This is the meaning of how Dan “gathers together all the camps.” Another point: Since the tribe of Dan camped at the edge, next to the Erev Rav (the Mixed Multitude), Dan’s role is to counter the evil “mixture” of the Erev Rav, by mixing together different aspects which do not create confusion, but which create a blend. Dan’s role is to discern what can be mixed and combined together, and to avoid mixing together anything that shouldn’t be mixed.

The approach of Torah learning rooted in the tribe of “Naftali” is: Perseverance and exertion to understand the sugya until one plumbs to the end of the depth of a matter. The word “Naftali.” Rashi explains, means “I stubbornly persevered.”

The approach of Torah learning rooted in “Yosef” is: When one develops his own chiddushim (novel insights) and adds to those insights. This is hinted to in the term *shomeia u’mosef*, one who

hears words of Torah and then adds it on to his own insights [one of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah].

The approach of Torah learning rooted in “Binyamin” is: Building and developing the structure of the sugya (tzurasa d’shmaatsa). A hint to this is that the Beis HaMikdash was “built” in Binyamin’s portion, alluding to Binyamin’s ability to “build” the overall, general picture of a sugya.

2) All of these abilities are contained in each person’s soul, and each person needs to clarify which way is meant to become his primary approach in learning Torah. Getting subtler, it is also known that each of these paths can really be a subdivision of another path. For example, one can have an approach in learning that looks like the approach of “Reuven” but it can really be part of a way of learning that is categorized as “Shimon.” and vice versa. But there is always a root approach for any of the approaches listed. Each approach really contains all 12 approaches, so that there can be 12 branching paths to any of these 12 root approaches, but each person always has one root way of learning. This was all clearer when our souls were not yet placed in exile, when our souls were more aligned [with our particular soul roots]. Throughout exile, our souls have undergone different lifetimes, and therefore it is possible that one is learning in his current lifetime in a way that is not aligned with his correct soul root.

The Breslev Way Of Learning Gemara

What is Rav’s view on Rebbe Nachman of Breslev’s approach in Torah learning, which is mentioned in Sichos HaRan (76), which Reb Nosson of Nimerov explains as “very quick learning, without getting confused, not to get stuck on something you don’t understand, and to just continue learning, and the next time around you will try to understand it.” and that “It’s better to accumulate a lot of pages of Torah learning [rather than focus on in-depth study]? Also, he said that merely “*Saying* the words, even without understanding, is called Torah learning.”

Does the Rav approve of learning Torah in this way, if a person feels connected to this style of learning? If a person has more cheishek (love) for this kind of learning, should he continue learning in this way?

A

There are two parts to Torah learning: ligmar (simplistic, non-analytical learning) and lisbar (explaining and understanding). The simple way to learn Torah is to “begin from below.” which means that one starts from ligmar (simplistic learning) and later lisbar (explaining and understanding). But there is also a way to “begin from above.” where one can gain Torah wisdom from its higher source which is called *ayin* (the spiritual but non-analytical dimension), and this is by beginning to learn Torah with *peshitus* (simplicity/ligmar) which leads to *haskalah* (lisbar/in-depth understanding in Torah). This is the way of Torah learning mentioned in *sefer* Sichos HaRan - to begin learning Torah simplistically and non-analytically, which connects the learner to the level of *ayin*, and this leads towards understanding one’s Torah learning.

The practical way to go about this approach, for someone who very much wants to “begin from above.” is to integrate together the approaches of “beginning from above” (starting with lisbar/analytical and in-depth Torah learning), with “beginning from below” (starting with ligmar/simplistic non-analytical Torah learning), by putting a bit more emphasis on “starting from above” (beginning with simplistic learning) and later analyzing what one learns, trying to understand what he has learned.

That is the approach for one who very much desires this kind of Torah learning, because [when one desires to learn simplistically], that is the person’s unique share (*cheilek*) in Torah learning.

When To Become A Rebbi (Torah Teacher) To Others

When can a person know if the time has come for him to spread and teach Torah to others?

A

A person is comprised of three parts: 1) What he receives from others. 2) His own self. 3) What he gives and influences upon others.

Those are three stages of a person’s life. At first a person needs to receive [Torah education] from his parents and teachers. After that, one can gradually build and develop his own character. When one grows up and matures, he can eventually be of influence to others. Compare it to the difference between a child and an adult – a child cannot bear child, but when he grows up and becomes an adult, he can bear children. A person is considered to be like a child as long as he relies on his parents for support, when he is still in the first stage, being a “receiver.”

So a person needs to see if his first stage, “receiving,” was traversed properly. If it was, then a person’s main task now is to build and develop his character, outwardly and inwardly. On the outward level, one needs to be consistently immersed in Torah study, firmly planted in the world of Torah learning. On the inward level, a person needs to develop a deep connection within himself to the holy Torah and to its Giver. After that, one can be of influence to others, from the immense spiritual light that he has gained. When a person is helping and influencing others, he also gains personal blessing from this.

There is a famous analogy of the Maggid of Dubna that illustrates how one can be of influence to others only after he has developed himself first: When a cup isn’t yet filled to the top and we pour it into another cup, the second cup will become filled but the first cup will lose some liquid. Instead of making the first cup lose some liquid, we should fill the first cup all the way until it is overflowing and it spills into the next cup, so that it will still be a full cup, even after spilling into the next cup. [So too, one should only influence others if he is first spiritually ‘full’, where he can then be beneficial to others without compromising on his own growth, as opposed to influencing others before one is spiritually ‘full’, where he will stop growing if he tries to influence others].

However, sometimes a person did not yet complete the first part of his life – the necessity to receive from others – and in many cases, a person also did not yet develop his personality yet. He may seek various teaching positions, though, because he is feeling peer pressure – he will feel that he is one of those “unsuccessful” people in the eyes of his friends, if he doesn’t get a position. Or, alternatively, he may not be finding *chiyus* (vitality) and *sippuk* (satisfaction) from within himself, and he hopes that by teaching others, he will find that vitality or satisfaction he is missing. Or, sometimes he may be seeking a teaching position because he is really running away from his own self. It may also stem from a desire for honor, power, money, or other self-serving factors. Therefore, a person needs to examine his motivations deeply, when he seeks to teach and influence others: Why do I want to do this? Then, he can know how to act accordingly, depending on the circumstance.

When a person has not yet developed his character – whether it is because he hasn’t received enough [knowledge] from others or whether he has not yet built his personality – if he tries to teach and influence others in this deficient state, it is a sign of a flaw in his character, and he will not be able to influence correctly.

However, there does exist a need in the soul to influence others. Sometimes, even a very deficient person can help his situation by teaching and influencing others, because he is inspiring and strengthening himself by helping others learn. This is a very common occurrence nowadays. Without going to teach others, a person may find it too hard to work on himself and overcome his

weaknesses. It is within his bechirah to choose, if he will be very devoted to working on himself, or if he will begin influencing others.

If one does choose to influence others rather than work hard on himself, one will need to balance his daily schedule. He will need to set aside time of the day where he tries to fix his weaknesses. One needs to be very careful that he shouldn't run away from himself in the name of influencing others. Firstly, a person who is involved with influencing others may become bombarded by all kinds of responsibilities, as part of his job. Even more so, he may stop growing, because he may no longer want to receive more knowledge from others nor work on developing his character any further.

This does not only apply to one who began to teach and influence others without first working on himself enough. It is also true for someone who was properly developed before teaching others. Such a person also needs to set aside time every day to continue his personal growth. This must be done for all of his lifetime. A person always needs these three aspects – receiving from others, building his own character, and influencing others. It is just that the balance between these aspects is different with each person, and also depending on the period a person is in. But the common denominator between all people is that a person should never be in a position of teaching and influencing others in a way that totally uproots him from his own inner world, *chas v'shalom*.

The secret of the success of those who are very in touch with their inner world is because on one hand, they are deeply immersed in their own inner world, but they also know how to [leave their private growth and] be of influence to others, giving others all their best.

Practically speaking, generally a person should not seek a place where he can teach and influence. Rather, one needs to *daven* to Hashem from the depths of the heart: that if he feels a need to teach and influence others, and the need arises for him to do so, that Hashem should enable this to happen, in a way that is pleasant, and not in a way which causes machlokes (dissension) among others. For if there is any machlokes involved in trying to get any position, a person should run from it as if he is running away from a fire.

In the meantime, a kolel avreich should be immersed in his soul in the word of Torah learning and *avodas* Hashem, along with *davening* to Hashem, as explained above. One should try as much as he can not to think about this [gaining a teaching position], on his own level (as each person is on a different spiritual level).

HASHKAFAH | The Torah Perspective on the Workforce

Should I Learn Or Earn?

Isn't there such a thing as the concept of "Yissocher and Zevulun." that Zevulun goes to work so he can support Yissocher's learning? So why can't we all be like Zevulun, and our purpose in life is to perhaps work so we can support others' learning? Perhaps that is my tafkid (role) in life?

A

Reichman (the famous wealthy supporter of yeshivos), once asked Rav Shach, "Who has more Olam HaBa, me or you? I uphold the entire world of Torah, while the Rosh Yeshivah teaches the Torah." Rav Shach responded, "I don't know which of us has more Olam HaBa. That, only Hashem knows. But one thing I know for sure: I do enjoy This World, because I learn Torah and teach it my whole life, but you don't have real enjoyment on This World at all."

Once I met a person who works for many hours a day, and I asked him, "Why do you work for so many hours a day?" He told me, "Because I want to be able to have a lot of money to give tzedakah with." I said to him, "Why didn't the Chofetz Chaim think of that too? Why didn't he go to work so he could give tzedakah?"

I'll tell you another story. There was a student of Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, a great Rosh Yeshivah in *Eretz Yisrael*. (As a side note, if you want to know how to learn *Gemara* b'iyun, you should peruse his *sefarim*, which are called "*Shaarei Shemuos*"). One of his students learned by him in Yeshivas Beer Yaakov, and then he moved to America. He was learning for a few years and then he felt he had to go stop learning and go to work. He called Rav Shapiro and asked him if the Rosh Yeshivah agrees with his decision. Rav Shapiro said to him, "Absolutely not. There is nothing to discuss." Rav Shapiro is one of the people in the generation who knows how to do the "Goral HaGra" (a mystical tradition on how to search for an Ato problems by opening up a special kind of *Chumash*). He only did the "Goral HaGra" for communal purposes, and he would never use it for private issues of people who came to him. The student asked Rav Shapiro if he could make an exception for him and perform a "Goral HaGra" for him to let him know if he should continue to sit and learn or instead go to work. Rav Shapiro responded that he only uses the "Goral HaGra" for communal issues, not for personal issues of an individual. Rav Shapiro was the fundraiser for the Yeshivah for half of the year (and Rav Wolbe took him over for the other half of the year); when he came to America to collect for his yeshivah, the student came to him and told him, "Now that I'm driving the Rosh Yeshivah around and enabling him to collect money, I should have the status of a community, not an individual." In the end, Rav Shapiro agreed to make for him a "Goral HaGra."

He opened up the *Chumash* and the possuk said, “For six days you shall work, and on the seventh day, you shall rest.”

It sounded like the “Goral HaGra” was *saying* that he should go to work. But that’s because this person wanted to go work! For *Chazal* say: “In the way a person wants go in, he is led.”

If Eliyahu HaNavi comes and tells you that your soul is from the tribe of Zevulun, you can act like a Zevulun. [Otherwise, you can’t assume that your tafkid is to be like a Zevulun].

Transitioning From Kolel To The Workplace

1) I am a kolel avreich who spends most of the day learning Torah. Recently I gave a loan to a friend, using a hester iska, but he lost more money since then and he cannot pay me back right now. In the meantime I have had to pay the banks a lot of money. I have 5 children, Baruch Hashem, and my wife works, but her income is not enough to cover the expenses. I have always heard from my Rebbeim that a kolel avreich “eats from the manna.” and the truth is that I have seen much siyata d’shmaya. The is, what is my obligation of *hishtadlus* (effort) right now – do I need to go out to work, or should I just have *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem and *daven*?

2) How can I know what Hashem wants from me, and why these debts have incurred on me?

A

1) Some people have a soul that is rooted in the realm of “*asiyah*.” “action.” and therefore the very nature of their souls are drawn towards “action” – in particular, the “actions” which people need to do within this “world of action.” This is called *asiyah d’asiyah*, “action within action.” For those people, it is proper to engage in a profession which utilizes a physical talent that they have, according to whatever talent Hashem has graced one with. One needs to choose a livelihood that is as close as possible to *kedushah* (holiness). Others’ souls are rooted in *Yetzirah* d’*asiyah*, “formation within action.” and their main talent lies in artistry, craftsmanship, and the like. Others have souls that are rooted in *Beriah* d’*asiyah*, “creation/thinking within action.” and they excel mainly in areas of logical calculation. Others have souls that are rooted in *Atzilus* d’*asiyah* “closeness/bonding within action.” and their main talent is in creativity, ideas.

In contrast to the above categories of souls (who are all rooted in *asiyah*/action and who need to engage in a profession, by their very soul root) are those whose souls have a more “inner” root [i.e. they may have a soul that is rooted in either *Yetzirah*, *Beriah*, or *Atzilus*]. For them, it is appropriate to spend the main part of their life on developing their inner world.

That has always been the case, throughout the generations. However, in the current generation, which is unbridled in its breakdown of boundaries, going out to work opens a person to the world on the outside, and it is dangerous to one’s *ruchniyus* (spiritual development). Therefore, in today’s times, going out into the world to earn a profession is no longer a simple matter as it used to be, and it needs to be very carefully thought about beforehand. There are people who do not have conviction to learn Torah all day, but if they go out to work, they are being exposed to the outside world and with no Torah learning to protect them spiritually. They are in spiritual danger, when they go out to work. On the other hand, if they stay in the *beis midrash* all day and they aren’t learning, they are simply bored, and the Sages state that “boredom leads to insanity.” Therefore, every case requires much thinking beforehand, and great *siyata d’shmaya*, in order for one to know if he should go to work, and what kind of profession it should be, and how, and all the other details involved. And a person will always need to *daven* earnestly, from the depth of the heart, in order to decide properly. He will also need to *daven* each day to be saved from all of the inappropriate sights and influences which are in all of the workplaces today.

It is clear that most people who have gone out to work in the last decade did not do so with enough thinking beforehand, and this has caused spiritual destruction to come upon the generation. There were people who went out to work and they didn’t really need to, and the kinds of jobs which they chose were inappropriate for them, totally unbecoming for a person who is part of the Torah world. Because of this, the generation has become desolate and spiritually destroyed, through the outside world that has mixed into the once sheltered Torah world. It is the realization of the statement of the Sages, “There is no day that isn’t more cursed than the day before it.” because people who were once part of the Torah world are going to out to work in all kinds of unsuitable professions, and are thereby uprooted, *Rachmana Litzlan*, from all inner holiness. In addition to this, there is also the problem of men and women mixed together in the workplace. May Hashem redeem us all from this.

There are also souls who have a higher root than *asiyah* (action), and they may also need to work for income. Sometimes, going to work for them is a result of the exile, which places the soul in exile, in a place where it doesn’t want to be. However, this matter is determined according to one’s personal level of *bitachon* (trust in Hashem). Therefore, in each case, the following factors must be considered: what is the general situation of income for one’s family, and what level of *bitachon* is the person on? After carefully weighing these two factors together, one can then decide what he

needs to do. A person is able to act a little above his current level of *bitachon* (and have a little bit more *bitachon* than he has right now), but not beyond that level. A person always needs to do a little bit of *hishtadlus* (effort), and to greatly strengthen his *bitachon*, acting a bit above his current level of *bitachon*. A soul which is more sensitive to the spiritual will be able to feel how it is easier to work on *bitachon*, than to have to work hard in order to make a living.

2) One should reflect on his personal weaknesses and then write them down. After that, one should think of the easiest weakness to work on, and then he should begin to repair it.

KIRUV

Best Way To Do Kiruv

I am involved in kiruv. I would be happy to receive guidance from the Rav about what I should be busy with when I am involved with others in my work, in a way that will be of benefit to me as well.

A

Be involved with them from the deepest place in yourself that you currently recognize, from amidst clarity and untainted truth. Meaning, be involved with others from within your own inner quality, as opposed to superficially “being mekareiv as many people” as you can. Try to get through to their hearts, to the point of truth that is in every Jew. Try to open up their minds to learning the holy Torah, and make sure to emphasize to them that there is a great, intellectual enlightenment which can be found in learning Torah. Emphasize a deep, analytical kind of Torah learning, as opposed to learning superficially. Also, show them how “Hashem is good to everyone.” and how Hashem’s ultimate “good” is found in His Torah, and throughout His Creation.

Helping Kids At Risk

What should be a person’s attitude towards kids who have thrown off the responsibilities of Torah and *mitzvos* (Rachmana Litzlan)? In our community there are many boys and girls who have “gone off the derech.” and many of them even come from prominent families of G-d fearing, bnei Torah. It’s so painful for any person to see these kids. When I see them, I immediately start thinking of what I can do to help draw them closer. I have a desire to draw all of them closer to Yiddishkeit, but I don’t know exactly how. What can I do for them? Should I learn Torah as a merit for their souls? Should I speak to them warmly and with love? Should I judge them favorably and smile at them and greet them? What can I do, and what can we do for them...??

A

Not everyone can actually be involved with them. Certain personality traits and conditions are required, in order to get involved with helping them.

First of all, you need to be able to “come down to their level” [to relate to what they are going through], but without falling down with them. Many times, people who are involved with helping them end up falling in with them, and to a very low level. Well-meaning people come to help these kids with the intentions of kiruv (drawing others closer to Yiddishkeit), and in the end they themselves become distanced further from Yiddishkeit. This happens because when a person talks to them, he opens his soul to another person’s world and he becomes connected to the other person’s life, and currently, the other person is involved with the worst kinds of behaviors. [Therefore, when one talks to the other person, he becomes very connected to the other’s life and all that’s going on in it, and he falls in with him.]

Also, these kids are often broken souls, not just from a spiritual viewpoint, but also from emotional viewpoint. They are suffering emotionally, whether they are depressed, melancholy, full of despair, unstable, lacking love from their parents, etc. When one connects with the emotional suffering that these children or teenagers are going through, he will also suffer emotionally with them [to the point that it is emotionally unhealthy for him to be involved].

In other scenarios, a person will need to go to certain places to be mekareiv others, and these places are really inappropriate to be in. Sometimes a person will bring the struggling child or teenager into his house, and this can have a bad influence on his own children.

One needs a lot of understanding of the soul in order to know how to deal with these children or teenagers, and to know how he should act with them and how to speak to them. One also needs to show a warm, friendly countenance towards them, and he also needs to possess a good heart, and to be very giving towards others, and to be willing to let go of the comfort zone of his own soul.

Therefore, it is not appropriate for every person to do this. So, it would be appropriate for you to *daven* for them. *Daven* also, from the depths of your heart, for all those in *Klal Yisrael* who have lost their way, for the collective salvation and rescue of the Jewish people and for each individual’s salvation and rescue – both for their spiritual needs and their material needs.

If you want to determine what you can do for these kids in terms of action, you should clarify to yourself what you can or cannot do for them, based on the aforementioned guidance, which described the boundaries of what’s appropriate and what’s not appropriate.

And, understandably, you also need to take into account if any of this work in helping kids will compromise on your “three main pillars.” which are: your time for Torah learning, the time you need for *davening*, and the time you spend on doing *Chessed*. So you will also need to determine [after determining if you are cut out for this job in the first place] how much time you will still have and how much energy you will need to spend on each of these areas [if you want to be involved with helping kids who are struggling].

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How We Should View The Non-Religious

How should we relate to a Jew who desecrates Shabbos and commits other evils? How should we relate to him with love for another, how can we include ourselves with him, etc.?

A

Our relationship towards them [irreligious Jews] should be out of true love, and we can involve ourselves with them to the extent that [the relationship] is not bringing one down [spiritually] – and only if [the spiritual descent from being involved with them] is minimal, to the extent that one can easily return to his previous level.

DATING & MARRIAGE

Guidance For Dating & Shidduchim

[BOYS]

- 1) What is a person's *avodah* when he is looking for a shidduch (wife)? What are the different factors involved and what does a ben Torah need to know and be aware of?
- 2) How can a person be mechazeik (strengthen) himself during this period of his life, such as when he encounters disappointment or when a long time has passed and he hasn't yet found his shidduch?
- 3) If a boy's parents have done research on the girl, does a boy need to submit himself totally to his parents, and just believe with *emunah* that they are messengers of Hashem to help him find his shidduch, and therefore he shouldn't have any opinion of his own? Is it appropriate for a boy to tell his parents what he wants, or should he just rely on his parents?
- 4) If a boy has met the girl a couple of times and he has a general good feeling about her, and in general he feels that they share the same hashkafah and they have pleasant, flowing conversations – how can he know if this is his shidduch? Is there any siman (sign) that this is his shidduch?
- 5) What should be the conversations be like between a boy and a girl when they are on a date? If the boy is very deep and spiritual, and he wants to speak with the girl about deep, spiritual matters in Torah, or in hashkafah, or about the soul – and he wants to have such a conversation with the girl because he is trying to determine if he shares a “language of the soul” with her – is there anything wrong with this? Should a boy just talk to the girl about his life and her life, and the news or events that go on in the world, etc.? Or should he begin to talk about “worldly” things only in the beginning of the conversation, and only later in the conversation should he try to speak about deeper and spiritual matters with her? Perhaps it's better if he avoids having deep conversations with her, and he should just keep the conversation limited to discussing their past and current experiences of their lives?
- 6) In order for a boy to “seal” his shidduch, does he need to decide this based on logic alone, such as by determining if he and the girl are compatible with each other? Or does he need to “feel” some kind of emotion towards her? (I want to emphasize here that I am not talking about anything that has to do with “falling in love.” *chas v'shalom*, which is the language of the streets). Rather, what I mean to ask is if there needs to be some kind of feeling or emotion that “this is the right girl for me.” or not). This will really come to play in a scenario where a boy doesn't “feel” anything towards the girl, or if he is confused in his thoughts or

he is having conflicting emotions about the decision he is about to make, but intellectually he knows that this is a good shidduch for him. Should the boy go ahead with proposing anyway, in spite of the doubts and confusion he is having about making this decision? Or does his decision to marry this girl need to come from total yishuv hadaas (a settled, calm mind)?

[GIRLS]

7) What is the *avodah* of the bas Yisrael (Jewish girl) during the period of shidduchim? How can a bas Yisrael be mechazeik (strengthen) herself if a long time has gone on already when she hasn't yet found her shidduch, or whenever she encounters disappointments, or when she sees how all her friends and sisters are already married with children, etc.?

A

[BOYS]

This is an expansive topic and I will try here with siyata d'shmaya to respond, briefly.

1) Firstly, a person needs to review the principle of *emunah* peshutah (simple faith in G-d) that it is only Hashem Who decides who will become his shidduch. However, in spite of this, a person needs to put in the *hishtadlus* (effort), according to his current level, and make the necessary research. In addition, a person should also write down a list of his priorities and what he is looking for in a spouse. On the list, he should write down what's important to him and what is less important to him. He should write them down in order of preference. Based on his list, he should then go about searching for his shidduch.

2) One needs to examine if he is truly looking for what he "needs" or if he is merely looking for what he "wants." in a shidduch. This is a very fundamental aspect which a person needs to examine. In addition, one needs to *daven* from the depths of his heart, and with simple earnestness. One also needs to keep reviewing the idea of *emunah* peshutah with himself.

3) This matter will depend on how much the parents are involved in a boy's shidduchim, and it also depends on one's *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem, that only He is in control. Even when a boy needs to assert himself to his parents [about how he feels about pursuing a certain shidduch or not], he should do so only with advice from a Torah scholar who has experience in these matters and who can guide him sensibly. [When a boy voices his opinions to his parents about a shidduch], it must be done in a refined way and in a way that does not compromise on the *mitzvah* of honoring parents.

4) A boy should wait a bit of time, until he feels calm and more objective, when his excitement has worn off a bit. He can sense somewhat of a “connection” to the girl when he reaches a calm, inner place in his soul. If he can feel a “connection” to her that feels calm and subtle, he should continue with the shidduch (as long as all other external conditions have been met). Along with this, one needs to have strong *emunah* that “Only Hashem decides who my spouse is - not me.”

5) In any conversation on a date, one should try to open up a point that is a bit meaningful, and based on how well those conversations go, one should determine how much of a connection he feels towards her. However, although that is the general rule, for all rules there are exceptions, so this will depend on what kind of girl it is.

6) The decision [of the boy to marry this girl] needs to always come from *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind), but it is enough if a boy has a feeling that this girl is appropriate for him.

[GIRLS]

7) Refer to Point #2 (One needs to examine if she is truly looking for what he “needs” or if she is merely looking for what he “wants.” in a shidduch. This is a very fundamental aspect which a person needs to examine. In addition, one needs to *daven* from the depths of her heart, and with simple earnestness. One also needs to keep reviewing the idea of *emunah* peshutah with herself).

One should be aware that all of our life is meant to be used a tool to ingrain *emunah* in ourselves. This is unlike the prevailing superficial attitude about shidduchim, which views *emunah* purely as a means to attain one’s shidduch. [Hence it is really the other way around: the period of shidduchim, and all other periods of our life we go through, are all tools to bring us to *emunah*].

One needs to examine if he is truly looking for what he “needs” or if he is merely looking for what he “wants.” in a shidduch. This is a very fundamental aspect which a person needs to examine. In addition, one needs to *daven* from the depths of his heart, and with simple earnestness. One also needs to keep reviewing the idea of *emunah* peshutah with himself.

Trouble Finding A Zivug

If a person isn’t married, does that mean that he or she is being deprived of the pleasure of being married, and it is a sign that it isn’t really necessary for this person to be married?

A

Almost all people that come into this world need to find their zivug (marriage partner). There are rare instances in which a person doesn't find his or her zivug. This can either be due to a punishment upon that particular soul of being sentenced to descend to this world without be able to finding a zivug, or, it can happen for an opposite reason: there are sometimes *tzaddikim* who don't come down for their own *tikkun* (soul-rectification), but only in order to help others achieve their *tikkun*, and therefore they don't have a zivug. This is reminiscent of how Moshe Rabbeinu separated from his wife Tzipporah, and also of the sage Ben Azai who never married. But usually, when a person isn't finding a zivug, it is because some factor is holding back the zivug, and the fact that he or she is not finding a zivug does not mean that it is not necessary to get married.

May Hashem send you your zivug quickly, and may it be your true zivug, according to your soul root.

More Than One Soul-Mate

The Shulchan Aruch (Even HaEzer 1:9) rules that a person is allowed to marry many wives, but that the Sages advised against marrying more than four women. I want to understand how this can be reconciled with the statement of *Chazal* that a person's zivug (destined mate) is announced 40 days before conception. Does this mean that only one zivug for a man is announced? Or do they announce more than one zivug for him? Also, how does this work out with the words of the Mekubalim about the concept of "soul roots." that a husband and wife come from the same soul root – is this only true about one's first wife, or would it also apply to other wives he marries [even during the lifetime of the first wife]...?

A

At the root, each person has his zivug (destined mate). However, afterwards, a division took place in which one soul became divided into many different parts. For example, there are five names of the soul, the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*. At first all of these levels of the soul were attached together, and later they became divided from each other. It is possible for the "*Nefesh*" part of one's soul to be in one person's body, while the "*Ruach*" part of his soul [which had been previously attached with his *Nefesh*] is in another person's body. There is also a further subdivision of the soul, because each of the five parts of the soul contains the levels of *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*, so there is a "*Yechidah*" part of one's "*Nefesh*." and etc.

Therefore, it is possible for one's true zivug to be found in several women. One's "*Nefesh*" can be found in Leah, while his "*Ruach*" can be found in Rachel, etc. If a person is meritorious enough, he merits that "his zivug comes to him." so that even if his zivug only contains a part of his soul, he can merit to join with the other parts of his soul, either through the concept of "ibbur" (lit. "impregnating" – when another's soul becomes added onto his own), or through gaining a "nitzotz." a "spark." of another's soul. This concept is explained about in *Sefer HaGilgulim*, and in the Shaar HaGilgulim [of the Arizal], and others.

[Joining with] the actual root of the soul is called [joining with] one's "first zivug." while [joining with] all other divided parts of one's soul are called [joining with] the "second zivug." an additional soul-mate.

Masculinity & Femininity In Marriage

It is written, "To your husband you shall desire" [a wife feels emotionally dependent on her husband]. Why is it that sometimes we find the opposite [that a man feels dependent on his wife]? Does this have to do with the different elements of the couple, such as a husband whose main element is water, and a wife whose main elements are wind and fire? And, how can this issue be fixed?

A

[There are 5 possible reasons for why a husband would have more a feminine nature and why a wife would have a masculine nature.]

1) Sometimes this happens due to their particular *shoresh haneshamah* (soul roots). A man may have been given a woman's soul, such as what we find with Yitzchok *Avinu*. And a woman may have been given a man's soul. When that is the case, this discrepancy between the husband and wife is not an issue that needs to be fixed. However, through *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice), one is able to rise to a higher spiritual level, just as Yitzchok received a man's soul after he showed self-sacrifice by the Akeidah.

2) Sometimes, however, this may happen due to the husband and wife having different primary elements, as you mentioned in your [i.e. a husband with a dominant nature of water, and a wife with a dominant nature of fire]. In such a case, in order for the woman's soul to become more balanced, she would need a strong, compelling reason to awaken the element of water in her soul

[which will get her to desire her husband], primarily to feel an emotional attraction to her husband, as opposed to a physical attraction towards him.

3) Sometimes, this issue can come from an unhealthy relationship between the couple. If that is the case, they will need to work on their relationship, and that will be their remedy to this issue.

4) Sometimes, this issue can stem from an emotional blockage on the woman's part. When that is the case, she needs to remove that blockage [and then she will become in touch again with her feminine side].

5) In other cases, this may be because the husband has a problem with the element of "water" in his soul, because his element of water (desire) is dominating him too much. When that is the case, the husband needs to balance out his element of water.

Appreciating Marital Challenges

What is the meaning of "ezer k'negdo." that a wife is a "helpmate" who "opposes" the husband?

A

We are taught by *Chazal* that there are two approaches to this. One approach is that it is only if a person merits this, he merits a wife who helps him. Another approach is that a person realizes that even though his wife opposes him, that itself helps him; just like a person realizes that "I place Hashem opposite me always" – that when Hashem is opposite him, Hashem helps him by "opposing" what a person wants – so can we understand that although one's wife appears to be opposing him, this itself is a "help" for him. So the husband should nullify himself to the opposition, and realize that he needs it, in order to become improved.

All challenges are meant to complete us. A man's soul is rooted in the element of water, and a woman's soul is mainly from fire, and we know that water and fire oppose each other. Marriage brings these two opposites together; the word shomayim (heaven) is a combination of the words aish (fire) and mayim (water), because in Heaven, opposites can unite in harmony. So too, although a man and woman are of opposite natures, they can still have a harmonious union together, when

they live correctly. But without having this essential understanding towards marriage, they fall from the “shomayim” and into the eretz/earth....

Surviving A Difficult Marriage

If someone is in a difficult marriage, how can he/she work on seeing the positive in this situation? Should he/she just focus on whatever nachas (pleasure) he/she gets from the children?

A

Take apart all the factors going on in your marriage, and see everything that's going on. This can take a few months. You will then discover much good in your marriage, and then, you should *daven* to Hashem that He should help you find the root good point in your marriage. Gradually, you will be calmed from this.

How A Husband Can Improve His Marriage

Can the Rav give me some advice on a husband build a better relationship with his wife by showing simple *ahavas Yisrael* towards her?

A

(1) Write down all of her qualities, according to your understanding. (2) Clarify what her best, strongest quality is, and become focused on it. (3) Figure out which of her qualities you most admire, and focus on it. (All of the above is basic advice for getting along, but “simple *ahavas Yisrael*” is actually much higher level than this.)

Holiness & Intimacy In Marriage

Regarding peace in the home, there is a view today that a couple should make a lot of use of “touch” and “talk.” There are marital experts who say that this combination of “talk” and “touch” is the way to succeed in attaining marital peace, and that this approach can save any marriage and prevent many divorces. I would like to know what the Rav’s view on this matter is.

A

Even in privacy, this is something that needs to be weighed out carefully (with sanctity of thought), and with sensitivity. It is a matter which depends on the general level of a couple.

Another factor to be considered is the particular period they find themselves in. One of the Sages said, “It is enough that they (the wives) save us from sin” (Talmud Bavli Yevamos 63a). So besides for maintaining shalom bayis (marital peace), a man also needs [physical intimacy with his wife] in order to be saved from sin [illicit relations].

Therefore, first a married man needs to figure out is how to create a situation in which he will have “bread in his basket” (Talmud Bavli Yoma 18b), [meaning that he has physical intimacy and relations with his wife which curbs his desire for illicit relations, because he fulfills his physical intimacy needs through marital relations with his wife].

However, this does not mean that one can indulge in physical intimacy without any restraint. This would go against the sanctity of the Jewish people, who are called “Yisrael Kedoshim.” “Yisrael are holy” (Talmud Bavli Niddah 17a). The Sages state that when a person feels his evil inclination overpowering him, it is permitted for him to have relations with his wife, if he goes into a dark room and covers himself with a garment (ibid). The *Mishnah* Berurah also says that even during times when one should refrain from marital relations [i.e. Rosh HaShanah or Shavuot], if one feels his evil inclination overtaking him, one is allowed to be lenient and engage in marital relations. So there are instances when a married man should engage in physical intimacy with his wife [and there is no concern of indulgence].

The Sages state, however, that when one indulges too much in physical intimacy within marriage, it is called kever, a “grave.” for the husband and wife, which “buries” them. If a couple lacks merits, *chas v’shalom*, they become “buried” through their indulgence in physical intimacy. So they need to clarify deeply what their current level is, what actions they need to do, what they are

capable of doing (and vice versa), and what actions will bring them down from their current level. And not always are they both at an equal level.

When a couple engages in a lot of physical intimacy with each other, sometimes they may gain a more peaceful relationship with each other, but this is only because they are at a low spiritual level. The Sages warned that “The side of evil begins with unity, and ends with separation” [it may look like they are becoming closer through the intimacy, in the end they will become separated].

RAISING CHILDREN

Naming A Baby

When choosing a name for a baby, what factors does this depend on (excluding a situation where the parents are naming the baby after a grandparent)?

A

This is not something which can be decided based on logic alone. It should be decided from a deep, quiet place in oneself.

In the external [practical] sense, it should be a name of a *tzaddik* (righteous person) in the Torah. A person would have to be on a very high spiritual level to invent a new, original name [which isn't in the Torah] because a new name would require one to originate a new spiritual illumination. The earlier generations were able to give new names [that weren't mentioned in the Torah], because they were on the level of originating new spiritual illumination. [The Hebrew word for "name" is *shem*], and a name that isn't true [for the baby's soul] is in the category of "shemamah." "desolate." corresponding to the spiritual netherworld of nothingness (*tohu*), which was the state of the world when it was desolate [before Creation]. In contrast, a spiritually repaired name fills the void of this desolation.

Who Should Be Sandak At The Baby's Bris?

If the parents of a newborn child are in doubt about who they should use as a "sandak" for the baby, should they only reserve this honor for one of the grandparents? Or, should the parents only seek a holy *tzaddik* to be the sandak, since a *tzaddik* can have a positive spiritual effect on the baby and enable the child to grow up pure and holy?

A

When the parents of a newborn baby use a holy *tzaddik* as a sandak for the baby, this can only be of good influence on the child if doing so will not cause pain to any of the grandparents that they weren't given the honor. If any of the grandparents are pained over the fact that they weren't given

the honor of being sandak, then the entire segulah of using a *tzaddik* as a sandak will be ineffective – for any blessing cannot take effect if it will somehow cause pain to any of the [grand]parents. Even if the [grand]parent is not upset, and he is merely unhappy about the fact that he wasn't given the honor of sandak, it will be considered a holy and pure intention of the parent of the baby to give the honor of sandak to a grandparent, and this itself will have a positive spiritual effect on the baby - which is exactly what the parents of the baby are aspiring for.

Are Children Naturally Rebellious?

Is there a way to get a child to want the true will of the soul (the desire to do Hashem's will) and to act in a more mature way?

A

A child contains two parts. One part of a child is that his/her *yetzer hora* dominates, for it is written, "The inclination of man is evil from his youth." The Sages use an expression, "Like a child running away from school." There are many other such statements in our Sages which describe the natural immaturity and rebelliousness of children. Children do not have *daas* (mature understanding), and they are easily overcome by a *Ruach* shtus (spirit of folly). On the other hand, the Sages state that the world stands on the merit of the "frivolous chatter" of children – since they are pure from sin, their Torah learning is purer.

A child contains contradictory aspects. On one hand, a child is pure and innocent. This is the quality of *temimus* (earnestness). On the other hand, children lack *daas*, which hampers their ability of self-control. Therefore, the natural evil inclination of man is more dominant in children, because it is unfettered. But because they haven't yet sinned, they resemble the level of Adam before the sin, which was the level of the Eitz *HaChaim*. The inner essence of a child is close to the level of the Eitz *HaChaim*, but in their external behavior, they do not have that much control over their evil inclination, and that is why they are usually more rebellious by nature. This is a very complex matter.

Providing Outlets For Children

What is a good outlet that a parent can choose for a child to relieve the child who is easily bored and who has problems with focusing in school because of this?

A

One should choose an activity for the child which is closest to the child's heart." and he should choose an activity for the child that is "of the most refined nature possible that he can find. We also need to realize, however, that not every case can be helped, because not every problem has a solution. [In those cases], all we can do is *daven* for help from HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

The Talkative Child

There are some children who are very talkative and they love to form relationships with people. How should we raise such children, and what exactly do they need to understand about where they need to draw the line when they converse with people?

A

Usually, at a young age, we can't educate a child exactly on how much he should or shouldn't talk. Rather, we need to create for him inner, deep content in his life. To the extent that a person gains inner, deep content in living, one's conversations will be more developed. Certainly, there is also a separate issue if a child becomes too mature in his conversations with others. But it is impossible to tell a child who is 7, 9, or 11 exactly how he needs to speak. Rather, we need to give him inner content in his life. The more inner content he gains, and with the more his inner content increases, his conversations will reflect the quality of his own inner world that he has reached.

Teenage girls talk much more. When the time is ripe, try to have a deeper conversation about this topic [about gaining inner content in life], but don't demand it of them.

CONNECTING TO TZADDIKIM

Asking Tzaddikim For Advice

I deal with the tzibbur and sometimes people have very complex issues and s, such as s about shidduchim or medical issues and other serious issues, which needs to be asked to a Gadol. When sending in a to a Gadol, does every detail of the need to be described? Or is it enough to send in the in general, without writing all the details, or is it not necessary to write down all the details of the , because people will say to me, “Why do all of the details of the need to be written, since he has *Ruach HaKodesh*?”

A

To give a very general description, there are two kinds of *Ruach HaKodesh*. There is one kind of *Ruach HaKodesh* where the *tzaddikim* understands all of the details of an issue, through the enlightened understanding of *Ruach HaKodesh* that he has attained. There is another kind of *Ruach HaKodesh* which does not make the *tzaddik* aware of all the details, but merely gives him the A, in any of the following ways. Either the words come out of the *tzaddik*'s mouth, as *Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos* says, that a possuk (verse) can fall into one's mouth [when one wakes up in the morning] and this is a small level of prophecy. In the same way, words can come out of a *tzaddik*'s mouth [through *Ruach HaKodesh*] which As the person's , or, he becomes aware of the Amentally in his thoughts, or he hears a voice telling it to him, or he will see the Ain the form of writing. In this kind of *Ruach HaKodesh*, the *tzaddik* is not aware of the reason for the A. Another phenomenon that is close to this is when the *tzaddik* gets a muskal rishon (initial perspective) about the issue which is *Ruach HaKodesh*, and this is coming from a spiritual illumination that comes from the intellect of the *neshamah* [as opposed to his second thoughts, which are already mixed with human logic and which are not in the category of *Ruach HaKodesh*]. Sometimes he can even sense this with the spiritual sensitivity of his soul.

In the second kind of *Ruach HaKodesh*, there is no necessity for him to know every last detail of the issue. But in the first kind of *Ruach HaKodesh*, there are varying levels. If the *tzaddik* is on a completely righteous level, the *tzaddik* can see the questioner's soul at its source in the soul of Adam HaRishon, and even more so, he can see the soul root of the person as it was before Creation. But only rare individuals throughout the generations had this ability. Any person who possessed *Ruach HaKodesh* saw things within the limitations of his understanding, just as no Torah scholar sees exactly what another Torah scholar sees in the Torah.

Therefore, the Athat the *tzaddik* saw in his *Ruach HaKodesh* is modified to the spiritual level of the *tzaddik*, and accordingly, the *tzaddik* will understand the general issue and the details of the

issue, based on his particular level. When this happens, the *tzaddik* will sometimes become aware of details even by employing the use of his human logic, to understand what he sees in the spiritual spheres.

It resembles what happens with prophecy, where the prophet saw a certain vision and he needed to interpret what he saw, as the Ramchal describes, in *sefer Kelach Pischei Chochmah*. It was also similar to what happened when asking s to the Urim V”Tumim, where the Kohen needed to use his *daas* in order to combine the letters properly and understand the A. The A that the navi or Kohen found did not come to him as a clear understanding, it had to be discerned. He had to analyze the information and combine it properly. With this kind of understanding, he was made aware of all the details.

Even more so, there were Sages who were able to As based on wisdom and cleverness, combined with *siyata d’shmaya* (assistance from Heaven) and prayer to be guided to the truth. This is also entailed knowing all the details of the issue or at hand.

Ways Of Connecting To Tzaddikim

1) There is a well-known concept of “connecting to the *tzaddik*” which is written about in the *sefarim hakedoshim*, such as in *sefer Noam Elimelech* and others. Does of all *Klal Yisrael* need to take this path? 2) Also, how does one actually connect to a *tzaddik*? 3) Does it have to be a *tzaddik* who is still alive, or can it also be a *tzaddik* who has passed away? 4) And is there a collective *tzaddik* for all people to connect to, or does each individual have a specific *tzaddik* to connect to?

A

1) Moshe received the Torah at Har Sinai and passed it onto Yehoshua. Therefore, there are two “bridges.” so to speak, between the Jewish people and their Father in Heaven. One “bridge” is Moshe, who represents the *tzaddikim*. The second “bridge” is the Torah. On a general note, the path of *Chassidus* leans towards the “*tzaddik*” as the bridge [between Hashem and the Jewish people], and the Lithuanian [Litvish] path leans more towards using the Torah as the bridge [between Hashem and the Jewish people].

2) One can connect to the *tzaddik* through the “garments” of the soul [action, speech and thought]. By way of action, one connects to the *tzaddik* by doing what the *tzaddik* says to do. By

way of speech, one connects to the *tzaddik* by speaking about the *tzaddik* and by *saying* the *tzaddik*'s Torah teachings. By way of thought, one connects to the *tzaddik* by contemplating the *tzaddik*'s way of thinking and to the general approach of the *tzaddik*'s Torah teachings.

One can also connect to the very essence of the *tzaddik*'s soul, by way of the *middos* (character traits) and *mochin* (mind) of the *tzaddik*. One connects to the *middos* of the *tzaddik* by connecting to the *middos* of the *tzaddik*, especially by connecting to the primary trait which the *tzaddik* clung to throughout his life. One connects to the *mochin* (mind) of the *tzaddik* by connecting to the inner essence of the *tzaddik*'s Torah teachings, by connecting to the “universal unity” that is revealed in the *tzaddik*'s Torah teachings. Finally, one can connect to the very innermost essence of the *tzaddik*'s soul by attaching one's emotions and thoughts to the *neshamah* of the *tzaddik*.

3) It is possible to be connected even to a *tzaddik* that has passed away. More specifically, one can become connected to a *tzaddik* when the *tzaddik* is clothed by a physical body, but this is only when the *tzaddik* is alive on This World, and this is through serving a Torah scholar, as *Chazal* teach, “Serving the Torah is greater than learning it.” There is also a connection one can have to the soul of a *tzaddik*, without physical involvement with the *tzaddik*. The intermediate level between these two levels of connection is when a *tzaddik* is *niftar* and he is on the way to being buried [where people who take part in the *tzaddik*'s funeral are able to gain from the connection to the *tzaddik*].

4) There is a connection one can have to an “individual” *tzaddik*, who is tailored to the particular soul root of a person. There is also the connection one can have to a *tzaddik* who lives in the generation, and one is able to connect to the *tzaddik* of the generation even if he doesn't know who the *tzaddik* is (This is discussed in *Sefer HaZechus* parshas Tetzaveh, and *Likutei HaRim*, “*tzaddikim*”). One can become connected to the *tzaddik* of the generation by affixing his mind and his soul to the level of the *tzaddik*. There is also a way for a person to connect to the “collective” *tzaddik*, and this is by becoming connected to the soul of *Mashiach*.

Ways To Connect To The True Tzaddik

Rebbe Nachman of Breslev wrote that one must gain a connection to the “true *tzaddik*” of the generation. Who is the *tzaddik* of this generation? If we do not know who the *tzaddik* of the generation, how are we able to gain a connection to him?

A

The further the generations are from the source, the more distant we are from our beginning point, and there is less spiritual light, with increasing spiritual darkness. This is especially the case in our generation, of which it is said, “And darkness will cover the earth.” The idea of this darkness is that the trait of *Malchus* [“leadership.” which refers to the leaders of the Jewish people] seems to be only a single small point, with all other spiritual light (the rest of the nine spiritual *Sefiros*/emanations) becoming concealed.

That is why the trait of “*Yesod*” (the “foundation.” which refers to personal holiness) is also very concealed and hidden today. For this reason, there has been an especial resurgence today of the sins of the generation of the Flood, the “damaging of the Holy Covenant” (sins involving personal holiness).... Since there is laxity today in the trait of “*Yesod*,” the “foundation” (personal holiness) in the area of actions which damage one’s “*Yesod*,” this external damage to the trait of *Yesod* has also placed the perfected level of *Yesod* into a state of concealment. That is why it is almost totally impossible today to find the “*tzaddik Yesod* olam.” the *tzaddik* who upholds the world. This is why it is very difficult to know who the *tzaddik Yesod* olam today is. We are a soul living inside a body on This World [thus our physical body and existence on This World conceals our soul’s view]. It is most difficult to recognize such a lofty soul residing in a body that lives with us on This World. This is why there is much confusion among those who seek to know who the *tzaddik Yesod* olam is: due to the fact that we live with a soul and a body, which are each telling us different things.

Practically speaking, *Chazal* state that the original light which Hashem created was hidden away for the *tzaddikim* in the future, and it became hidden in the Torah. Therefore, when we are in a situation where the “*tzaddik* has gone lost.” the “light” [of the *tzaddik*] returns to its root, in the Torah. So one should seek to find the “light of the *tzaddik*” by studying the wisdom of the Torah. In terms of the *Sefiros*, the *Sefiros* of *Keser* [“crown.” the highest spiritual point] and *Malchus* [leadership] correspond to each other, and so do the *Sefiros* of *Chochmah* [wisdom, Torah] and *Yesod* (foundation, personal holiness) correspond to each other. That is why a person can find the spiritual light of “*Yesod*” (personal holiness) in *Chochmah* (the Torah’s wisdom). This is the depth behind the view of several of the sages throughout the generations who did not seek to rectify the *Yesod* in the active sense – rather, they attached themselves only to *Chochmah* [to studying the Torah’s wisdom]. Understand this well.

Additionally [the way to become attached with the *tzaddik* of the generation] is through having *emunah* (faith in G-d) during trying times. It is written, “And your faith, at nights.” Through believing in something, one becomes attached to it. When we are in a time period of “daytime.” we can know who the *tzaddik* of the generation is, but in a time such as ours, which is likened to the

“night.” our task is to believe in the existence of the *tzaddik* and become attached to him through the light of *emunah*, as opposed to “knowing” the *tzaddik*. The spiritual light of *emunah* (believing) is greater than the spiritual light of knowledge. Therefore, connecting to the *tzaddik* through *emunah* [in the existence of the *tzaddik*] is a greater level of connection to the *tzaddik*, for it is at the root.

Additionally, *Chazal* state [concerning our final generations], “We have no one to rely on except for our Father in Heaven.” In the name of Rav Chaim of Volozhin, this is explained to be a part of the curse of the final generations. That is the simple understanding. But there is also an inner *avodah* contained in this. It is a message from the Sages that in the final generations, we need to nurse forth spiritual vitality from a higher source than human beings. We need to nurse forth our vitality directly from the Creator, Himself. On a deeper level, the entire 6,000 year era we are in corresponds to “knowledge.” *Chochmah* (wisdom), which also corresponds with *Yesod*, and which corresponds with *tzaddik Yesod* olam. In the current era, *Chochmah* corresponds with *Yesod*. But in the very end, it will be revealed that “The purpose of knowledge is to know that we do not know.” and this refers to the correspondence of *Keser* with *Malchus*. This concept, in the side of evil, is manifest whenever there is a damage to *Yesod*. In the side of holiness, it is when one rises from the level of *Yesod* to *Malchus*.

Help From A Tzaddik

Is there a concept that a person can receive help from the souls of *tzaddik*, regarding certain areas of inner work? Also, is this something that is worthwhile for a person to invest his efforts in?

A

Yes [there is such a concept]. The main *avodah* of a person should be spent on developing his soul, but one can also involve himself a little with gaining help from a *tzaddik*.

A connection to the soul of a *tzaddik* can be gained from attaching oneself to the Torah teachings of the *tzaddik*, or by connecting with the unique actions that the *tzaddik* did. Or, a person can gain from a *tzaddik* if he is of [or attains] the same soul root (*shores haneshamah*) of the *tzaddik*.

Travelling Abroad To Kivrei Tzaddikim

Is there an inyan (a concept) to travel to graves of *tzaddikim* who are buried in *chutz l'aretz* (outside of *Eretz Yisrael*), such as the kever of the Baal Shem Tov, and other *tzaddikim*? Or should I should *daven* by graves of *tzaddikim* buried in *Eretz Yisrael*?

A

It is better to *daven* [by the graves of *tzaddikim*] in *Eretz Yisrael*. However if there is a certain guarantee that *davening* by the grave of a certain *tzaddik* will be beneficial to you, or if your soul feels very attached to a certain *tzaddik*, or if the *tzaddik* was part of your ancestry, or if you are connected with the *derech* (path) of the *tzaddik*, this connection is a valid reason to go *daven* by his kever.

However, you should weigh out the pros and cons involved. Will you gain more holiness from it, or will you encounter *tumah* (inappropriate sights) as you go to these places? Will you be better off *staying* in *Eretz Yisrael* rather than dealing with the spiritual challenges involved with traveling to the gentile countries? There are spiritual challenges involved just by travelling there, as well as in your stay there. Sometimes a person travels abroad to *daven* by the grave of a *tzaddik* but he slowly becomes “a person of the big world” out there, because he becomes familiar with the world. Sometimes a person has a subconscious motivation deep down in him to journey to other places precisely for this reason, and sometimes a person is completely not aware of this motivation, and at other times a person is more aware of this subconscious motivation.

The Avodah By The Grave Of A Tzaddik

When coming to pray by the grave of a *tzaddik*, what is the main *avodah* (inner work) of a person there?

A

1) Connect to the Torah teachings of the *tzaddik*, if possible. 2) Be disconnected from materialism, and become connected to the spiritual world of the soul.

Praying At Graves Of Tzaddikim

(1) What is the true perspective on the accepted custom amongst certain sects of Jewry that when one is faced with any form of suffering or illness G-d forbid, that the way to receive salvation is to pray by the graves of *tzaddikim*? We find certain prayers to say by the graves of *tzaddikim*, which are printed in the *sefarim hakedoshim* and also in the works of the Poskim. When should a person pray by the graves of *tzaddikim*, and which kinds of people need to do so?

(2) Also, is there a particular grave of any *tzaddik* in *Eretz Yisrael* that it is proper to pray by [to merit salvation from any form of suffering]?

A

1 - This [praying by the grave of a *tzaddik*] is one the ways [to merit salvation]. Some of our *Gedolim* made heavy use of this approach, and some of our *Gedolim* didn't pray by almost any graves of *tzaddikim* at all.

The reason [that some *Gedolim* would often pray by graves of *tzaddikim*] is because a burial place of a *tzaddik* is a place in the world where there is more G-dliness revealed. [There is a concept called "Olam, Shanah, *Nefesh*" – "World" (place), "Time." and "Soul." meaning that there is an *avodah* which exists on the level of the "soul" alone, as well as in a "place" [as well as in "time"]. So there can be an *avodah* on a level that is purely "soul." and there is also an *avodah* which makes use of a "place." A soul which is more rooted in "place" will make much more use of visiting the graves of *tzaddikim*. As for the proper time of when to make use of this *avodah*, the Arizal said that the proper time for this is Erev Rosh Chodesh.

2 - The main "place" in the world where one can pray by is:

(A) Kever Rachel (the Tomb of Rachel), as the *Vilna Gaon* said. Rachel is called the *Shechinah* (Hashem's Presence on this world), and she is also called the *Malchus* (royalty) which joins with the pain of the Jewish people.

(B) The "Kever Rashbi" (the tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai) is also the proper place to pray by, for Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, "I am able to exempt the entire world from the attribute of judgment." Thus, praying by the tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai has the power to sweeten a harsh judgment and thereby nullify it.

(C) Alternatively, being that a person can also receive salvation through the power of *emunah* (faith in G-d), the Kever Chavakuk (the tomb of Chavavuk) is also a proper place to pray in, for it was the prophet Chavakuk who said that “the righteous person shall live by his faith.”

(D) Additionally, one can go to the grave of the saint Baba Sali, for he lived closer to our generation.

(E) One can also bond with the collective unit of the Jewish people, and by bonding his soul with the Avos (forefathers) specifically, by going to Mearas HaMachpailah (the Cave of Machpela). One can also go to the graves of Aharon HaKohen, Yosef HaTzaddik and Dovid HaMelech (who are included the “seven shepherds”). One can also go to the graves of those who revealed the Torah: the grave of Rabbi Akiva, who was the main revealer of the Oral Torah, and the grave of Rashbi, who was the main revealer of the Hidden Torah. One can go to any graves of a similar nature. There is also another way [to attain salvation from suffering and illness]: by bonding to one’s personal soul root [by going to a grave of a *tzaddik* who bears the same soul root as yours].

Watching Videos Of Tzaddikim

Can one become connected to *tzaddikim* through watching a video of the *tzaddik*? What are the advantages of this, and what are the disadvantages?

A

Yes. This is because one of the seventy forces of the soul, as listed by the *Vilna Gaon*, is the power to retain a visual (shomer). If one recognizes the *tzaddik*, it awakens an inner force within the person, and sometimes it even awakens one’s power of memory (zoicher), and if not, it will at least awaken one’s imagination, in addition to what one has actually seen. This, too, can bring one to a strong connection with the *tzaddik*, because it is a greater level of revelation.

On a deeper level, a video is like the concept of the “imprint” (reshimo) of the original level of spiritual light, which was once integrated into the original spiritual light. In the End of Days, the light of the reshimo/imprint is more clearly revealed. In the future, the power of shomer/retaining will be fully revealed, where all of history will be revealed and become integrated with the past, in the present. A spark of this light is already starting to shine even now.

Different Ways Of Tzaddikim

1) In the *sefarim* of *Chassidus*, as well as in the earlier *sefarim*, it is mentioned many times that the purpose of life is *d'veykus* (attachment with Hashem). Did all *tzaddikim* throughout the generation agree to this, or were there other *tzaddikim* who held that the purpose of life is to fulfill all of the 613 *mitzvos*, and mainly the *mitzvah* to learn Torah?

A

The purpose of life is always *d'veykus* with Hashem, and it is just that there are different many ways to reach this: (1) One way is through become attached to Hashem without the use of any "garments." meaning, that one attaches himself to Hashem through *emunah* peshutah, simple faith in G-d, and from a "simple sense" in the reality of the Infinite, Blessed Is He. (2) Another way is through attaching oneself to the root of the revelation [of Hashem], which is, through attaching oneself to the "garment" that is the holy Torah. In this way, a person becomes "one" with Hashem, so to speak, for "He and His will are one" and "He and His wisdom are one." (3) Another way [of attaining *d'veykus*] is through attaching oneself to the purpose of all the revelation, which is, "to make for Him a dwelling place in the lower realm." This is through actual observance of the *mitzvos*. This is how one reaches *d'veykus* on the lower realm. For "*mitzvos*" are from the word "tzavta." "companion." as is well-known [which implies that doing the *mitzvos* enables one to attain *d'veykus* with Hashem]. All of the aforementioned paths are different ways of attaining *d'veykus*.

2) The *tzaddikim* throughout the generations disagreed with each other, both in areas of Torah as well as in areas of how to serve Hashem. There is a well-known fundamental that this was because they had differing soul roots (*shorshei haneshamos*). When the *tzaddikim* disagreed with each other's views, was it because they each had a clear knowledge that the other *tzaddik* was presenting a view according to his unique soul root? Or was it instead that each *tzaddik* held that the other *tzaddik* was totally wrong?

A

It depended on the situation. Usually, a *tzaddik* whose soul root was in *ohr pnimi* (internal light) did not recognize this concept [of validating the other *tzaddik*'s view], whereas a *tzaddik* whose soul was rooted in *ohr makif* (surrounding light) was more aware of this concept [of validating the other *tzaddik*'s view in spite of their disagreement].

3) How is it possible for a *tzaddik* to have an influence on his students, or a Rebbe on his chassidim, and draw others in to follow his own way? How did the *tzaddik* or Rebbe know that this was good for his students or chassidim [since every person has a different soul root]?

A

Either it was because [the *tzaddik* or Rebbe] knew through *Ruach HaKodesh* [that his teachings were appropriate for his students and chassidim], or it was because he had *emunah* peshutah that if Hashem directed this person to him, it was the will of Hashem that it should be this way – this was the approach of the Chazon Ish.

4) In certain sects of Jewry, there is a view of “My way is the right one.” and that anyone else who isn’t part of their following, or anyone who isn’t a chassid of their own Rebbe, is deemed as someone who doesn’t serve Hashem. I am talking specifically about those who are following a statement that was said by any of the true *tzaddikim* or Rebbes of the past. How it is possible that a *tzaddik* should say that someone needs to attach himself with his Torah teachings? Aren’t there many ways to serve Hashem, as we see from the 12 different tribes, who are called the “12 tribes of G-d.” who each represent a different path of serving Hashem?

A

Each *tzaddik*'s intention was, that his particular approach was the “gateway” that was all-inclusive of the 12 general paths in serving the Creator. This is well-known. [Therefore, each *tzaddik* held that] anyone who didn’t become attached to his all-inclusive “gateway” would merit [only] a “diffused” light (*ohr prat*), without a “collective” light (*ohr kolel*).

Different Lifestyles Of Tzaddikim

I have heard and seen that there different, contradicting lifestyles of different *Gedolim* and *tzaddikim*. There were some [*Gedolim* and *tzaddikim*] who lived modestly and simply, to the point of shameful poverty, whereas there were other *Gedolim* and *tzaddikim* who lived royally, in beautiful homes, and with beautiful furniture, etc. Others lived a more average, middle-class lifestyle. How do we reconcile these different ways of living of our *Gedolim*? What can us small people learn from it? And what is the proper way for us to live like?

A

Generally, this is a matter that depends on the different existing soul-roots (shoresh haneshamos).

For example, some *Gedolim* lived a life of wealth and royalty. The sage Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi (who is called Rebbi) merited “two tables” – he merited Torah scholarship and also fabulous wealth – and this was because he descended from the royal family of King David. Therefore, he conducted his life with royalty/wealth. Contrast this with the lifestyle of the sage Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa, who sustained himself with a little bit of carobs. This was because his soul was rooted in the concept of “He builds worlds and destroys them.” and destruction in Hebrew is the word chorav, from the word “carob.”

However, even when one’s soul is rooted in wealth and royalty, he still needs to undergo the process of spiritual growth that is called havdalah (separation) and hachnaah (subjugation), a certain separation from the physical world, and only later can he have hamtakah (sweetening). It is said in the name of Reb Pinchos Koritz explained the teaching of the Sages, “This is the way of the Torah - eat bread dipped in salt.” that frugality is for one who is still on his path in the “way of Torah.” but once one has already arrived at the “palace.” he is able to conduct his life differently [there is no longer a need for him to be frugal].

Also, there are souls who are rooted in ohr (spiritual light), which includes the right and left lines (kav yemin and kav sm’ol) as well as *Malchus* (royalty), whereas others’ souls are rooted in keilim (“vessels”).

Therefore, one should clarify his soul root, and also, what his current spiritual level is. After that one, can know how to conduct himself. [If one concludes that his soul is rooted in royalty and that he needs to live a more affluent lifestyle], one should always suspect that maybe he is being motivated by a lustful desire for wealth. And, vice versa: If one feels an affinity for adapting a

simpler and more modest lifestyle, one should also suspect that perhaps this is coming from laziness and from a lack of responsibility.

Defending The Honor Of A Tzaddik

How should we react to a person who shows disrespect to a Gadol of *Klal Yisrael* and who speaks disparagingly about him? Should we voice any protest against such a person (since he is committing a grave sin by disgracing the honor of a Torah scholar), or should we just be quiet (since the person is in the category of a fool, for speaking negatively about a Gadol)?

A

Don't be involved with this at all. Instead, just be aware that we are found in the depths of the "50th Gate of Defilement." and that is why all kinds of *tumah* (spiritual defilement) and fallacies are all present, in all of the deeds, emotions, and thoughts, in our external world as well as in the more inner dimension. Everything today [all deeds, emotions, and thoughts of both the external and inner dimensions of reality today] is all a giant mixture. That is the very idea of the Erev Rav, which means *taaruvos rAbbah*, "great mixture." We need to scream out to Hashem, with *mesirus nefesh*, for the complete Redemption. However, in whatever place you live in, you still need to know how you should go about this practically.

In order to voice any protests against another person [who speaks disrespectfully about any of the *Gedolim*], you first need to clarify well the details involved [i.e. what exactly the person said, etc.]. Instead of protesting against the person, you should simply suggest to him that he shouldn't involve himself in these matters, because he might get "burned" by others. (An exception to this would be if the person is fighting for the sake of Heaven).

Is There A Tzaddik Of The Generation?

I have heard of that many tzaddikim throughout different generations were considered to be the "tzaddik" (saint) of the generation or the "gadol hador" (greatest Jew of the generation).

Is there such a concept as the gadol hador or the tzaddik hador? And in our generation, is there also a gadol hador or tzaddik hador?

A

Yes. There is a tzaddik of the generation in the “revealed” dimension, and there is a tzaddik of the hidden dimension, who is the greatest of the 36 hidden tzaddikim. In this generation, though, even the revealed dimension is hidden from us, because of our generation it is said that “darkness covers the land”, and our generation resembles the times of the judges [where they did not recognize who the leaders of the generations were and therefore they had to establish judges to rule the nation].

REFUAH: Recovery From Illnesses

Purpose Of Physical Suffering

I don't understand what the purpose of [all my] physical suffering is. What is the reason for it? I am trying to learn Torah and do teshuvah. How can it be that I didn't get a kaparah (atonement) by now?? *Chazal* state that "There is no suffering without sin" [but I have suffered enough by now, so why are my previous sins still causing me to deserve any further suffering]?

A

One needs a *tikkun* (soul repair) for sins of his current lifetime, as well as for sins of a previous lifetime. One also needs a *tikkun* for some of the evils that have been committed since the beginning of history, and each soul has a specific role in this universal *tikkun*. In addition to this factor, there is also the suffering of *tzaddikim* (the righteous), the higher and more elevated souls who suffer from simply being on This World and enduring all that it entails, which contains both external and internal suffering. These higher souls are a "spark of the *Shechinah*" and their pain is part of the "pain of the *Shechinah*." and an example of this was the suffering of the sage Rabbi Akiva [at the hands of the Romans].

Healing In The Month Of Iyar

Is there a special power of refuah (healing) in the Hebrew month of "Iyar"?

A

As is well-known, the Hebrew word "Iyar" (אייר) is an acronym for the verse, **אני ה' רופאריך**, "Ani Hashem Rofecha." "I am Hashem, your Healer." and the Talmud teaches that the request in Shemoneh Esrei for healing, Refoeinu, is placed near the request about teshuvah-repentance, Hashiveinu, to show that healing is a result of doing teshuvah. This is based on the verse, "And understand with its heart, so that it will repent and be healed." (Yeshayahu 6:10). Through attaining the heart's ability to understand, one draws forth refuah/healing from there. The verse is teaching us that through gaining the ability to "understanding" (hirkur, which is the special power contained in the month of Iyar), one can get healed. Iyar is a month of gaining the ability to

understand deeply (hirhur) and that is precisely how one gains refuah/healing that is inherent in the month of Iyar. But it depends on one condition – doing teshuvah (repentance).

Cancer

What can I do for someone who has the ‘dreaded disease’ [cancer], besides for *davening*?

A

The “dreaded disease” [cancer] is called sartin in Hebrew. A sartin is a crab. The sartin (crab, also called “cancer”) happens to be the *mazal* (constellation) of the Hebrew month Tamuz.

The Sforno to Vayikra 13:2, when describing certain kinds of tzaraas (leprosy), describes a kind of leprosy which is “sartin.” cancerous, to the entire body.

The word sartin also hints to the remedy for this disease, because it is a hint to the words sar Satan, “remove the Satan.”

Now I will elaborate on what the connection between the crab and cancer, and accordingly, what the *tikkun* (remedy) for it is.

The month of Tamuz has the *mazal* of sartin/crab. The sin with the Golden Calf happened on the 17th of Tamuz. The *Kli Yakar* (Devarim 1:1) explains that ever since that day, the Jewish people turned away from Hashem, they turned away from facing Hashem (panim) and instead they are turned around from Hashem (achor). There is a *sefer* called Ohr *HaChaim* – Geulah V’Yeshuah which explains that ever since the 17th of Tamuz when the sin with the golden calf was committed, anything connected with the *mazal* of Tamuz has become “turned away” from facing Hashem [becoming subject to hester panim, when Hashem conceals His light].

The *Vilna Gaon* explains (in Aderes Eliyahu to Melachim I: 7:85) that the 12 *mazalos* correspond to the 7 main celestial bodies which affect our earth, which are the sun, moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn and Jupiter. The constellation of the sartin (crab) corresponds to the moon. The moon receives its entire light from the sun. It has no light of its own. The moon has no pnim (inside), it has no content of its own. That shows us the spiritual meaning behind the illness of sartin/cancer. It is an illness that symbolizes the hester panim (concealment of G-d’s radiance towards us), a kind of darkness, when Hashem acts toward a person in the mode of achor, “turned away” from a person.

The Malbim says that when the sun passes the constellation of sartan (crab/cancer), the light of the sun hits the northern part of the world, and the southern part of the world becomes dark. The word for “northern” is tzafon, from word tzafun, “hidden.” which is a hint to the concept of hester panim, the “concealment of Hashem’s radiance.” when Hashem conducts Himself in a mode in which He conceals His light.

Chazal teach in Pesikta *RAbbasi* (20:3) that the Beis HaMikdash could not be destroyed on a Wednesday because it is the fourth day of the week, which corresponds to Moshe Rabbeinu, and Moshe requested that in his merit, the Beis HaMikdash should not be destroyed on this day. Moshe said, “Master of the world, the crab (the sartan) survives only because of the water, and it was I who was saved from the water.” Moshe was rewarded on this world with keren ohr (beams of light) that shone from his face.

Therefore, if one wants to be saved from this illness, he should become connected with the trait of Moshe, who was “saved from the water” [this will be elaborated upon soon].

In a commentary attributed to the authorship of Rav Saadya *Gaon*, it is explained that a crab is a creature which lives from the water and comes on to dry land for sustenance, and it is “created for healing.” among other things. [Hence, the sartan/crab/cancer is associated with healing.]

Thus, the sartan/crab/cancer represents the root of illness, for it represents hester panim, but it also contains the opposite: the root for healing. This is because there is a rule that “Two opposites bear one root.” [So while crab/cancer is associated with illness and concealment of Hashem’s light, it is also the root of healing.]

The *tikkun* (remedy) for this illness is to reflect on the he’aras panim, the “illumination of Hashem’s (G-d’s) countenance.” by reflecting on the concept of G-d’s Divine Providence. As in the verse, “The eyes of G-d skim though everything” - the fact Hashem oversees everything. [This connects a person to the trait of Moshe, who merited the keranos, the “horns of light” which shone from his face, a form of he’aras panim of Hashem.]

Besides for the above, one should also repair the soul’s element of water, the trait of taavah (lusts). The *sefer Igra D’Pirka* (217) writes that a person should not ravenously eat his food like a glutton, and instead, one should eat in the way that a sartan/crab eats, which takes its food with its ‘two fingers’ [its claws], eating slowly.

On a more specific level, a person should discover his greatest weakness and fix it, both in the external sense as well as in the internal sense [as explained in the Rav’s “Four Elements” series].

TESHUVAH

Fear Of Changing

When I begin to identify where my feelings are coming from, I feel fear, either because I am afraid of change, or because I am afraid of how others will react to me if I would begin to change. How can I deal with this fear?

A

Instead of thinking that you will have to make big changes, think that you will only be making small changes, and try to make small changes only. You can only be afraid of change when it is a big change. Change is like water dripping on a rock; the rock only withers after many drops of water fall on it. It happens slowly and in very small amounts, not in one shot. When you have this attitude toward change, there is no reason not to change.

Usually, when you think about change, you wonder how you will get all the way to the end, and you become overwhelmed, because you see how much change you will have to undergo in order to arrive at the goal. Instead, think that you will be taking small steps and that you are only going to get there slowly and over time.

Changing Unwanted Behavior

Many people feel “stuck” in their life in certain areas, whether in spiritual areas or in material matters, and they aren’t succeeding in changing any unwanted habits, whether it comes to things they need to take care of, or whether it comes to things that they just want to simply stop doing. My question is, how can a person succeed in changing an unwanted habit?

How can a person begin to change even when it comes to even the simplest matters? For example: If a person wants to begin running [and he doesn’t feel like it], what can he do [to come out of his lethargy and get moving]? What can a person do to stop the habit of smoking? Applying this to the spiritual, if a person wants to be consistent in keeping to a certain Torah study session, how can he begin changing? If a person habitually commits a certain sin, what can he do in order to stop, especially if he feels that he simply can’t overcome these negative habits?

A

Generally speaking, there are two root ways of self-work. One way is through taking the “all-inclusive” approach (kelalus), and it is also known as mesirus *nefesh* (self-sacrifice). The other way is through specifics, known as peratus also known as hadragah, progressing step-by-step.

In the first way, kelalus, a person firmly establishes a mental conviction, in his intellect and heart, that he is making an absolute decision to change. He makes up firmly in his mind that he will have the boldness and strength of character to change his behavior. Sometimes a person can employ the use of other external “anchors” which will make him feel somewhat obliged and forced to keep to his decision. For example, if a person wants to become serious about learning Torah, he may decide firmly that he will not eat or go to sleep that day unless he has fulfilled his quota of Torah learning. This approach is extreme, and “many tried to do it but did not succeed.” as it was said of those who tried to be like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

The other approach, peratus, is where a person makes smaller goals for him to accomplish, which require only a bit of willpower and minimal exertion to accomplish. Each day, the person examines if he has fulfilled this small accomplishment. This also entails making use of various external “anchors” that will make him feel personally obliged to fulfill his goals. Realistically speaking, he should use “anchors” that speak to his particular personality and his current level. Using this approach, one makes gradual progress, getting further and further – progressing slowly, but with consistency.

It should be emphasized, however, that if a person is trying to overcome a sin which he commits habitually, G-d forbid, then there is no advice which can help a person go against Hashem. The only thing a person can do for this is to try with all his energy, with sensibility [to overcome the sinful habits].

How can we subdue our desire for evil and get ourselves to want Hashem’s will more consistently?

A

A simple way is fear of punishment. Another way is by increasing our will for Hashem’s will, as explained in this lesson, along with *davening* and crying to Hashem for help.

Making A Soul-Accounting

When I do “*cheshbon hanefesh*” (self-accounting), I become sad with myself, because I see that I have mostly bad things in myself. How can I stop being so negative about myself and begin to see myself as mostly good?

A

Try not to focus on any of your negative qualities and remain focused on your positive aspects. If this doesn't help, you can think the following: Who gave you all your shortcomings? Hashem gave those very shortcomings to you. Realize that even your weaknesses come from Hashem; you will then find that you look at your shortcomings in a different light.

I understand that even my shortcomings are all from Hashem, but my difficulty with this is that all of my shortcomings have developed in me due to all my sins!

A

Do you only do bad things? Do you only make evil choices? We go through countless decisions each day; if you analyze your day well, you will discover that you are mostly choosing good throughout the day.

KEDUSHAH

Guarding One's Personal Holiness

Teshuvah During Shovavim

If a person finds it too difficult to fast, can the Rav recommend any path he can take, by which can rectify sins related to the period of Shovavim, so that no imprint of sin remains on a person?

A

He should fix his primary negative *middah* (character trait), and he should become connected, consistently and with clarity, to the world of Torah thought [regularly thinking about words of Torah].

Is there a path by which a person can know if he has finished rectifying the sins which one needs to rectify during the period of Shovavim?

A

[Yes.] When one feels that he is no longer pulled towards this [sin], and when he feels Hashem's presence in front of him. This is also written in *sefer* Shaar Yissocher, by the author of "Minchas Elazar" [the Admor of Munkatch].

Advice For Shemiras Habris

The topic of shemiras haBris [guarding the Holy Covenant – safeguarding one's personal holiness] is very difficult in our generation. The closer I become to Hashem and the more I learn Torah, the stronger my evil inclination seems to become. So how is it possible to completely guard the Bris? Even if a week goes by [without sinning in this area], the next week I am suddenly attacked [by my *yetzer hora* in this area]. My mind begins to go crazy [with all kinds of lustful thoughts] even as I'm in middle of learning Torah. What do I do about this?

A

This generation is the most unbridled kind of society in all of history. Besides for all of the forbidden deeds and sights that fill the world in every corner, the fact is that there are tools of technology which cause *tumah* (defilement) and they are found in every place. These tools are the very primal root of *tumah*. Therefore, even if a person doesn't see, hear, smell, speak, or touch anything forbidden, [he is still negatively affected, for] the very air of the world is still filled with *tumah*. It is the "50th gate of defilement" [the most depraved level possible]. The Other Side of Evil is at work, from all directions. That is the "50th gate of defilement." where *tumah* penetrates from all of the surroundings.

In previous generations, the main kind of evil was in the area of inappropriate sights, as *Chazal* state, "The eyes and heart are the two tools of sin." and "The evil inclination does not take hold except in what the eyes see." The *Gemara* says that if a person said the name of the harlot "Rachav." he would immediately become defiled. But in this generation, our very being here on this world means that we are in place of the worst level of defilement, which is making itself known to us from all directions, with nothing stopping it. The more spiritually refined one is - the more that one reveals his *neshamah* – the more he can sense how just being here on this world, and in this generation especially, is a state of terrible spiritual suffering. For it is then that "you see an upside-down world." where all holiness has been overturned, completely and in a terribly disturbing manner.

Practically speaking:

1) It is recommended that a person should minimize, as much as he can, how much he looks at the physical world – even to refrain from looking at things that are not forbidden to look at. A person can make an exception with this when it comes to looking at things that calm the soul. This is a matter that is different with each person, depending on what level he is on. One should be very careful not to act above his actual level, though, because that will only backfire.

2) One should become attached to an inner kind of thought, mainly a thought of Torah or an insight of *avodas Hashem*.

3) The more a person penetrates into his inner world, the more his soul becomes enveloped by the inner world, and he will be less found on the outside world. This is the proper way of life which a person needs to direct his life towards.

4) When one feels that he is burning with a desire to commit an act of sin, or whenever he feels like his mind is being overtaken [by lustful thoughts], he should immerse himself in cold water. If

this cannot be done, he should at least wash himself with cold water [to cool off his passion right now]. This is way to weaken the *yetzer hora* when it gets strong. One should also review holy verses, enthusiastically.

5) When one is amidst a moment of weakness and he feels powerless to his lustful inclinations, he should try to focus his vision on an on any nondescript point. If possible, he should focus on a letter of Torah [any of the letters of the Aleph Beis]. This is the inner way to remove one's thinking from any bothersome thoughts, in order to come out of a "scattered" state of mind. Certainly it is better if a person can get his mind busy with Torah thoughts, but if this is unrealistic for the person, one should at least divert his mind to think about anything else – that's also good.

6) There is also a piece of advice that is meant for individuals to practice: to be willing to sacrifice one's life in order to sanctify Hashem's Name, amidst the intensity of the difficult temptation. On a specific level, this means that one should be willing to die, rather than think the sinful thoughts. On a more general level, it means that one should be willing to give up one's life for Hashem (*mesirus nefesh*). And if one finds himself at the climax of temptation, he should cry out to Hashem, intensely, from the depths of his heart, and beg the Creator that he should be prevented from committing the sin.

Immorality In Our Times & The Remedy

How are we to understand the outbreak of same-gender attraction which fills this generation without restraint, and how can we help those who have fallen into this, to come out of it?

A

THE ROOTS OF THE MATTER:

The deeper roots of this matter [in terms of Kaballah, the mystical teachings of Torah]. is contained in an understanding of the upper spiritual realms (the upper *Partzufim*), namely, in the dimensions known as "*Atik*" and "*Arikh*." The Sages teach that "There is no "left" side [corresponding to the feminine] in *Atik*." meaning that there are no traces of the absolute feminine in this dimension. Rather, any of the feminine (*Nukva*) in that dimension is found on a very obscure level, called "*achor b'achor*" (lit. "back-to-back"), and it is only within the "masculine" (*duchra*), meaning that it is the "feminine within masculine." *Nukva d'duchra*. At this level, the *Nukva*/feminine does not correspond to the Heavenly sphere known as "*Malchus*" (royalty) which

corresponds to total femininity, but to the Heavenly sphere known as “*Yesod*” (foundation, which corresponds to the masculine). The absolute level of *Nukva*/feminine only exists in the spiritual realm of the “lower” *Partzufim*.

The world which we are in, the world of “action.” corresponds to the concept of *Nukva*, the feminine. In our world, there is a concept of absolute femininity, which is expressed by the Torah’s acknowledgment of the difference between man and woman, and which is also manifest in the forces of the soul and the physical body.

In the End of Days, the upper spiritual dimensions are radiating strongly, and this is the root of “the illumination of Mashiach.” *Chazal* state that Mashiach, who comes from Dovid, comes from Sodom and Moab [through the union of the daughters of Lot with their father, who lived in Sodom and who are the ancestors of the Moabite nation]. Therefore, in our current times, where the “light of Mashiach” is radiating - as the Sages teach, from the 6th century and onward – as a counter-attack from the forces of impurity, the spiritual defilement of Sodom has come to our world along with this illumination [in order to counter the illumination of Mashiach].

In the side of holiness, represented by the spiritual realm of the “Upper *Partzufim*.” the “masculine” forces are called “*Atik*” and “*Arikh*.” In the side of evil, these forces enter our world of action, where they manifest as “the acts of Sodom” [men lusting after men: immorality].

In the side of holiness, the “masculine” represents the idea of total giving with no receiving. In terms of the soul, this refers to the power of “*lishmah*.” to act for non-ulterior motives: when one does something not out of any will to receive something in return. When this spiritual light (*lishmah*) “falls” into the lower realms, however, it becomes used by the physical body - which only wishes to receive, and which has no interest to act *lishmah*. The body turns the spiritual light of *lishmah* – the “masculine” - into a desire to do the acts committed in Sodom [where men lusted after other men]. This was previously an entirely “masculine” force (giving without needing to receive), which becomes turned by the body into the “feminine” (the need to receive).

THE REMEDY:

The main part of the remedy for this is when one uses the soul’s power of *lishmah*. One should understand that the lust of men for other men is actually the body’s misuse of the power of *lishmah*, and therefore, the root of the remedy is to recover the power of *lishmah*. Through connecting to *lishmah*, one intensifies the “masculine” force in the soul.

However, the above is only a repair which will apply to pure souls who have been negatively affected by the forces of defilement which fill the world without restraint. There are other souls on

this world who deliberately incite others to sin in this area, and most of them are reincarnations of souls of the people of Sodom. Their only remedy is to being willing to die al *kiddush* Hashem (in sanctification of Hashem's name).

At a more basic level, this particular lust is fueled by the imagination. *Chazal* state that the evil inclination has seven names (see Succah 52a), and Reb Nachman of Breslev said that it also has an "eighth" name: "*medameh*." the imagination. This particular "name" of the evil inclination – "the imagination" – is mainly manifest in the time period of the End of Days, especially when it comes to the desire for immorality. In concept, it is when a person imagines that he has a desire for another person, as if the other person is him. It is like a mirror, which shows a person his own image, and the person desires the reflection – meaning that he has a lust for his own self.

The depth of this matter is what the *Vilna Gaon* writes in *sefer* Mishlei, that there are two root evil inclinations – "taavani." lust (water) and "kaasani." anger (fire). The sin of Adam HaRishon and Chavah was taavah/lust, when they desired the Tree of Knowledge. Anger, however, is rooted in the "seven kings of Edom" who originally ruled in the beginning of Creation. Anger is the manifestation of a desire that is unmet, and the deep root of anger is therefore not "anger" per se, but gaavah, conceit, which is also known as "ana emloch." "I will rule." The depth of conceit is when a person desires that everyone else should be like him. This conceit is expressed through one's imagination. Thus, anger (which is rooted in desire) actually comes from conceit. So it is desire which pulls anger and conceit towards it. In the End of Days, the root of evil appears. The root of evil is not the sin of Adam, or the Serpent, or the warring feminine and the masculine forces, but "the seven kings of Edom" – the deeply rooted desire of ana emloch, "I will rule." (As a hint, "Edom" is from the word "*medameh*." imagination).

In the spiritual dimension of the "upper" *Partzufim*, known as *Atik* and *Arieh*, there are no traces of the feminine. In our world, this concept manifests [in the side of evil] in the imagination, which fuels conceit: "ana emloch." "I will rule." the idea that "Everyone else should be like me." That is why a person would have a lust for another person: his lusts are really a product of his deeply rooted conceitedness.

The truth is that the imagination, which is false, wouldn't be able to exist if it didn't have a spark of truth to it. This spark of truth is that the "feminine" is able to be 'turned' into the "masculine" level that is at the spiritual level directly below it. That is why the imagination is able to use this transformation. Through the desire for immorality [men lusting for men], there are essentially two "females" [two receivers], and the imagination 'turns' the two 'females' into two 'men' [as if there are two "givers" here, when in reality they are only two "receivers"].

ACTUALIZING THE REMEDY:

The root of the soul-remedy for this is, firstly, to understand that the holy root of this concept is the power of *lishmah*. Therefore, if one feels capable of doing so, he should work on the concept of *lishmah*.

Secondly, one should understand that the desire for immorality stems from gaavah/conceit. Therefore one should work on the area of conceit, as explained in the words of our Sages about the topic, and as explained in the series of “Fixing Your Fire-Conceit.”

Thirdly, one should recognize that the desire for immorality comes from the imagination, which causes a person to want that other people should resemble him. The soul-remedy for this is to get oneself to “resemble” Hashem. In this way, one transforms his misused “masculine” force into a proper “feminine” force: to become a holy kind of “receiver” [by channeling one’s dependency and lusts as a desire to receive solely from G-d].

In the “animal” level of the soul, the power to “receive” takes on many forms: sometimes as lust, sometimes as fear, sometimes as lowliness (the opposite of conceit), sometimes as a will to be different from others, sometimes as a will to associate oneself [with a certain person or cause], etc. But those are just the manifestations of the issue, not the root of the issue. As with all other problems in the “animal” soul, one needs to use apply the power of “*daas*” in order to come out of the improper “garments” [which have come upon the soul].

[In conclusion]: The more that people work on the concept of acting *lishmah*, the more that this spiritual damage [of men lusting after men] will be repaired, for then the light of *kedushah* (holiness) will shine in the world and remove the *tumah* (defilement). Then it will be revealed that this entire Creation is for Hashem’s sake.

END OF DAYS

Terrorism In Eretz Yisrael

Current Events

Can the Rav please speak about how to view the current events taking place in *Eretz Yisrael*?

A

There is a spiritual dimension of reality, and a physical dimension of reality. The spiritual reality is currently mixed up, confused, and lacking clarity - because it is so mixed up. There is almost no beacon of light visible, except for a few rays of light every here and there. When this almost total confusion carries over into our physical dimension, it manifests in our physical world as the confusion and chaos that we see.

As long as everything looks fine in this physical world, the spiritual world cannot be revealed. But, when the physical world becomes overwhelmingly chaotic, mirroring the chaos in the spiritual dimension, then the confusion increases, until the physical dimension finally explodes. And when the physical dimension in front of us finally explodes, Moshiach comes.

An additional reason for [the chaos now] is connected with the concept of *hisbodedus* (the power of solitude). Throughout the generations, most of the wars fought were between nation and nation, but in the last few years, we can see, in Israel as well as outside of Israel, that there all kinds of wars being fought. The people fighting in Syria are a gathering of many people; they are not the nation of Syria alone, they are a combination of many different nations who are fighting each other. The depth behind this is because we are living in a generation of “individuals.” in which each person fights “alone” [an evil use of the power of *hisbodedus*].

Yaakov *Avinu* fought “alone” with the angel, and this reflects the holy kind of being “alone.” which is essentially *hisbodedus*. This is “the generation of *hisbodedus*” and, therefore, we have a unique ability to tap into this innate power of *hisbodedus*. But the evil kind of “alone” is the evil kind of individualism which we see rampant in today’s time, in which each person acts individually, for evil purposes [doing their “own thing”].

A person in this generation must separate from their surroundings and live internally, “alone” with Hashem. The light that is created by the individual can of course shine onto the rest of the world and raise his surroundings in holiness. Practically speaking, a person needs to live internally, alone, where it is just him and Hashem.

So, when should a person do *hisbodedus*? Will he wait until the grave to be alone...? *Chazal* explain that “Gog and Magog will merit burial.” In order to survive “the war of Gog and Magog” (the final war), one must be “alone” (to live internally with Hashem), in order to merit the meaning of “And Yaakov fought alone, until the dawn of the morning.” Before the final redemption will be the war of “Yaakov fought alone ...” [Each individual needs to persevere “until the dawn of the morning.”]

One can be involved with his environment, of course, and help people. But he must build his internal world, so that he will be able to spiritually survive the “war of Gog and Magog.” The war which we are in today, in the world and especially in Israel, is a war that reflects the spiritual struggle with *hisbodedus* that people have. May we merit the “coming of the dawn.” in which the recognition of Hashem will shine completely, may it come speedily in our days, Amen.

Fearing Terrorist Attacks & Wholesomeness

Can the Rav give a few examples of how we can feel like a “tamim” (to be “wholesome”) towards Hashem and realize that He’s in control of everything, even when we hear of terrorist attack?

A

We are in a world being dominated by attacks from all kinds of forces, such as Islamic extremists, wicked people who are constantly contemplating ways of how to kill. If one tries to think logically of what causes terrorism, either he’ll conclude that it’s Arabs from Syria or from Iran, or from some other place in the world. But you can realize that they are all messengers of Hashem, and Hashem is using them to carry out His will – it is really not possible to handle them using our puny human logic. Hashem is leading them, and this is above the understanding of our human intellect.

The wisest people in the world perhaps can wonder of how to deal with them, but do they know what’s enabling them to act? No, because it is Hashem Himself who is letting them act. The wise people in the world can try to think and think of what to do about them, but Hashem lets them act as He wills, and all of their rationalizations are for naught.

A person can see that all that he does understand is but a drop of understanding in the incomprehensible. We don’t even understand the tiniest detail of Hashem’s ways. Reb Noach of Kobrin zt”l said that without *emunah*, it’s not possible to leave the house, and with *emunah*, one can conquer everything. Most people though are leaving their homes each day without *emunah*, out

of immaturity towards life. But when a person has true understanding, and he thinks, he can see how the entire world is being led by Hashem, and that we have no comprehension of anything, and we can't predict even the next moment. So how do we survive in this world? Only through using the depth of the power *temimus*.

Are there things today we are doing which prevent us from having *temimus* (earnest, simple faith in Hashem)?

A

All that we see with our physical eyes can take away our *temimus*. For example, you see your house, and you naturally think that some contractor built it. You get used to thinking that people do everything in this world. When a person reads and hears the news all the time and he keep hearing/reading the opinions of others people, how each person understands things, and this makes us think that people are in charge of this world.

It is the opposite of *emunah* which is to believe that Hashem runs the world, and the only thing which we can do is to use our power of free will. All of the news outlets – secular media, Jewish newspapers, and even the most Chareidi newspapers contain outright heresy. They all are indicating that people run the world. The more a person lives a life of *temimus*, the more he views the world through different lenses. He is aware that whenever a person does something, he is merely a messenger of Hashem.

But when we get used to reading [or hearing] the news on a set basis, we get used to thinking that people run this world, which is the opposite of a *temimus* kind of life. If someone can hear the news all the time and tell himself that Hashem is running the world even after all that he hears, then it would be a point open for discussion. But if a person regularly listens to the news, he probably isn't reacting that way, and it gets a person used to heresy on a regular basis!

Calmness In This Situation

How can a person feel how Hashem is doing everything when we feel all the time that we live in the real world and that it is we who do everything?

A

This is a very good question. One must know that “I have to do what I need to do, but after I do what I do, I must tell myself that it’s not up to me, and that only Hashem does everything and let everything happen.” On a more subtle note, this deep awareness can also bring one to *bittul* (self-nullification) and humility towards Hashem.

How can we feel calm and that Hashem is doing everything when there are so many troubles surrounding us?

A

This question goes against all our *emunah*. The Kotzker Rebbe zt”l said, “If I could understand Hashem, I would not want Him to be my God.” We do not understand Hashem or His ways. We do not understand His good ways and surely when He has to inflict pain upon us we don’t understand. There is a little that we do comprehend, but for the most part, we don’t comprehend His ways, so we must not question Him.

What can I do to actually calm myself down, in the meantime?

A

When you truly believe that Hashem is doing it all, then you will be calmed. On the contrary, if you believe that “this bad person” did this and “that bad person” did this, then indeed, everything seems bad. But tell yourself that no one is running this world but Hashem Who is endlessly merciful – all that He does is good. If you truly come to feel that Hashem is really doing everything in this world, not people, you will be calmed which is the depth of using your *temimus*. Perhaps one

can try to “explain” the troubles we face today as an “atonement for our sins” or because “Moshiach is coming.” etc. However, the way of our *emunah* is to simply believe that Hashem is behind it all, therefore all is good.

The Erev Rav

Our Attitude Towards The “Erev Rav”

What is the reason that the “Erev Rav” have been chosen to impose difficulties upon us in the end of exile? What is the *avodah* that is required of us, with regards to the Erev Rav?

A

(The “Erev Rav” is from the words “taaruvos rabah.” a ‘great mixture’, and they are the opposite of the situation of the redemption, which will be the revelation of the “*Yechidah*.” from the word “*Yachid*.” Individual. Therefore our *avodah* is to live in a “clear world” [unmixed with evil influences]. Meaning, we need an absolute separation [from “Erev Rav”], because having a connection to them, even a little bit, is already falling to this kelipah [impure husk].¹¹

Living In Eretz Yisrael – Pros & Cons

We all know that we are immediately before Mashiach’s arrival, with all that this means and what is going to happen. I live in *Eretz Yisrael* but I am asking this question on behalf of those who live outside of *Eretz Yisrael*. Do those who live outside of *Eretz Yisrael* need to come live in *Eretz Yisrael*?

¹¹ Editor’s Note: On another occasion, a question was asked to the Rav of how to relate to the Erev Rav [which the Rav has defined in his talks about “Erev Rav” as those who look like “Jews” who influence others Jews to sin and go against the Torah]: “May one smile or say “Good Morning” to an “Erev Rav” person? The Rav answered: “No. Because even this, is a connection.”

The question arises, as to what exactly defines a person as being of the Erev Rav. The Rav was asked this, and he responded, “One of the signs of Erev Rav is when one is “moiser.” a person who [willingly] reports on other Jews to the government].” See also Peirush haVilna Gaonon Tikkunei HaZohar 41a who lists the five groups of the Erev Rav and how they can be identified.

A

The Talmud (Talmud Bavli Kesubos 110a) says that everyone should move out of their country to go live in *Eretz Yisrael*, and Tosafos there says, “This is not practiced in our times, because it is dangerous to travel. And Rabbeinu Chaim would say that in our times there is no *mitzvah* to live in *Eretz Yisrael*, because there are many *mitzvos* which apply only in the land of *Eretz Yisrael* and there are many punishments for those who are lax in keeping them, and we are not able to so careful in keeping them.” According to Rabbeinu Chaim in the Tosafos, there is both a physical danger and a spiritual danger to go live in *Eretz Yisrael*, so there is no obligation today to live in *Eretz Yisrael*. [Even according to the opinions that there is a *mitzvah* today to live in *Eretz Yisrael*] there is also a dispute if the *mitzvah* is Biblical or Rabbinical in nature: this is discussed by the Ramban in *Sefer HaMitzvos* L’Ramban, and in *sefer* Pe’as HaShulchan, and others.

Now, there is an obligation upon a person to connect himself to *kedushah* (holiness), in terms of soul, time, and place. Therefore, besides for the matter if there is a *mitzvah* or not to live in *Eretz Yisrael* today, there is still a level of *kedushah* which can only be attained by one who lives in *Eretz Yisrael*. That is clear, and simple. In spite of this, however, the view of Rabbeinu Chaim in the Tosafos is that if there is any physical or spiritual danger in moving to *Eretz Yisrael*, there is no *mitzvah* to go live there. The “spiritual danger” he is referring to is the laxity of people in observing the unique *mitzvos* of *Eretz Yisrael* and the subsequent punishments for those who do not properly adhere to the *kedushah* of *Eretz Yisrael*. However, there were still some *Gedolim* throughout the generations who risked their lives in order to go live in *Eretz Yisrael*.

In our times, though, besides for the above danger, there is also an additional danger, which we will clarify here, with *siyata d’shmaya*. Our Sages taught that in the final days, before the coming of Mashiach, when we are not yet meritorious of Mashiach’s arrival, the jurisdiction over the land of *Eretz Yisrael* is given over to the “Other Side.” In the active sense, this means that the wicked souls of the “Erev Rav” are in charge of controlling *Eretz Yisrael*. These are very reincarnations of the souls whom Moshe Rabbeinu allowed to convert and be brought up from Egypt. These are the very same souls who later instigated the sin with the golden calf, by convincing the people that Moshe Rabbeinu was no longer with them. They represent an alternative leadership to Moshe Rabbeinu. These are the people who rule *Eretz Yisrael* in the final days: the heads of the Erev Rav. They are called Erev Rav from the word *taaruvos* (mixture) which connotes an *iruv rav* (great mixture), a huge and disturbing mixture of all elements within one place.

Therefore, one who lives in *Eretz Yisrael* in in spiritual danger of becoming mixed with the Erev Rav, in terms of seeking prestige, money, power, etc. from them. As time goes on, they increase the influences of their great mixture, to the point that every single boundary which our Sages and

Gedolim have built is being trampled upon and uprooted. Their mixture of influences affects all people who live in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Making matter worse, a recent organization called “HaShamayim HaPetuchim” (trans. “Open Heavens”) has allowed millions of non-Jews to come live in *Eretz Yisrael*. Jews leave *Eretz Yisrael* and mix with the gentiles and become influenced by them, and then return to *Eretz Yisrael* with all of these influences that they have brought back. This is all due to the Erev Rav’s agenda, which seeks a totally mixed society with every possible influence. They want to incorporate every existing influence into [Israeli] society - and they don’t want to leave anything out. In that way, the *tumah* (spiritual defilement) of countries outside of *Eretz Yisrael* differs from the *tumah* today in *Eretz Yisrael*. Outside countries contains the *tumah* of the gentile nations, whereas *Eretz Yisrael* today contains the *tumah* of the Erev Rav.

In order to cover all of the details of the disturbing mixture of the many different secular elements that the Erev Rav has so far succeeded in bringing to *Eretz Yisrael*, we would need several thick volumes. But there isn’t enough time to publish all of the details, so we would only be destroying our precious time, instead of the Erev Rav. For we are currently found deep in the “50th Gate of Defilement.” where evil is covering us on all angles, in front and behind us, and from every possible direction. Basically everything is found in the “exile of the Erev Rav” today.

Therefore, it is proper for every Jew to live in *Eretz Yisrael*, but only if one has a total separation from the “Erev Rav” here. On a personal level, every individual needs to clarify his personal situation [to see if he should live in *Eretz Yisrael* or not]. For example, if one is needed by many others, or if one is of spiritual influence to others [in such cases, he should not move to *Eretz Yisrael*, because others need him]. Also, if raising one’s children in *Eretz Yisrael* will not be conducive to them, or if moving to *Eretz Yisrael* will be too hard of a change for them [because they will be switching schools], this is also a factor not to move to *Eretz Yisrael*, and it needs to be carefully thought about. Also, if one cannot make ample livelihood in *Eretz Yisrael*, one will need to examine how much *bitachon* (reliance on Hashem) he really has [and then he can decide].

We are hoping and awaiting the Redemption that it should come speedily. There is a great spiritual gain to be in *Eretz Yisrael* at a time like this...

What To Do About The Erev Rav

One of the most difficult issues seems to be that the “Erev Rav” can really be Jews. What can be done about this, especially since there is a big “price” to pay, physically and spiritually?

A

The word “erev” (evening) is from the word *taaruvos* (mixture), and in terms of *halachah*, we find that there are things which can be nullified within a mixture: a dry substance within a dry substance, a moist substance within a moist substance, anything which gives taste, anything which can become permitted, etc. This is a mixture which is *mikreh*/“happenstance” which is on a level of a “branch” of mixture [and therefore it can be sorted]. But the very root concept of mixtures is represented by “Erev Rav.” which means “*taaruvos rabah*.” “a great mixture.” and it cannot be sorted like other mixtures. For it is the very root of all mixtures. The root of this is Amalek, who “met” the Jewish people in the desert – “met” is from the word *mikreh*, happenstance. They are a *mikreh* that is connected with the very irreparable mixture.

The word “erev” means “evening.” and Hashem separated the day from the evening, therefore the day and the evening exist independently. But there is also a point where day meets the evening: the twilight. There is also a point where evening meets day: dawn. But the “Erev Rav” is like an evening mixed with the day, meaning that it obscures the light of the day. In order to sort out this “*mikreh*.” this “happenstance” which is so connected to the root of all mixtures, a great spiritual light is needed, and it would have to be a light which is above the possibility of mixture. Such a light would have the power to sort out the *mikreh*/happenstance. This light is the “light of Mashiach.” and it is the illumination of the Torah which is above “the mixture of light and darkness that serve together.”

These are essentially the inner workings behind the final generations, where there are equally warring forces of good and evil against each other. On the side of evil is the power of the “Erev Rav.” and on the side of good is the “light of Mashiach.” a pure light which is above all mixture (rooted in the illumination of Torah). That is why those who learn Torah are able to access a light of clarity: clarity of the words of the Torah. The external part of this - the “vessel” - is through the means of technology that gather together all of the *sefarim* that we have, into one place. The inner part of this - the “light” - is that it has become easier to reach a “world of clarity” within every sugya.

Therefore, the main sorting process of the Erev Rav takes place through involvement in Torah study. For it is written in the name of the Arizal that “*daas*” [knowledge of Torah] has the same gematria (numerical value) as the words “Erev Rav” – and therefore, the main way to sort the Erev Rav is through *daas*, to clarify very well each sugya. This is the main part of sorting out the Erev Rav.

However, in order to sort the Erev Rav at the root, and in order to reveal this clarity in our world of action, one needs the illumination of *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) which penetrates to the very essence of the *neshamah* (Divine soul), of which it is said, “My G-d, the soul You have to me is pure.” meaning that the *neshamah* is completely pure and it contains no mixtures. One who does this becomes attached with the “illumination of Mashiach” that is available in the world, and with the “illumination of Mashiach” that is in the soul. This is how one can have a part in sorting out the Erev Rav – which is the main *avodah* of the final generation.

Soul Reincarnations In Our Generation

Are all the souls in this generation from Dor Haflagah (the Generation of the Dispersal), and Dor HaMabul (the Generation of the Flood), and from the generation of Sodom, or rather that the influences of the world today are coming from those souls?

A

Very good question. There are always exceptional souls in every generation, even when the generation around them is evil. The Arizal said that Moshe was named so because he was drawn from the water (“ki min hamayim mi-shi-si-hu” – “for from the water he was drawn”), because even Moshe’s soul is from Dor HaMabul (the Generation of the Flood) in which there was a decree that involved water, and he was saved from water because he was the one exceptional soul of Dor HaMabul who merited not to be a part of the decree of the flood. Moshe’s soul was contained in Noach who lived in the generation of the Flood. Sodom was not a “generation” of “Sodomy.” it was just an evil city, and Lot was saved from it, because he was the exceptional soul in Sodom that deserved to be saved.

Our souls are from those generations, and we are sent here to this world to rectify their sin. Therefore, our souls are the holy parts of those previous souls. Just as in those generations there were very few souls that were holy while most of the generation was evil, so is our generation mostly evil, with a few souls that are holy and pure.

Most of the souls in this generation are totally from the “Erev Rav” (the Mixed Multitude), according to the writings of our Rabbis [Ed: as explained in a forthcoming response from the Rav, this means that most of the souls in this generation contain a “spark” of Erev Rav in their souls]. The souls of the Erev Rav are rooted in the evil, impaired side to the three active elements: fire,

water, and wind. Sodom was the roots of the Erev Rav souls rooted in fire, Dor HaMabul was the root of Erev Rav souls rooted in water, and the Dor Haflagah were the wind-rooted souls of Erev Rav. Therefore, in our souls there is evil in our elements of fire, water, and wind [Ed: and those impaired parts of our soul come from the “Erev Rav”]. If a person merits to sanctify himself on this world, he merits to use his fire, water and wind for holiness [Ed: thereby rectifying the evil within his soul that comes from the “Erev Rav” aspect of the soul].

Afraid Of The Geulah

Since we are now in a process that is leading towards the Geulah (the Redemption), with Hashem’s help, I have a question that is bothering me very much. Although every Jew wants the Geulah, I am afraid of it, just as I’m afraid of dying. After all, after the Geulah people will no longer have free will to choose between good and evil, and then it won’t be possible to do teshuvah. Even through all my attempts to improve, any success that I have is very minimal in comparison to the huge overhaul that I really need to undergo. There’s no way I will become a completely different person before the Geulah arrives. I’m not becoming a totally G-d fearing person who dedicates his entire life to serving Hashem. [So I’m afraid of Geulah, because I will never be fully ready for it and then when it will come and I can no longer do teshuvah.] Is it okay that I’m afraid of the Geulah no less than I’m afraid of death, chas v’shalom?

A

Yes [fear of the *Geulah* is appropriate], and such fear is called “*Pachad Yitzchok*”, the fear of Yitzchok Avinu, which is a fear that spurs a person to change, but only if this is a fear accompanied by a sense of joy [of striving to do Hashem’s will], and it should not be a phobia or anxiety which is destructive to a person.

Can There Be Another Holocaust??

In the past the Rav has said that the “Torah world” [the world of yeshivos] has already been destroyed [due to the influences of technology today], and that either one of two things will happen – Either it will be like the situation in Europe before the Holocaust (and it will meet the same end as that generation [*chas v’shalom*], or, HaKadosh Baruch Hu will prevent this from happening by bringing the *Geulah* [refer to the Rav’s derasha of Bein HaMitzarim_027_Spiritual Destruction, given in 2017].

Based on the current situation of the world today, does it make more sense that the second option will happen [Hashem will bring the *Geulah* soon] and therefore we don’t need to be concerned from the decrees that the “Erev Rav” [the Israeli government] are making and we don’t need to be concerned about a possible destruction of the next generation? If I know the Ato this it would make a big difference in my personal *avodah*.

A

There is still a lot of reason to be concerned [that the generation can become destroyed *chas v’shalom*].

World War Iii & Natural Catastrophes

1) The Chofetz Chaim said that the third world war will not be fought with tanks and warplanes, but with technology. Is that what is taking place today, and will it continue like this until Mashiach comes? Or will it also be coupled with actual wars, and difficult situations of global hunger and other kinds of suffering? 2) Also, there are prophecies in Navi concerning the End of Days, that there will be “earthquakes” and other kinds of natural catastrophes [floods, hurricanes, etc.]. Is that the simple meaning of these prophecies, or can it mean something else?

A

1) Yes. However, it is very possible that it will be both [technology coupled with conventional warfare], if the harsh decrees about the End of Days do not become nullified, *chas v’shalom*.

2) The prophecies are about natural disasters in the End of Days can also be understood literally. However, there is a rule that any harsh prophecy can be nullified.

Corona

Cold Relationships Of Media Communication

What did the Rav mean in the recent response about corona virus that it is coming because of all of the cold connections today that people have to each other, and how is that worse than sin itself? How can it be worse than sinning?

A

I will now go more into the root of the matter this time, and I will elaborate a bit with *siyata d'shmaya*. Hashem has created His world with an inner layer and an outer layer to everything. The inner layer to everything is always the spiritual light, the *ohr* which is contained in it, and this corresponds to the soul, to the *neshamah*. The outer layer within everything is the container that is within everything, and that corresponds to the body. In other words, there is a soul and there is a body to everything in the creation.

There are two different ways of internal connection. There is a connection that one has to himself, which is called self-love, loving oneself, and this is a “cold” kind of connection. When two beings come together, there is warmth. There is a connection of warmth.

Where there is an internal connection, when one connects to himself, that is called cold connection. When a person is inwardly connected to himself, this is using the power of cold for *kedushah*, which is the holy use of the power of coldness. This is not an egoistic kind of self-love. It is a holy kind of self-love and it comes from using the power of cold for *kedushah*.

However, when this power becomes twisted by the side of evil, it is the power of Amalek, who has the power of evil coldness. This causes people to connect with people in a cold manner.

There is also an evil way to use the power of heat, the power of warmth, which is when a person becomes passionate and heated when he is on his way to committing a sin, such as forbidden relations. When a person only has a superficial connection to himself, this is the evil force of heat.

And when a person has an egoistic self-love to himself, this is the evil use of the power of cold. Being cold is not a sin. But it is the root of all sins because it prevents a person from doing *mitzvahs* and it causes a person to commit any sin. When a person is cold and he is indifferent to *ruchniyus*, that is the power of Amalek, the power to be cold and indifferent towards the spiritual and just as a

person's *middos* are the inner roots behind his *mitzvos* and his Torah learning, so is heat and warmth a root to all of one's connections that one has.

Why Would Cold Relationships Make People Deserving Of Death?

Why would this cause people to be deserving of death? Is it similar to the situation of the second Bais HaMikdash when there was rampant *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred? Or when the three cardinal sins were being committed? Or is this something new which has developed in our generation which is all considered like one small village connected together?

A

When a person is connected to coldness itself, it is death. It is a connection to the very concept of death because a living person is warm whereas a dead person is cold. This corona virus, which is being caused by cold relationships between people, is a new issue which has developed in our generation. We will now elaborate on this, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

The three cardinal sins, the sins of murder, illicit relations, and idol worship, are the root of all sins. However these three root sins are essentially getting their power from the sin of *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred. In this generation, the generation of the *ikvesa demeshicha*, the generation directly proceeding Moshiach's arrival, the inner root of *sinas chinam* is being revealed. And the very root of *sinas chinam*, the very root of baseless hatred, is the power of *pirud*, disparity, separation. It is a world of disparity that is being revealed in our times. By the period of the second Bais HaMikdash, when *sinas chinam* was rampant, it was more of a chance kind of a disparity. It was a kind of a disparity where people were still able to bond with each other, in spite of the disparity. It countered the *Chayah* level of the soul. In the era of the first Bais HaMikdash, the presence of three cardinal sins corresponded to the *nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *neshamah* levels of the soul. But in today's generation, the disparity of the world today, is the evil force which counters the *Yechidah* level of the soul, the highest level of the soul. The *Yechidah* level of the soul corresponds to the holy power of coldness, which is essentially the power of a person to become alone and in solitude with Hashem. In the side of evil, this power is countered by the power of evil coldness, the power of disparity, the power of Amalek.

Yechidah, the soul's power to be cold, to become alone and attached to Hashem, is really the holy manifestation of *keter* (lit. crown). On the side of devastation, it is being countered by the epidemic called the corona, which is really the manifestation of *keter* on the side of evil.

We need to understand very well that until the year of 5779, we still had another 221 years left until the end of our world which will be at the year 6,000. From this year onward, with

5780, the 221 years have now been shortened. The number 221 is equal to the word *erech*, which hints to the *middah* of Hashem that is called *maarech apei*, when Hashem slows down His anger. And now that the 221 years have been shortened, it has also minimized on some level Hashem's conduct of slowing his anger. Therefore, from this year onward, the entire world is going through changes, especially in *Eretz Yisrael*, and things will not become totally calm until the coming of Moshiach.

According to the non-Jewish calendar, the year is 2020, which is the number 20 twice. The number 20 is equal in gematria to the word *keter*. This is the revelation that is taking place now, the *keter d'keter*, the innermost level of the *keter*, which is the word *keter* twice, equal to 20 and 20, which is a hint to the non-Jewish year of 2020.

Therefore, a state of solitude has come into the world, an impaired kind of being alone, where nobody can come within the space of another person. The private space of a person corresponds to the *Yechidah* level of the soul, and right now nobody is allowed to interfere with another person's space. It is also causing people to remain secluded in their homes. And as it is known, the *nefesh* level of the soul is in the liver, the *Ruach* is in the heart, and the *neshamah* is in the brain, the *chaya* is on the person's clothing and the *Yechidah* is in the house. Therefore one is to become secluded in the house due now, to the *Yechidah* revelation which is taking place in the world today.

Understand that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has now erased any connection to *tumah*, to all of the restaurants, to all of the mingling, all of the vacations and the entire world of falsity that has been here for the last couple of years.

However, just as when we left Egypt, we remained with the idol that was called Baal Tzefon, the root of all idols, so too are we remaining now with the very innermost level of *tumah*, the very core of the *shaar hanun d'tumah* (the 50th level of defilement), which is otherwise known as the media, the internet. Now people are secluded in their homes but their entire connection to the world is still being enabled through the media and the internet, which is the *shaar hanun d'tumah*, the internet. It is the most difficult *kelipah* which has not yet been shattered. The innermost gate of this *shaar hanun d'tumah*, the *keter d'keter* on the side of evil, is dominant now without any restraint.

The way to get rid of this *kelipah* is by shining the light of Moshiach, which is found with us already now. This is the light of the *keter d'keter* on the side of *kedushah*. When the media will disappear, Moshiach will come. But until Moshiach comes, the innermost level of the *shaar hanun d'tumah* dominates in the world and it contains a mixture of *kedushah* and *tumah*, from the highest level of *kedushah* all the way down to the lowest level of *tumah*. That is why in this generation everything has become mixed and confused together in a disturbing way, which our logic cannot comprehend. This will not change until the coming of Moshiach.

Self-Improvement Now

The Rav has said that there are two parts for us to improve upon at this time, to connect to people who are good and pure and to attain connection of warmth with other people. Why isn't it enough to just have warm connection with people? Won't this alone fix all of the cold connections that people had with others? Also why do we need to physically befriend people who are pure and good.

A

On one hand, a person needs to build warm relationships with other people to counter all of the cold relationships that there are in the world. This is the holy use of the power of warmth. But that is not the main part that we need right now. The main thing we need right now is to find our power of holy coldness, which is essentially the *Yechidah* level of our soul, and that is the main revelation taking place now. This is achieved by becoming attached and integrated with Hashem, with the belief and the trust that there is no one in control except for Hashem.

We need to review the segulah of the *Nefesh HaChaim* (3:12) that when a person believes that no one has any control other than Hashem, he is protected from all harm. This is the true and the only way to pass through this period, where the kelipah of the shaar hanun d'tumah has become physically manifest throughout the world.

Therefore, a person needs to attach his soul to Hashem with love and with fondness for Hashem, and to feel a sense of *bittul*, nullified to Hashem. Through this a person can live a life of delighting in Hashem and in His Torah. This is the general way of living a life of truth but all the more so, in this generation, and especially in the current period, which we are in now.

It is our hope and our tefillah that the kelipah known as the shaar hanun d'tumah, which is the media, should become shattered, and that Moshiach should become revealed now so that he can illuminate the entire world with the yichud that will reveal, the individuality of Hashem, because there is nothing besides for Hashem: Ein od Milvado, efes Zuloso, "There is nothing besides for Hashem, there is absolutely no other than Him."

Is The World Purer Now?

Has the world become a purer place now [since all public venues are shut down because of the coronavirus lockdown]?

A

There are two sides to the coin now. On one hand, Hashem has put an end to the “49 gates of impurity” by closing everything down, all of the eateries, hotels, entertainment outlets, etc. This has made it easy for everyone to cut off from all of this. On the other hand, the shaar hanun d'*tumah* (the 50th gate of impurity) has still remained, and it only has gotten stronger, because people are in their houses now and surfing the internet all day, getting all of their chiyus (vitality in life) from the internet and from media. On one hand, we are very happy that so much evil has gone away from the world now, but on the other hand, we can be very pained and troubled that the strongest kind of evil, the great *tumah* which is the media and internet, has only gotten stronger. However, in spite of this, there is also the light of Hashem shining strongly now to counter all of this.

Various Resolutions To Take On

I read the Rav's response about the root of what is causing the corona virus and what we need to work on now. In addition to various kaballas (resolutions) that I made, bli neder, my wife and I took upon ourselves to increase giving tzedakah to try to house people who are in need of kiruv, and all this so that we can increase relationships with others and to create relationships of warmth with others, which I understood from the Rav's words about what we need to improve on right now. I am also trying to *daven* now about the situation. My problem though is that I feel like a fly on the wall when it comes to everything that is going on right now, which is being labeled now as a pandemic. Is the average simple Jew like me really able to do anything in the world right now will my prayers really help? And since this is a message of Hashem to *Klal Yisrael*, as a whole, how can some individual person really make a difference?

A

Everything contains an external and an internal layer to it. Everything has a body and a soul to it. The act of giving tzedakah and hosting guests is all the external part of what we need to do. It is the container, the body. We also need the inner part, which is the soul. This inner part of becoming more connected with others is to have a true, inner bond with others. However, we need to be careful with who we connect to, and therefore we should only become connected to those who are pure, to do this as much as we can, and at our own levels. In the inner recesses of our soul,

we need to connect ourselves to the root of all the neshamos of *Klal Yisrael*, to feel a connection to *Klal Yisrael* as a whole and to each Jew individually.

And in the actual sense, we should become connected to those who have good hearts and those who are spiritually pure and good. But that is only one side of the coin, and it counters the corona, which is from the word *kor*, which means cold, and it is by increasing warmth and love in our relationships with others by becoming more connected with others.

But the other side of the coin is that we also need to use the power of *kor*, the power of coldness, for *kedushah*. And that is by becoming secluded with ourselves and to become secluded with the Creator. This is the secret of revealing the highest part of the soul which is called the *Yechidah*, which means individual. The corona is really the *kelipah*, the shell, which counters the *Yechidah* level of the soul, which is shining strongly now during the current period that we are in. And it is essentially the light of the redemption, may it come speedily.

Tefillah (*davening/praying*), always helps in any situation. Sometimes *davening* can totally erase a decree and sometimes *davening* will not take away a decree but it will lighten the intensity of the decree. But even if *chas v'shalom* there is a decree which cannot be nullified through *davening*, which is what the people thought at the times of Purim, it is still possible to lessen the intensity of the decree through *davening*.

The main kind of prayer which is needed now by the Jewish people specifically, and also by everyone who inhabits the world in general, is to pray that everybody should return completely to G-d, and that everyone should recognize that G-d is showing everyone that He does not want this false and this superficial kind of connection that people have with each other in the world today. It includes the connections that people have with each other by eating out together in restaurants, through vacations, through night entertainments, through places of social mingling, through using social media to send out information and videos to each other, and etc. All of this is falsity, it is all *sheker*. And it is all founded on the *shaar hanun d'tumah*, the fiftieth gate of impurity, where *keter* becomes *sheker*, where connection becomes falsity, and even more so it is the innermost level of the *shaar hanun d'tumah* itself. It is *sheker* itself.

By recognizing this truth and by returning in complete *teshuvah* to Hashem, the innermost gate of the 50th gate of holiness will become revealed.

In no circumstance should a person *daven* that the epidemic should stop so that everything will return to the way the world was before everything started. Because if the world continues as it was, before all of this began, it will actually be worse for the world than death, and this is because the world is filled today with *tumah* in every direction and the heart of any Jew that is pure today is able to feel broken from the very presence of all the depravity and all the *tumah* that is in our world. And *rachmana litzlan*, even as the epidemic is taking place, now that people are secluded in their homes instead of connecting to the *Yechidah* level of their soul and becoming alone with their *neshamah* and with their Creator, instead they are *Rachmana litzlan* becoming even more attached to the internet and to social media outlets. This is the very depth of the tragic fall into the

innermost level of the *shaar hanun d'tumah*, the fact that people are getting their main *chiyus* from such a source.

At this time the verse of “*mi l’Hashem eilai.*” “Whoever is for Hashem, come towards me.” applies to us more than ever. Each person right now has the awesome choice of either becoming connected to Hashem, to the Torah, and to one's *neshamah* or *chas v'shalom* fall into the depths of the *shaar hanun d'tumah*, the most depraved spiritual level possible. That is what we truly need to *daven* about. For this reason, our *tefillos* at this time need to come from the depths of our *neshamos*, each person on his own level, from the deepest place within yourself that you are in touch with. What we *daven* for the most shows what is bothering us the most, at this innermost level of our being.

Summary Of Our Avodah Now

What is our *avodah* now?

A

To erase our emotional connection that we have with the world, to feel separated from it in our soul, as much as we can. And to also cut off from it in the practical sense, by disconnecting ourselves from all that's going on in the world, and to instead connect ourselves only to Hashem and to His Torah, and nothing else! In depth, we need to become connected to the *neshamos* of all the people of Yisrael, and in the actual sense, we should become connected only to those who are as close as possible to *kedushah* (holiness).

What Is The Message Of Corona Tragedies In America?

In *chutz l'aretz* many people were already *niftar*, Rachmana Litzlan, from the coronavirus. What should we do as a *zechus* for others?

A

HaKadosh Baruch Hu is awakening those who live in *chutz l'aretz* in particular, because of the gross pursuit of materialism there, and because of all the mingling with secular culture that's very prevalent there, which affects them both on an external level as well as on an internal level. And therefore, people need to separate as much as they can from the materialistic lifestyle and way of thinking of secular society in *chutz l'aretz*, and they need to build for themselves only a life of *kedushah*.

Even more so, though, it is upon each person to build for himself his own private world within him, so that he can go totally against the lifestyle of mingling with the gentiles. Understand that well.

One should also awaken those who are ill with coronavirus to gain this perspective, and that's besides for helping them with what they need and *davening* for their recovery.

In *Eretz Yisrael* as well, there is also this issue of intermingling with secular society, where those who are observant of Torah and *mitzvos* have slowly had more and more involvement with the secular world. That is why in the time which we find ourselves in, Hashem has sent an awakening to the Chareidi world by shutting down all community life. The issue of mingling with secular society began in Bnei Brak, when Torah observant Jews began to become more involved with Tel Aviv and the rest of secular society in Israel, and it spread from there. And that is why Hashem came and shut down everything, to awaken them that they need to close themselves off from being connected with the secular and from being mixed with all outside influences. It is better if people would do this willingly, rather than be forced to do it.

If a person is superficial, he will place the blame on the Chareidi world and point an accusing finger at them. But if a person lives inwardly and spiritually, he recognizes all of this as Hashem's calling to the Chareidi communities, that it is time for them to cut themselves off from being involved with secular society in Israel, unlike the last couple of years where so many Chareidim have gone to learn in secular academies, workplaces that are inappropriate with a Jew's values, and with being involved in working for "kosher" media, which is highly inappropriate for a Jew.

It is upon every person to see now that Hashem is demanding a change. The direction of the last couple of years, where Torah observant Jews have become more and more connected to the secular society and culture of the world, needs to be changed. We need to separate from all of it. Until now, people had the claim that they needed to do so for the purposes of earning a livelihood. What has Hashem done now? He has erased and destroyed the source of livelihood for most people now, so that people can reflect and recognize the falsity of this claim.

The same goes for all of the vacations to hotels for Pesach in *chutz l'aretz*. It has destroyed the generation today, and now all of it has vanished, as if it never existed. And all of the academies have been silenced.

Chas v'shalom should a person think that eventually over time things will return to normal again. Instead, each person needs to awaken himself now that Hashem is demanding a disconnection from everything. Each individual on a personal level needs to reflect now on what he

had been connected with until now and what Hashem has taken away from him, and realize what Hashem wants from him, and what he needs to cut off from.

But the root of the *tumah* in the world still has not been severed yet, and unfortunately, it has only gotten stronger. It is the accursed media, that *avi avos hatumah* (the “grandfather of impurity”), and it is the source of all of the diseases on this world, and it is especially the root of the coronavirus. The media is at the inner root of this coronavirus epidemic.

Every person needs to disconnect from the media, because it is the final test which we have entered into in this current period, for it seems to people that all their needs are met by being connected to there the Internet. Instead of deciding to disconnect from it, though, people are only becoming further connected with it, and this is because it is written, “*Before becoming broken, there is pride.*”

May Hashem illuminate His complete light and erase all evil, including this current epidemic, and may His light fill all the dimensions of Creation.

Wearing Masks During Corona – Hashem’s Message

What message did Hashem send us through everyone having to wear a mask over their face because of corona?

A

There are a few perceptions to it. (1) It is to remind us of the “mask” [that Moshe had to wear] as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf [which brought down the spiritual level of the people and didn’t allow them to see Moshe’s face directly]. (2) The mouth covers the nose and the mouth specifically, because the nose and mouth correspond to the level of the six centuries of This World which precede Next World, and it is a hint that the state of “This World” is now becoming “covered” over, revealing the state of the Next World.

Awakening Heavenly Compassion To Protect Oneself And Others

If a person does the inner *avodah* that the Rav is describing, will this awaken Heavenly compassion on him and on the rest of *Klal Yisrael*?

A

It awakens hashgachah “peratis.” “individual” Divine Providence, because when you access your true individuality, it is said that “Just as you are to Him, so will He be to you” (see *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* 1:7), meaning that there will be actual Divine Providence in all areas.

How Mesirus Nefesh Protects From Death

Is this way of bonding with Hashem as the Rav has described [in the derasha about corona] accomplished specifically by having mesirus *nefesh* for it [which is a very high level], or is every person able to do it on his own level?

A

During this period, every person can certainly inspire himself to have some level of *mesirus nefesh*. Although a person will still not be able to access the inner spiritual light available during this time when he only has a little bit of *mesirus nefesh*, even though it is not the full level of *mesirus nefesh*, he can still have some small amount of *mesirus nefesh* on his own level, in just one area that he works on, and that is necessary for any person to work on at this time.

In general, whenever danger comes to the world, a spiritual light comes to the world which is known as his-talkut *hanefesh*, “removal of the soul.” and this can be manifest in two different ways. If a person is not zoche (meritorious), then *chas v’shalom* this concept of “removal of the soul” will translate itself into death for him. But if a person is zoche, it becomes the power which is described in the teaching of *Chazal* known as “Die before you die” (Mos ad shelo tamus), meaning that one uses the very power of “removal of the soul” for holiness, by having mesirus *nefesh* (being willing to give up his will for Hashem and devote himself much more than usual to doing Hashem’s will).

This is the deep root of how a person can be saved from death. Getting saved from death is not by running away from death. Rather, it is by using the very power of death itself, by channeling the power of “death” in a holy direction, which is by using the power of mesirus *nefesh*, giving up one’s desires in order to do the will of Hashem. In that way, a person can be saved from death [by having mesirus *nefesh*].

How Do We Have Mesirus Nefesh Now?

What are the parameters of mesirus *nefesh* (showing self-sacrifice) during this time?

A

There is practical *mesirus nefesh* one needs to do now as well as emotional, inward *mesirus nefesh* that a person needs now.

In the practical sense, a person should take one thing a day that he has a hard time with and overcome it. On the emotional and inward level, a person should cut off deeply from all that's going on in the world and to feel a sense of separation from the entire world. A person can activate this *mesirus nefesh* by thinking: "How long will all of this go on for? Look how Hashem has changed the world so quickly."

A person can see that whole world is shaking now, and that alone can get a person to see how much he needs to cut off the world now, because he sees how the entire world is sheker and that Hashem can change it so quickly.

Yeshivos & Individuality

Also, why is it that all of the yeshivos teach a certain "one-size-fits-all" approach to their students? Why isn't the concept of individuality taught? Especially since the Rav emphasizes so much about this concept of revealing one's individuality. Why isn't the generation taught about this concept of individuality, if it is so important to each individual's *avodas Hashem* and in doing what Hashem wants?

A

You can see that Reb Yisrael Salanter had many talmidim who each had a very different approach, in their way of thinking and in the areas of *avodah* that they emphasized. The Alter of Kelm, the Alter of Novhardok, the Alter of Slabodka and the other students of Reb Yisrael Salanter all had vastly different approaches. The 'one-size-fits-all' approach is only the external layer. At the internal layer, we can find many different unique approaches.

How Does One Reach The Innermost Place In The Soul?

What are the levels of reaching the innermost place in the soul?

A

The first part is the lowest part of the deepest place in the soul, which is to reveal one's individuality. At this level, a person feels his existence (*Yeish*).

After this stage is a further level, where a person can reach *bittul* (self-nullification) and nullify his sense of *Yeish*/existence.

What exactly does a person nullify? A person needs to nullify anything external to his self which is not who "I" really am. In addition, one also needs to nullify any qualities that were gained from others, because in reality, all qualities gained from others are all coming from the world of imagination since a person only 'gains' qualities from others by imitating them because he compares himself to them, and this is all from the world *medameh*, which means "comparing" and which also means "imagination."

So a person needs to nullify the *medameh* any qualities gained from others as a result of comparing himself to them, which all came about through using his imagination. Then one can reach his true self. This is his true *Yeish* (existence).

Then, the final stage is for one to nullify even his true self, and to become attached in *d'veykus* to the only true Existence, Who is Hashem.

How Much Time Is Needed Now For Daily Hisbodedus?

How much time should a person set aside now to be "alone" with Hashem?

A

It should be for at least a few minutes. It is proper to do it for a half hour or an hour a day. Spending more than an hour a day on this or not will depend on the balance that one has between his actions and his Torah learning, each person according to his level and according to his situation. But the main thing is not the amount of time one spends on it. It is mainly about reaching an inner, quiet place in yourself, where you can reach a simple bond with Hashem. Each person can do this on his own level right now, since the time now is appropriate for this.

Now that Hashem has arranged it that a person is found less in the *beis midrash*, it is a sign that it is upon each person now to seclude his soul, inwardly, with His Creator.

How To Connect More To Personal Torah Learning

Regarding Torah learning, does a person need to immerse himself more especially at this current time in the areas of Torah that he loves learning about?

A

One needs to immerse himself in the parts of Torah that he feels the biggest connection to, so that he can become immersed in it with the depths of his soul. Since most people find themselves in a complex situation during this time in their lives, most people are not on the level of *Gedolei HaDor* (leaders of the generation), who have the spiritual stamina to be in the house and yet still disconnect emotionally from all of the noise and disturbances surrounding them and who can continue with their regular fixed times of Torah study as usual. There are some rare individuals who can do that, and they are praiseworthy, but here we are speaking about the common case scenario, as opposed to the level that people simply aspire to be on which is not commonly reached.

Therefore, in order for most people to get through this period, they will need to connect to a part of Torah which is closer to their heart. There are two reasons for this. The inner reason is because that is how a person can connect to the Torah on a deeper level. The external reason is because it is more practical to learn something enjoyable over a long period of time, which will help a person withstand the disturbances in the house, because he can easily reconnect to his learning when he is continuously learning what he enjoys.

Practically speaking, a person should pick a Torah topic of particular interest to him, and study it more, clarify it, and immerse himself in it. Alternatively, a person can choose several different inner points to work with, and become more immersed in them. But if any sensible person wants to pass this period correctly and is lacking an enjoyable structure in his schedule, he will find himself amidst the chaos from all of the petty disturbances in his house. Therefore, a person needs to organize a structure of Torah learning for himself. Either a person should choose an expansive Torah topic to study so that he can clarify it better which is usually more common with those who have a more encompassing knowledge in Torah – or, at least, a person should at least pick a Torah topic that he is very connected to, and that is what he should immerse himself in, for the time being.

Although we have a *mitzvah* to know the entire Torah, and an avreich has his normal structure of learning from the kolel, the fact is that most people will not be able to hold out strong

over a long amount of time like this, due to all kinds of complex factors taking place in one's house. Therefore, a person should be wise and choose to learn *sefarim* that he enjoys learning, or a certain Torah topic that he feels particularly drawn towards, and that is what he needs to become more connected with now. In this way, a person will be able to deal better with the various complex situations in his house. Certainly if one has a fixed time every day for learning Daf Yomi or fixed times every day of in-depth Torah learning, one should keep it up as much as he can, but a person needs to be sensible and find areas of Torah learning which are closest to his heart, which he can involve himself in regularly. Although this is normally not the preferred structure of Torah learning for a person, it is the recommended approach for a person to take right now, in order to get by these trying and complex times that we are going through.

What Inner Force Is The Rav Referring To?

[The Rav explained recently in the derashah about corona that a certain “inner force” has come onto the world in the last few years.] What is this “inner force” that the Rav is referring to?

A

The spiritual light of the 50th gate within the 50th gate [both on the sides of good and evil] is referred to by the Kaballists as the Reisha D'lo Isyada, “The unknowable beginning.” It is the point known as Keter, and the innermost level of this is Keter D'Keter.

Are We In The End Of Days?

Are we found now in the End of Days? And how exactly will the “50th gate of holiness” prevail?

A

Every person can see now that no one knows what will be. Basically everything now is cloudy and unclear. This corresponds to the revelation of the point of Reisha d'lo isyada, to the

unknowable beginning, and it is being translated in our world as a reality in which people are not able to know for certain of what is going to happen.

The End of Days is the general name of today's times, and we do not know precisely for how long it will continue. It will be overcome only when the presence of Hashem completely fills each person's heart.

Why Did Coronavirus Strike Right Before Pesach?

Why did the coronavirus happen right before Pesach, which is the most pressure-filled time of the year, with so many things we need to take care of? Before Rosh HaShanah it's also a pressure-filled time, but that's more of an internal kind of pressure, such as thoughts about how to do teshuvah, etc. But right before Pesach, the pressure is that people have to do all kinds of errands out of the house. If this would have happened after Pesach, we would have a more settled mind to be able to enter inward into our soul....

A

What did it look like for the Jewish people right before the redemption from Egypt? Did they arrive at the redemption from Egypt from a state of calmness and tranquility? They were coming from being in a state of tough, difficult labor with bricks and mortar and with all of the terrible suffering and oppression that took place in Egypt.

But at the plague of darkness, the Jewish people didn't have to work anymore....

A

That only came after their suffering was so terrible that they *davened* and cried out to Hashem, after the first Pharaoh died. But before the plague of darkness, the Jewish people first had to go through a period of confusion and disorientation, and from that state of confusion came the next stage, where they enjoyed some tranquility, when Pharaoh died and they cried out to Hashem and their prayers were heard by Hashem. The process began with confusion, with disorientation, and this was followed by tranquility, with the first Pharaoh's death which led to their strong prayers that were heard by Hashem, and then the next step of tranquility started for them, when Egypt was

stricken with plagues over the course of 12 months. But it all started with the Jewish people being disoriented. It did not start with calmness and tranquility.

In different terms which mean the same thing, it was dark in the beginning, which was followed by light. It was like the first day of Creation, which began with evening, followed by morning, and this completed the day. That is the way that everything in the Creation happens. “The shell comes before the fruit.” The process always starts with confusion, and slowly, those who are *zocheh* will, with the help of Hashem, not die, unlike the four-fifths of the Jewish people who died in the plague of darkness, and they will enter into the state of “Let there be light.” in which “The night shines like the day” which is said regarding the night of Pesach.

Is Corona Like The Plague Of Darkness When Four-Fifths Died?

The Rav recently stated in a response that the coronavirus is like the plague of darkness, which was bad for Egypt but good for the *tzaddikim*. Does this mean that those who were *niftar* from coronavirus were like the four-fifths that didn’t survive the plague of darkness in Egypt, who didn’t merit the Geulah?

A

No. By the plague of darkness, only the *reshaim* (those who were deemed wicked) perished from it. Right now, though, were everything is mixed because of the dominance of the *Erev Rav* in the world today, the epidemic can affect either both *tzaddikim* and *reshaim*.

What Will Happen After Coronavirus Stops

What will be when this is all over?

A

The world will not go back to the way it was before, and that is clear. The world will not return to normal again unlike after World War II. Whether this period lasts for a long time or for a short time, it is clear that the world will never return to the way it was before.

The World Will Not Return To The Way It Was Before

What does the Rav mean that the world will not return to the way it was before? Can the Rav be more specific about this? And when exactly did the world enter into the innermost level of the 50th level of *tumah*?

A

There will never be calmness and peace in the world again. There will be a lot of extreme changes in the world, from all different directions. Some of these changes will be totally unexpected. Last year of 5779 was a 'bridging point', and now in 5780 we have actually entered into a changed world. Anyone who isn't so affected by the *tumah* of the world today is able to see it clearly, just as clearly as the sun in mid-day.

Who Is Gog And Magog Today?

1) The Rav has said recently that we are currently in the war of Gog and Magog. How is this possible? Who is Gog and Magog today? 2) Also, there are views in *Chazal* that the Jewish people will be exiled to the desert for 40 years before Mashiach comes. Will this happen soon?

A

1) "Gog and Magog" exists both internally as well as externally.

On the inner level, the "war of Gog and Magog" is when all of one's inner forces are clashing and "warring" with each other (all of them without exception). It is when each force contradicts another force in the soul and an internal war is created. This is because the light of individuality is right now radiating in each person's soul, due to the light of the "*Yechidah*" level of the soul which is right now shining strongly in the world. When one's individuality is being revealed more strongly, even though this is all taking place on an unconscious level, it brings out the differences between all of the contradicting forces between one and another. Therefore, everything every single force of the soul is at war with one another.

On the outer level the war of Gog and Magog means as follows. There is the root, the secret of oneness, which is the nation of Yisrael. Branching out from this root are two branching nations,

Esav and Yishmael. The exile of “Edom” refers to Western society, and the exile of “Yishmael” refers to the Muslim world. However, it is now being revealed that both Edom (Esav) and Yishmael are rooted in Amalek, and to be more precise, they are both rooted in the “Erev Rav.” This allows for the union of Edom and Yishmael, where both Western and Muslim cultures are becoming mixed together. That is why we see today Christian Arabs, and on the other end of the spectrum we find a faction of Muslims such as in Saudi Arabia and other Arabic countries who are joined with America, in the fight against Iran. This is because Islam divides generally into two sects, and part of it is joined with Western society. Even Edom (Esav) is called “Western” society, and west in Hebrew is *maarav*, from the word *taaruvos*, “mixture.” which is a hint to the mixing together of Islam and Western culture. And the Muslims themselves are called *Aravim* (Arabs), which is also from the word *maarav*, from the word *taaruvos*/mixing.

2) The inner definition of being exiled to the desert for 40 years before Mashiach arrives is that we need to return to the exact way that our ancestors were like when they were exiled in the desert for 40 years. And that is to personify that which Bilaam said, “They are a nation that dwells alone.” That is the way which is becoming revealed now, where each person is now dwelling “alone” at home.

How Will We Merit The Geulah In Spite Of All The Tumah Today?

How can we deal with all the *tumah* which is coming from the *shaar hanun d'tumah* today? And how can we go against the rest of the world?

A

There are two parts of how Hashem will redeem the Jewish people by the final Geulah (Redemption). One part of it depends on how Hashem wills it to be through His choice. If Hashem redeems us through *middas hadin* (strict justice) then of this it is said, “Which living one can be found righteous by You?” If that is the case, *chas v'shalom*, it will be like the words of the *sefer Chessed L'Avraham* who states that 7,000 people will remain alive for the Redemption. There is also another way, in which Hashem can bring the Redemption as an “elderly King who is full of compassion.” where Hashem will awaken all souls from within, to recognize Him. And through this, everyone will immediately do *teshuvah* and return to Hashem, and then everyone will merit the Redemption.

What exactly will happen? None of us can know.

It is the *avodah* of every individual now to use the illumination being shined upon our souls now, to use the spiritual light of the *shaar hanun d'kedushah* (the 50th level of holiness). All a person

needs to do is to resemble a bit the verse, “And I have cleaned out the house.” and then one will feel the inner light which is shining clearly now.

As for your question about how to go against the rest of the world, *Chazal* teach on the verse “Avraham HaIvri” that Avraham was on one side of the world while the rest of the world was on the other side. But there is a fundamental difference between what happened with Avraham and with today. Simply speaking, Avraham bequeathed to us the ability, as his descendants, to go against the rest of the world. But the more important aspect of this difference is that Avraham attained all of his levels in a hidden manner, until Hashem showed Himself to him after all of his exertion to recognize the Creator. But we are found at a point where Hashem’s light is already beginning to shine for us, and it is just that there is a point concealing it from us. If one manages to remove that obstacle even slightly, the light of Hashem will immediately shine for him. So it is really not that difficult to go against the rest of the world today.

For there is an equal counterbalance between good (holiness) and evil (impurity), and if there is so much impurity in the world today, there is just as much holiness available which counters it, which we can gain access to. It is the intense light of Hashem which is shining strongly and clearly now.

How Will We Merit The Redemption?

Will the hisorerus (awakening) of the Jewish people now bring the Geulah?

A

There are two kinds of awakening, an “awakening from below” (when people inspire themselves to do teshuvah and this brings us salvation from Hashem), and there is “awakening from above” (when there is first a Heavenly arousal and then we are led to be inspired and redeemed from troubles). When we left Egypt and we needed to be saved from the Egyptians who were chasing us, there was first an “awakening from below.” Everyone was trapped by the desert on one side and the sea on the other side, and our only hope was to jump into the sea and rely on a miracle from Hashem. As soon as we went into the sea, which began with Nachshon ben Aminadav, we began the “awakening from below” which merited us to receive salvation from Hashem. The final redemption will reflect the exact state of affairs as the first redemption, which was when we left Egypt. It is an “awakening from below.” from our *mesirus nefesh* (our willingness to dedicate our will for Hashem), and this awakens Hashem’s will to redeem us. This is the simple understanding, that our *mesirus nefesh* awakens Hashem’s will, and this is the normal way of events, in which there is an awakening from below that arouses Hashem’s salvation for us.

However, there is also the “Infinite Light” of Hashem (the *ohr EinSof*) in which Hashem first brings us an “awakening from above” to initiate the process of Redemption, since it is His original will that we be redeemed. Also, we are currently at the end of This World and entering into the Next World. So there are two different viewpoints now. From the perspective of ending This World, we need *mesirus nefesh* to merit redemption. This is “awakening from below.” From the perspective of entering into the Next World, though, we can have “awakening from above” and merit our salvation from Hashem’s will itself.

Finding Your “50th Gate Of Holiness” Within

The Rav explained in the derasha that there are 3 parts to our inner *avodah* now: To connect to oneself, to connect to the Torah, and to Hashem. The Rav emphasized a lot about becoming connected to oneself. Is this the 49th level within the “50th level of holiness” or does a person need to begin by connecting inwardly to himself and then use that inward connection to become further connected to the Torah and to the Creator?

A

This is an approach which emphasized how we can negate the 49 levels, which are only “outside” of a person, things which a person does but which he has no personal connection to. When a person connects inwardly to his very soul, that is the “50th gate of holiness.”

Does this mean that a person needs to work with his 4 elements of the soul?

A

It is a very fundamental way. There are other ways as well for a person to reach his soul. The point of the derasha was that the Creation now is returning to the original state of man when man was created as an individual. The 4 elements is the very design of Creation, but it is only one of the ways in which a person can reveal his true self. It is very fundamental, but it is not the only way in which a person can penetrate to his true self. The path that was stressed in the derasha was the fundamental concept that Hashem created a person as an individual and that our *avodah* now is to returning to being alone as an individual.

What is the *avodah* of accessing the 49th level within the 50th level of holiness?

A

It is two-fold. One part is by separating ourselves from the world, by separating ourselves from all of the 49 levels of *tumah* in the world. The other part is to become more in touch with our own soul and reveal it, but at that level we are still not touching our very soul, because it is only at the 49th level of holiness within us and only at the 50th level of holiness within us do we reach our very soul itself.

How does a person reach the “50th level of holiness”?

A

It is accessed when a person can alternate between two different states, the state of thinking and the state of non-intellectual simplicity. At times a person needs to use his mind to think and at other times a person needs to leave his thinking aside and become simply and non-intellectually attached with Hashem. The 50th gate of holiness is when a person has this balance of going back and forth between these different states.

What is the point that we are supposed to be reaching?

A

When you arrive at the simple understanding that the Creator exists and that there is none other besides Him. As the Kotzker said, “Ain Od Milvado” means when you know that there is nothing else to know other than the fact that Hashem exists. That is the deepest place in the soul to reach.

In the outer layers of our soul, we can access all kinds of knowledge and information. A person can “know” of Hashem and he can know Torah. But deeper in the soul than this is when one

knows about “Ain Od Milvado.” that there is nothing else to know other than this knowledge that that Creator exists.

A person cannot live all the time at this understanding in his soul, because it can be only be accessed for a short amount of time and soon afterwards a person needs to return to routine.

On the outer layer of one’s soul, a person gains all kinds of knowledge, and the first thing that a person needs to get to know is the Torah, to gain knowledge in Torah, and from there he can receive all kinds of vast knowledge. But he will also need to access a deeper place in the soul and go to there at times: The place in his soul where he can become aware that there is nothing else to know other than the reality of Hashem’s presence. This is the meaning of the concept of “complete *d’veykus* (attachment) and *hiskalelus* (integration)” in the Creator.

What’s Going To Be??

What’s going to be? Are we not supposed to think at all of what’s going to be in the world??

A

The very thought of “What’s going to be??” is really coming from a desire to stay on this world and to stay attached to this world, from a refusal to accept Hashem’s new world. It should make no difference to us what’s going to be. Hashem will run this world as He sees fit. You can wonder about what to do for a small amount of time as part of your *hishtadlus*, but to wonder about what is going to be with the world is coming from a desire for permanence for This World. This same desire to stay attached to the current situation was the same problem that the four-fifths of the Jewish people who died out in Egypt in the plague of darkness had.

Dealing With Family Now

How can we deal good with everyone in the family who are stuck now for a long time in the house?

A

One needs to reveal *ahavas Yisrael* towards them, to reveal a genuine relationship with them, and to understand that all other relationships are from the world of falsity.

of them to improving themselves in whatever they personally need to improve in.

Avodah Of Spending All Day In The Home With The Children

Practically speaking, during this time people are found at home all day with the children. How are we supposed to balance this together with all of the inner *avodah* that we need to be doing with ourselves?

A

Just as when it comes to anything else that you need to be involved with on this world, you can do it without fully involving your soul in it, leaving some space for your own inner self even as you're in the midst of a lot of commotion. When you need to be involved with your children, you don't need to become totally absorbed in them. Part of your self can be remain "outside" of them even as you're taking of them, so that you are only partially involved with them, and not fully. *Chazal* taught, "Torah is good together with *derech erez* (the mundane), for exerting oneself in both of them helps one forget about sinning." and the *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that even as a person is involved with *derech erez* managing his mundane affairs, one should involve his thoughts in Torah study. That means that even when a person needs to take care of his various worldly responsibilities of life, he does not need to be fully involved in the worldliness of it. Instead, he can move back and forth from it. When a person needs to be spending time with his children, he should immerse his soul totally with his children. If he does, he is found totally in the mundane. A person should be involved with his children for some time, but even during the time he is involved with them, his thoughts need to go back and forth between being immersed in the spiritual i.e. thoughts of Torah, or thoughts pertaining to self-improvement and serving Hashem, or thoughts of *emunah* with being involved in the physical side to life.

Social Distancing

What is the way to view our social distancing now from others?

A

The fact that Hashem has caused everyone to become distanced from others is not only for the purpose of being healthy, it is to show us that we need our inner health, which is to emotionally disconnect from the world. We can all see with our eyes that it was too difficult for anyone to disconnect from interacting with the world today, and now Hashem has come and separated the world from everything. By closing down all venues of entertainment in the world, all of the restaurants and hotels and all places of entertainment, He has quickly silenced the 49 gates of *tumah* in the world. But the only thing that remains which Hashem didn't take away yet is the *shaar hanun d'tumah*, the 50th gate of defilement. A person today now has the choice to either separate from everything in the world and to become alone, like when Yaakov was alone, like the "nation that dwells alone." and feel totally reliant on Hashem, which is the true life – or, a person chooses to connect to the media and to internet, which is the *shaar hanun d'tumah*!

Should Children Be Pressured To Follow The Social Distancing Guidelines?

In these trying times we are in, there are people who are high-risk to coronavirus. What should such a person do if he has big children in the house who are not being careful with social distancing? He can't dictate to them what they should do, and it's possible that they are endangering his life. We are trying to follow all the guidelines that were set and we are trying to be careful, but what should we do, practically speaking, about family members who aren't being careful? Do we need to put pressure on them, or should we have *emunah* and not be concerned about this?

A

It is a very high level to have *emunah* and not be concerned that your children will endanger you, because they have *bechirah* (free will), and therefore it's very difficult to have *emunah* that others can't harm you when they are being careless through their *bechirah*. A person is able to have *emunah* and not believe in nature, meaning that he has *emunah* that only Hashem is in control of nature. A person is also able to use *emunah* to negate the power of *bechirah*, since he believes that everything is from Hashem and that no one else's *bechirah* can harm him unless Hashem decreed it to happen, and this is a higher level of *emunah* than when a person believes that Hashem controls

nature, and it is less practical for people, who live in the material world which they identify very strongly with.

Practically speaking, you need wisdom of life to go about this. Either you can designate a room in the house for the high-risk person to stay in, or you can rent out a place for your older child to stay in so that you can have the high-risk family member stay in your house. Sometimes you may need to send your children out of the house. Every situation needs to be dealt with wisely and with great sensitivity, and you need to weigh out what the best possible option is, and there a lot of complicated factors involved.

In many homes, the situation right now is causing an endless amount of complex factors for everyone, in terms of activities, emotional needs, supporting the family, having *emunah*, and endless other factors taking place. Some of it is *avodas* Hashem, some of it is just about knowing how to act practically and wisely. Every situation needs to be weighed out carefully, along with *davening* to Hashem, of how to lead the home effectively.

A very big part of the suffering that people are going through now is that they are disoriented, and their minds are so clouded that they can't do proper decision-making, and this creates additional suffering within the atmosphere of the house, and it becomes a vicious, endless cycle of suffering for everyone. People need a settled mind and some calmness. The situation we are going through now is not going to be easy for anyone, but within all of it we can still settle our minds and weigh out our thoughts properly and make proper decisions. We can do this by writing down all the different possible options we have, and organizing the list, and then asking advice from another person for a new idea we didn't think about. Then we can choose the most practical idea for our homes, but it will never be easy. We just need to look for the most viable solution in comparison to all other options that aren't as viable. Every situation in every home is different.

When Will Coronavirus End?

The Rav said regarding the coronavirus that we will see a better day. Does this mean that it will go away, or that it will continue?

A

I do not know.

What I meant to ask was: What did the Rav mean that there will be better days than this?

A

The entire Creation consists of various forms of movement. People will see one part of the movement of something and they will conclude that the entire reality of something is what how they are seeing it, and they don't understand that everything which we see is shaky and subject to change. Even more so, since we are found in the ikvesa d'meshicha, at its very end, any reality is subject to change at any given moment, because everything is shaky now. This is the concept known as Reisha D'Lo Isyada, "The unknowable beginning," where there is uncertainty at every moment because everything is moving and intersecting and becoming mixed together every moment. As a byproduct of this, there is nothing stable anymore. And since the reality we are in now is part of the Reisha D'Lo Isyada, we really cannot know what will happen. It is not by chance that we can't know what is going to happen. It is intrinsically built-in to the design of Creation, that we cannot know with certainty about anything that's going to happen, that the reality is "The heart is not revealed to the mouth," meaning that until we are able to speak with our mouths with certainty about what will happen, it remains at the level of the "heart." it is all a secret, so we are not able to know precisely about the process which will happen.

The Rambam says this more clearly: "Until the redemption comes, we do not know how it will happen." This is not only referring to the uncertainty surrounding the actual moment when Mashiach will arrive. It also applies to the moments preceding Mashiach's arrival, which is the ikvesa d'meshicha (the footsteps of Mashiach). Before the actual "feet" of Mashiach arrive, we cannot be clear about what is going to happen.

We need to walk now with *temimus* (earnestness), with simple belief and trust in Hashem. We need to live every day with HaKadosh Baruch Hu present in our lives. We arise with Him. We walk with Him. We sleep with Him. We live with Him. We move with Him, step after step. It is like when Moshe approached the arafel (the thick, dark clouds) where Hashem was. In the darkness of arafel, a person can only see a few steps in front of him, and he cannot see the distance, only what's directly in front of him. That is the kind of life that is "Baruch Hashem Yom Yom." "Blessed is Hashem, day by day."

Understandably, there are things a person needs to be concerned about regarding the longer period of time that we may be facing, but one has to go about it sensibly and with careful planning. But for the most part, we do not know anything about what our situation is going to be like, and it doesn't matter what the experts say, even if they're the biggest experts. Any opinion given by one who imagines himself to be an expert on what's going to happen, is not worth anything, as it's clear to any sensible person. The reality is that we cannot see in the distant horizon. We can barely see what's directly on the horizon for us.

What will be the next step? That is all in the hands of Hashem, and one has to trust that Hashem will guide him, and it is with Him that we walk. Hashem said "*Follow Me into the desert*" for 40 years, and now we are going with Him as well. And it will be exactly like it was in the desert: "*By the mouth of Hashem they traveled, and by the mouth of Hashem they camped.*" Did Moshe

Rabbeinu know what was going to happen? No, he was relying on Hashem to take care of him and everyone else, travelling and encamping only by Hashem's command. That is the way a true life looks like. The only is if a person is prepared to enter into such a life. This is the test which a person is going through at this time. There is nothing clear to us right now except for that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is guiding us on a path that is for our own good, to illuminate our souls, and to shine the light of the complete redemption, speedily, in our days.

What To Daven For Now

What exactly should we *daven* for now?

A

We should *daven* that the light of the Redemption should shine, illuminate and purify all souls. From this it should spread also to the physical body of all people, so that should be a complete refuah shelaimah (a full recovery) for everyone. One should not only *daven* that there should be a refuah shelaimah alone, because then a person only wants recovery for people and he is fine if Hashem lets all the *tumah* remain in the world. Instead, we should *daven* that Hashem will send all sick people a refuah shelaimah by removing all the *tumah* from the world.

What Is Hashem Showing Gentiles With Coronavirus?

The Rav said in the derasha about the *avodas* Hashem now during coronavirus that Hashem has brought something to the world which has caused us to all go into our houses, so that we can reveal “the light of Hashem” in the privacy of our own house. What message then is Hashem sending the goyim (gentiles), who are also being secluded in their houses? What “light of Hashem” can the goyim reveal, if they do not recognize Hashem?

A

That is a very good question. If the spiritual light being revealed upon the world now would be at its total, absolute level, then everyone would enter inward into their souls, and it would be the

revelation of “The King has brought me into His chambers.” Those souls of the gentiles who are in the category of *chassidei umos haolam* (the righteous among the nations), whom the *Gemara* says about are destined to become the servants of the Jewish people in the future (that is, for Jews who were careful with the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*, as the *Gemara* states), are those fortunate souls of gentiles who will merit to enter inward. Only those gentiles who merit entering inward into their souls and attaining a deep connection to the G-d of the Jewish people will be the *chassidei umos haolam* who will remain alive in the time of the future.

But when we are not *zoche* (meritorious), and instead we are forced to enter inward due to some external reason, it is like what the *Gemara* says that there are places of prayer for Jews and for gentiles, meaning that for every concept of holiness that exists, there is a corresponding concept in the side of impurity. In that case, when there is some external reason that forces everyone to come inside their homes, such as when there is an epidemic spreading through a city (Talmud Bavli Bava Metzia 60a), then the gentiles as well are being forced to enter inward. That creates confusion, because it means that the Jewish people are entering into the inner dimension together with the *Erev Rav* (the gentile souls of the Mixed Multitude), and this causes most souls to have a spiritual downfall, because it causes people to find nothing but the depths of the “50th level of defilement” when they are forced into seclusion in their homes, and thereby, the Jews become mixed with the impurity of the *goyim* (i.e. being immersed in *tumah*) all day at home, which translates nowadays into surfing the Internet all day at home, the epitome of the non-Jewish way of living.

That is the depth of the terrible spiritual downfall which affects both Jews and non-Jews together, when they are being forced into seclusion in their homes, and this is the meaning of how the impurity of the *Erev Rav* is its power of *taaruvos*, “mixture” the mixing together of all the worst influences on the purity of the soul, and it is the root of all evil.

Why Doesn't The Rav Tell People To Wear Masks?

Why doesn't the Rav tell the talmidim coming to the shiurim to wear masks? Although doctors can't be believed, we should at least be concerned enough to take precautions.

A

I do not give *halachic* rulings. More specifically, I almost never tell people what to do. My entire place on this world is generally to give clarity on topics, and more specifically, to reveal the wisdom of Hashem in each thing, and most importantly, to show how each thing can bring us closer, more attached, and integrated, with Hashem.

Why Did Corona Originate In China Specifically?

Was there a connection between the coronavirus disease and China, where the virus originated?

A

Avraham came from the eastern part of the world and shined the world with righteousness [by teaching about belief in the one G-d], everything began and ended with him, and at the end of his life when he merited the blessing that G-d would become the “shield of Avraham.” an equal force on the side of impurity was created. Avraham sent away his children that he bore from Keturah, and separated them from his family in his lifetime, and that is where the mixture of nations started from. Since Avraham was a father who separated his children from him, those estranged children would mimic that very way of behavior towards their own children, for generations to come [Ed.: thus the Chinese, who descend from Avraham’s children from Keturah, have been known for centuries to be cruel to their children].

Amalek intermarried with the descendants of Yishmael and Esav, mixing into Avraham’s descendants. This was a fundamental kind of mixture that affected and ruined whatever separation Avraham made. Whatever Avraham separated, Amalek mixed together [by marrying into the nations of Yishmael and Esav].

The overindulgence in coarse physicality, and the unending pursuit of materialism, has its source in America. The *tumah* (spiritual defilement) of idol worship comes mainly from the East. The technology [for media and internet] was developed in America, but the *tumah* (defilement) of technology is more connected with the East.

Corona and Rosh HaShanah 5781

Some approach Rosh HaShanah with a sense of *yirah* (trepidation and fear of judgment) and others approach it with a sense of love and closeness with Hashem, as the Rav has explained, that this is a matter that depends on one’s personal soul root. This past year, 5780, was very different than other years. Corona was definitely the biggest wake-up call ever for Hashem we’ve ever seen, and it clearly evokes a sense of *yirah*, because Hashem sent punishment to

the entire world. Does that mean that we need to approach this year's Rosh HaShanah of 5781 with a sense of *yirah* (trepidation) because we are living in scary times where we don't know what will happen next? Even if a person's soul root is *ahavah* and he normally approaches Rosh HaShanah as a time of *ahavah*, have the times now changes and even such a person would need to feel more *yirah* about Rosh HaShanah?

A

The troubles affecting our *ruchniyus* (spiritual situation) of the last few years were actually a more difficult problem for us, than this past year's corona pandemic. As for how to approach the coming Rosh HaShanah, it is still a matter that depends on one's personal root (which is either *yirah*/trepidation or *ahavah*/love).

Mashiach & Redemption

Preparing For Mashiach Through Torah Learning

I have heard in the name of the Chofetz Chaim that after 10 “shemittah” cycles, Mashiach will come. I understand that the time for this has already passed. The question is: What is preventing the coming of Mashiach? Is there anything holding him back altogether, and if there is, what is the main reason that Hashem isn't sending Mashiach? I am asking this because if we would be informed what the reason is for his prevention, then each person could know what needs to be done, whether through investing time or money in making the coming of Mashiach possible, whether by bringing in Rabbonim who could speak about the main issue we need to fix, or by distributing CDs about the topic.

A

1) The “light of Mashiach” is termed by our Sages as “the 50th gate of holiness.” This is countered by the “50th gate of defilement.” which prevents the revelation of holiness. To explain the concept, there are 49 “gates” of the spiritual dimension [both in holiness and in the side of evil],

corresponding to 7 levels that each subdivide into 7 levels. Our world is on the spiritual level of the number 7, for there are six days of the week and a seventh day of Shabbos. That is the perspective of “division” in Creation [as opposed to the original state of undifferentiated oneness]. Each of these 7 divides into another 7, as implied by the daily morning prayer, “Today is the first day to the Shabbos.” “Today is the second day to the Shabbos.” etc. The Sages said that the “son of David [the Mashiach] cannot come until all of the perutos (coins) are finished” – and it is brought in the name of Eliyahu HaNavi that the word perutah (coin) is from the word peratiyos, “individual.” meaning that Mashiach cannot come until all of the “individuality” ceases, and collectiveness (kelalus) is revealed. This collectiveness (kelalus) is also called the 50th gate of holiness.

In the side of holiness, kelalus/collectiveness is the concept where all details become unified as one: “On that day it will be that Hashem will be One and His Name will be One.” It is when all souls of the Jewish people will become connected together, “as one man, with one heart.” the unification of all souls, and the unity of all the creations. They will all become unified under the oneness of Hashem’s Name. It will all come together, forming one perfected form of man. For all of the creations – including the non-living, plants and animals – are all but parts of the perfected man. Currently, this is all seen as disparate parts, each with their own design, but in the inner dimension, they are all but parts of one perfected man. This perfected state is called the “light of Mashiach.” In contrast, the 50th gate of defilement is a “pseudo.” imitation form of oneness. In depth, it is total disparity. It is a unifying which leads to total disparity. It begins with unity and ends with disparity. Superficially, it appears to be unity, but on the inside, it is disparity.

How does the “50th gate of defilement” manifest itself? Anyone with a logical and simplistic perspective can see that in the last few decades, the world is becoming more and more collected into one whole. As an example, a huge distance between continents has been vastly reduced to a short amount of time travel, and it takes little time and money to get to faraway places, and it is also made very comfortable. People are able to communicate with each other instantaneously, in any place in the world, and at any time. It is possible to see a person found on the opposite side of the world, by means of the media/technology. It is a way to “see from one end of the world to the other.”

The very concept and essence all media/technology in general, and the “smartphone” in particular, is all a means of using “one tool” which is all-inclusive of all existing information and knowledge. It unifies all possible information that can be sensed through seeing, hearing, smell, speaking, and touch. I am not even referring to all of the harm that result from all of this – those are just the results. I am referring to the very concept of how technology unifies everything together. It is the evil and twisted use of the power of echad, “oneness.” because it unifies all information together. It is the very “50th gate of defilement.” with all that this entails. For it can

open up a person to a dimension which includes everything, and that is the very idea of the “50th gate” – an all-inclusiveness.

Any logical person can understand that the Redemption is the idea of echad, oneness, and that the very idea of hester/concealment [the period preceding the Redemption] is a “pseudo.” imitation form of “echad”/oneness. The clearer that the light of true oneness will shine, the more that people will realize how the “oneness” of the Other Side is an illusory kind of oneness. That is the secret of the Redemption.

Escaping From Anti-Semitism

With the rise of Anti-Semitism throughout the world, and with all the increasing Anti-Semitic attacks on Jews, especially with the Anti-Semitism that’s now in the American government, does all of this mean that Hashem wants Jews to move to *Eretz Yisrael*? How can a Jew living outside of *Eretz Yisrael* know if the time has come to move to Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*)?

The atmosphere [in America] today is different than it used to be, resembling the way things were like before the Holocaust [in Germany]. How should we view the rise of Anti-Semitism and how can we know if Hashem wants those living outside of *Eretz Yisrael* to move to *Eretz Yisrael*? We have all heard stories of people who were able to leave Europe before the Holocaust and they waited too long....

A

The simple nature of a Jew’s soul (besides for the issue if there’s a *mitzvah* or not to live in *Eretz Yisrael*, and when this applies) is to yearn to dwell in the palace of the King and to live close to Him. Therefore, simply speaking, at all times the “initial thought” of a person is that he would like to live in *Eretz Yisrael*.

However, “upon second thought.” there are additional factors to consider. There were *tzaddikim* who were afraid to live in *Eretz Yisrael*, due to the immense holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*, similar to the fear of getting too close to the Aron (Ark) which would burn any unworthy carriers. Another reason was because they couldn’t abandon their “flock” – their leadership of communities who needed them, as well as other reasons related to benefitting the masses. As for all others, leaving their

country to go live in *Eretz Yisrael* couldn't be done, due to their responsibilities to earn livelihood, and also because they wouldn't be able to find proper places of education for their sons and daughters properly by moving there. Sometimes a person cannot move to *Eretz Yisrael* due to the *mitzvah* of honoring parents, and sometimes a person cannot move there simply because of valid social or community reasons: a person would find it too hard to leave behind his friends or community. There are other reasons as well [not to move].

However, the recent events [of Anti-Semitism] are like a *bas kol*, a “voice from Heaven.” to strongly awaken our “initial thought” [to want to live in *Eretz Yisrael*]. But after considering this, a person should also think it over, with a calm state of mind and with a pursuit for the truth. Each individual should do this, and think about what is proper for him to do right now, and why.

Should We Daven About Anti-Semitism?

As Anti-Semitism continues to rise, it seems that we especially need to *daven* to Hashem to be protected from our enemies. What is the proper way to *daven* these days, during solitude, for the protection of the Jewish people from its enemies? Should we *daven* that our enemies should be destroyed? Should we *daven* that our Father in Heaven should prevent them? Or should we *daven* that we should be protected from their evil schemes?

A

These enemies are the “birth contractions” preceding the Redemption. Thus the main purpose [of Anti-Semitism] is for the Redemption to come speedily, now, amidst pleasantness and joy. We should view our enemies from this inner perspective.¹²

The main thing, above all, is that we should do complete teshuvah (repentance). Our root enemy is the *yetzer hora* (the evil inclination), the internal enemy that resides in a person and who has control over the person. Although it seems that it is only our “external” enemies who are in the lead [it is actually a manifestation of how our “inner” enemy [the *yetzer hora*] is at the lead]. Therefore, we need to place extra emphasis on how to fight our “spiritual” enemy, the enemy who is fighting us on a spiritual level. As the Sages said, “One who gets another to sin is worse than the one who kills him.”

¹² Editor's Note: refer to the derasha of Tefillah_0162_How We View The Nations

The Spiritual Exile Of America

In the name of Rav Hutner and other *Gedolim*, we have heard of the phrase “Galus America” (the “American exile”). Since I live in America, it is relevant for me to know about this. Can the Rav explain to me what the idea of “Galus America” is, and how it differs from the exiles of other countries in our times? Perhaps the Rav can tell us what the proper perspective should be, on how to view the exiles in which we, the souls of the Jewish people, are found in.

A

“Galus America” is an exile of materialism, of glorifying materialism and being firmly attached to it. Unlike the Greek exile, which was an exile of the “body” in the sense that it glorified the wisdom the physical body, the “exile of America” is about being attached to materialism for the purpose of the materialism itself [it is about gruff physicality, as opposed to the Greek exile, which was focused on the intellectual aspects of man’s physicality]. It resembles the verse, “Feed me now, of this red stuff” – an attachment to the very materialism itself.

In America, the general attitude of people is to value people based on their financial success. America is also about an attachment to owning many acquisitions, and life in America mostly revolves around this.

As a result, the exile of America is not an exile of constraint, but the opposite of constraint – it is all about “expanding” [our horizons to pursue more and more materialism]. It is all about taking each aspect of one’s materialism and expanding it further. Examples include [the pursuit and pride that people have in] owning a bigger house, a bigger freezer, a bigger washing machine [a bigger and fancier car, etc].

It also includes the excessive attachment and indulging in food. For example [in America it is commonplace for people to have], eating a bigger breakfast when a person could have instead eaten a simpler breakfast of one or two eggs, and the like.

The more value people place on materialism, the more they pursue it. The emphasis on materialism [in America] therefore creates a bigger pursuit of materialism [in America. And that is what defines “Galus America”].

Making Yeridah- Leaving Eretz Yisrael For Chutz L'aretz

Can the Rav help us decide if we should continue living in *Eretz Yisrael* or if we should move back to *chutz l'aretz*?

A

Yes.

L'chatchilah (ideally) it is certainly better to live in *Eretz Yisrael*, both from a halachic viewpoint, because there are views in the Poskim who maintain that there is a *mitzvah* to live in *Eretz Yisrael*, and also from a spiritual standpoint, because *Eretz Yisrael* is a place where one can grow more in *ruchniyus* and *kedushah*.

Sometimes, there is a need to move to *chutz l'aretz*, mainly for any of the following reasons:

1) To benefit a tzibbur. 2) For kibud av v'aim (honoring parents) purposes. 3) If moving to *chutz l'aretz* will help one have more personal growth. 4) For parnassah (livelihood) purposes. 5) For medical purposes – either physical health or mental/emotional health. 6) For chinuch purposes (educating one's children). 7) For shalom bayis (marital peace) purposes.

Practically speaking, clarify with your wife, if you can, about the pros and cons of leaving *Eretz Yisrael*. Then you can better figure out how to ease your difficulties [with living in *Eretz Yisrael*]. Along with this, you should try to slowly internalize the gains and qualities of living in *Eretz Yisrael*, but do this sensibly and with wisdom.

If possible, decide that you will stay in *Eretz Yisrael* for some more time, like another year or at least another half a year. After your 'deadline' comes, re-evaluate your situation again. The very fact that you are giving yourself a deadline sometime later this year, where you will re-think your situation again, is enough to ease your difficulties [of living here].

Make sure to give your wife a true feeling that you genuinely want what's best for her, and let her know that if there is indeed a pressing need to move to *chutz l'aretz* that you are prepared to move, if need be it.

Making Aliyah- Moving To Eretz Yisrael

With the recent words of the Rav about corona being an outcome of the "50th level of *tumah*." is it better now to move to *Eretz Yisrael* if one will still be able to have parnassah (livelihood) there and is it for sure better to live in *Eretz Yisrael* at a time like this when the world is falling apart? If a

person is indeed able to go to *Eretz Yisrael* now, would it would be wise to quickly move to *Eretz Yisrael* before the situation here in America becomes more severe?

A

Generally, yes [it makes sense to move to *Eretz Yisrael* especially at a time like this]. Each specific case, though, needs to be carefully weighed and thought about, before making the move.

Nearing The End

During these times we can actually feel how the end is near. From what I've heard from Rabbonim, we are slowly seeing with our own eyes how this is happening. How should I view all of this in the proper way? And what does the Rav recommend I should do? Every time I hear the latest news development, it drains me, whenever I think about the current state of affairs.

A

Repeat to yourself the *emunah* peshutah, the simple belief, that Hashem does everything that and that He will do everything, and that there is no force which has any power in the world except for Him. This is discussed in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* shaar III. By reviewing these facts, you will be “moving” all the time near the Creator and with the Creator, instead of “moving” all the time with all the human beings on the world. This is the way a true, inner life looks like, for anyone who seeks truth.

Eretz Yisrael In Danger

It's well-known that the situation today in *Eretz Yisrael* is very dangerous. I know that we don't need to fall into despair and that we should just learn Torah, strengthen our fear of Heaven, say Tehillim and *daven* personally to improve the situation in *Eretz Yisrael*. Can the Rav advise anything we need to learn about, how to strengthen ourselves, which chapters of Tehillim to say, and what to *daven* for specifically, for the sake of the Jewish nation?

A

The main danger [in *Eretz Yisrael*] today is not that there is a physical danger to our body here, but because of the danger to our souls. The very fact that people are more afraid of the physical danger here, than the danger to their souls, is what places us in danger more than anything else [because the very attitude of attributing more importance to our physical situation than to our spiritual situation is an attitude that endangers our true being: our soul].

We need to know that tefillah (prayer) is certainly an important part of our *avodah*, but it is only a part of our task. Part of our task is the inner work that one needs to do with oneself, and the other part of the task lies in turning to the Creator. The personal inner work that we need to with ourselves is to feel separate from the direction that the generation is moving in today, and to live alone, with the few that serve Hashem. We can do so both in the external sense and in the internal sense as much as possible (in addition to benefiting others on our own level). This separation from the generation that we need to make can be compared to the “Ark of Noach.” and like Moshe running away [from Egypt] to Yisro. One needs to become immersed in the inner world of Torah learning, *avodas* Hashem, and *Chessed* – just as Noach involved himself in *Chessed* for all the time that he built the Ark, and just as Moshe practiced solitude in the fields, as described in *Sefer HaMaspik L’Ovdei Hashem*.

Therefore, when we *daven*, we need to mainly *daven* for the spiritual situation of the generation, and partially about the physical situation of others, such as *davening* for others’ health, livelihood, etc. The main thing is to *daven* according to your current level, from the deepest and most genuine place in yourself that you are in touch with. It is written, “For all hearts seek Hashem” – [we need to *daven* from] the very inner point of our heart, the all-inclusive point that is in our heart, the power of collectiveness [of the Jewish people] which does not become involved with our personal issues.

Furthermore, one needs to firmly establish the *emunah* peshutah (simple faith) that it is Hashem Who did, does, and will do everything, and that there is no one in charge except for Hashem. One needs to connect both in his mind and in his heart to this belief, for all of his days - and for all of eternity.

The Techeiles Controversy In The End Of Days

Regarding the issue of techeiles-wool, it seems that there are many signs indicating that this [newly discovered techeiles] is the true techeiles. It doesn't seem to be contradicted from the words of our Sages. Now, whenever there is a doubt in *halachah*, either we can clarify it based on what appears to us logically, or, perhaps we should just remain silent about it, because we are not able to attain clarity in this generation about something new, unless we have a mesorah (tradition) about it. These are the different two options that I recognize, and if there is a third option, can the Rav please enlighten my eyes to it? I don't see any other way about it. I don't understand how it's possible for us not to do a *mitzvah* of the Torah simply because there are other factors to consider (which exempt us from this *mitzvah* today), and even if it's all l'sheim shomayim (for the sake of Heaven), it's still forbidden to commit a sin for the sake of Heaven, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes...

A

The word techeiles is from the word tachlis, purpose. In the Ends of Days, the time when the tachlis (purpose) of the world is being revealed, the spiritual illumination of this tachlis/purpose is beginning to shine in the world, and it is shining greatly and strongly. Therefore, this has awakened the revelation of techeiles.

However, since the spiritual illumination of the world's tachlis/purpose is not yet completely shining, there are doubts about what the perfect techeiles is. Therefore, when it comes to this topic, we cannot apply the logic of "Do not add to the words of the earlier Sages" regarding this topic, because this is precisely the spiritual illumination which comes at the end of days, when the tachlis (purpose) of the world is being revealed.

There is no one specific order of steps for everyone to take in their *avodas* Hashem. There are many different ways to serve Hashem. Just as there can be a machlokes (differing opinions) in how to act when it comes to practical *halachah*, so are there different many orders of structure to *avodas* Hashem. However, the order in which the Messiahs will come will ultimately reflect one of those paths. Still, this does not mean that each individual needs to follow the same order of steps in their *avodas* Hashem.

Questions About Redemption

- 1) I have some questions about Mashiach. First of all, am I allowed to ask at all about Mashiach and the Geulah (the final Redemption), since we are not able to know what's going to happen anyway?
- 2) Will Mashiach come to *Eretz Yisrael* or will he come to the rest of the world as well? Though he will “gather all the dispersed” together, will he do this by actually coming to each country of the world where there are Jews, or will everyone gather together to come see Mashiach in *Eretz Yisrael*? There's a very big difference, because if Mashiach is only coming to *Eretz Yisrael*, then people from *chutz l'aretz* would have to be in *Eretz Yisrael* by the Geulah in order to greet Mashiach, but if he's coming to *chutz l'aretz* then he will gather us from where we live and we don't need to go anywhere now.
- 3) The *Gemara* says that “All ends have finished.” meaning that every possible time for Mashiach's arrival has already passed, and therefore the only reason why he hasn't yet come is because of certain sins that are holding him back. Will the generation need to a lot of teshuvah or even a bit of teshuvah will be enough?
- 4) The Rav said in a derasha in America that the situation here is so spiritually dead that Mashiach cannot come here the way it is now. Elsewhere, I have seen that the Rav explains that it does not make sense at all how Mashiach will come, because it is not a logical matter that we can understand, and he will come even if it seems totally illogical for him to come. How is this not a contradiction?

A

- 1) You can ask about Mashiach and the Redemption, but not every A will be a clear A.
- 2) If Mashiach comes due to “an awakening from below” [i.e. due to our teshuvah], he will come to all the different countries of the world, resembling a person who travels to find his mate. If Mashiach will come due to “an awakening from above” [if his arrival is due entirely to Heavenly compassion and we did nothing to deserve his arrival], then he will come only to *Eretz Yisrael*.

It has already become very, very, very important to be in *Eretz Yisrael* for some time now.
- 3) The sins of the generation are not small – the generation is found today at the 50th level (the innermost level) within the “50th gate of defilement.”

4) My intention in *saying* that “Mashiach cannot come here” is because the *Gemara* says that Mashiach will either come in a generation entirely deserving or entirely undeserving, and right now Mashiach cannot come in the sense of a “generation entirely deserving” because the generation today doesn’t deserve him. And when the generation is undeserving, we have no idea of what exactly will happen. We have already begun to see, more and more, that the generation has become “entirely undeserving” of Redemption, due to the generation’s heavy use of the accursed media.

What Will Happen To Us When Mashiach Comes?

If one is connected on this world to both good and bad, what will be with him when Mashiach comes? And what is the inner growth that he needs in order to earn his *tikkun* (soul repair)?

A

1) On This World, there is a mixture of good and evil. When Mashiach comes, there will be no more evil in the world, only good. All traces of evil will fall away. 2) The inner growth that a person needs is to receive all his knowledge from a pure source, and not from a source that is mixed with good and bad together, which is rooted in the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil” [i.e. the Internet and the media]. The level of the Torah is the “Tree of Life.” and through it one can merit Torah at its pure root.

Mashiach Ben Yosef & Mashiach Ben Dovid

1) Since the Redemption is soon approaching (may it come speedily), I have several questions about Mashiach – both Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Dovid. I heard in the name of the Chozeh of Lublin that he succeeded in nullifying the decree that Mashiach ben Yosef will get killed in the final war. Is this agreed upon by all opinions, or is there a dispute about this?

A

Yes, there is a dispute about this.

2) Will Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Dovid both grow up in *Eretz Yisrael* or can they grow up even in *chutz l'aretz*?

A

Mashiach doesn't necessarily need to have grown up in *Eretz Yisrael*. *Chazal* said that "Mashiach sits at the gates of Rome." However, this is not meant to be understood in its simple context. Mashiach ben Yosef especially has his main roots in *chutz l'aretz*, whereas Mashiach ben Dovid has his main roots in *Eretz Yisrael*.

3) Do Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Dovid need to be well-known *Gedolim* or can they be hidden *tzaddikim*?

A

Either. On a subtler level, Mashiach ben Yosef is in the category of a revealed *tzaddik* whereas Mashiach ben Dovid is in the category of a hidden *tzaddik*. Mashiach ben Yosef descends from Rachel, who was "known" for her righteousness, whereas Mashiach ben Yehudah descends from Leah, whose righteousness was more hidden. The word "Leah" is equal in gematria to the number 36, corresponding to the concept of the 36 hidden *tzaddikim* [hence Mashiach ben Yehudah who descends from Leah is in the category of a hidden *tzaddik*, just like his ancestor Leah].

4) Are there *tzaddikim* and *Gedolim* in every generation who recognize Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Dovid?

A

Sometimes, yes.

5) Is it possible that the two Mashiachs will be baalei teshuvah (returnees to Judaism), since baalei teshuvah usually have a more collective kind of soul?

A

Yosef was a *tzaddik* to begin with [hence Mashiach ben Yosef will be in the category of a *tzaddik* from the start], whereas Dovid was in the category of a baal teshuvah [hence Mashiach ben Dovid will be in the category of a baal teshuvah, for Dovid is the father of baalei teshuvah].

6) If Mashiach will be Litvish, Chassidish, or Sephardic, how will all sects of Jewry respect him equally? If Mashiach will be Litvish then the Chassidim won't hold from him, and if Mashiach will be Chassidish then the Litvish won't hold from him....

A

It's very possible that at first, there will be a machlokes (controversy) about Mashiach, but after the controversy about him settles, it will be like what *Chazal* taught about Mashiach, "And if you will not be believers, see My light which is shining" (V'im ain atem maaminim, reu b'ori she-zoreiach").

7) Does it say anywhere that the two Mashiachs will at first be despised by most of *Klal Yisrael* and only later they will be revealed as *tzaddikim*?

A

The A is the same as above – either there will be a machlokes about Mashiach, or there will not be. This is all the more true about Mashiach ben Dovid, who is in the category of a hidden *tzaddik*.

8) Will the two Mashiachs be greater than the seven Ushpizin (Avraham, Yitzchok, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef and Dovid)? If yes, how can it be that the two Mashiachs, who grew up in this generation which is at such a low level, can be more righteous than the biggest *tzaddikim* of history, more than the Avos and Moshe??

A

It is because since there is so much *tumah* in the final generations, “There is more light that comes after darkness” [the darkness and low spiritual level of the final generation makes the *tzaddikim* of the final generation even more righteous than the previous *tzaddikim* of our history]. Even more so, the spiritual level of the two Mashiachs will be a gift from Heaven to them, as the Mesillas Yesharim teaches about holiness, that “at first it is work, and in the end it is received as a reward” – at first a person works to achieve holiness, but in the end he can only receive it as a gift from Heaven.

9) Does Mashiach ben Dovid have the soul of Dovid HaMelech (as it says “Dovid Malka Meshicha.” “David, the King Messiah”), or is he an offshoot of the soul of Moshe? Is there an argument about what the soul of Mashiach ben Dovid is?

A

“Moshe will come with the two Messiahs.” Thus, Mashiach has the soul of Moshe, meaning that Mashiach’s soul is unified with Moshe’s soul. Mashiach is called “Shiloh.” which is equal in gematria to the word Moshe.

10) Will the two Mashiachs come together with Moshe or with Eliyahu? On one hand *Chazal* say “Moshe with the two Messiahs.” but on the other hand we find a term in *Chazal* referring to “Eliyahu and the two Messiahs.” Is there an argument regarding which *tzaddik* will accompany Mashiach’s arrival (Moshe or Eliyahu)?

A

At the inner dimension, Mashiach will be accompanied by Moshe, and on the external dimension, Mashiach will be accompanied by Eliyahu. Moshe is the inner essence and the “soul” of all good character traits. Eliyahu’s role is to “return the hearts of the fathers on the children” [to stir the Jewish people to repentance in preparation for Mashiach’s arrival].

11) *Chazal* teach that Eliyahu HaNavi will inform the Jewish people that Mashiach is arriving. But how will we know if he’s really Eliyahu HaNavi?

A

It is not absolutely certain if everyone will believe Eliyahu’s report that Mashiach is arriving. Only those who are truthful people will recognize it.

12) The *Gemara* says that Mashiach ben Dovid’s name is Menachem, and *Chazal* reveal elsewhere in a Midrash that his full name is Menachem ben Amiel, and that Mashiach ben Yosef’s name is Nechemia ben Chushiel. Why are these names specifically, Menachem and Nechemia, chosen to be the names of Mashiach?

A

Mashiach ben Yosef’s name, Nechemiah, is from the word mochin (mind), corresponding to Torah thought, the revelation of Mashiach ben Yosef, who descends from Yosef, whose wisdom was regarded throughout all of the land. The Redak says that Mashiach ben Dovid’s name, Menachem, is equal in gematria to the word Tzemach, which refers to the sprouting of Mashiach that will come from Dovid.

13) I saw in *sefer* Nesivos Shalom and also in *sefer* Shem M’Shmuel that Mashiach ben Yosef will repair problems with *kedushah* (personal holiness) and shemiras habris (guarding the holy covenant), and afterwards Mashiach ben Dovid will come to repair problems with

emunah. If so, why then does everyone need to do teshuvah, if the two Mashiachs will come fix the world anyhow?

A

Because doing teshuvah draws the Redemption closer. The more that a person fixes his sins with teshuvah, to that extent will a person merit the spiritual benefits that will come from the two Mashiachs, on his own level, and to the degree that he does teshuvah. Because even when Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Dovid will arrive, not everyone will merit to equally partake of the spiritual benefits that they will bring.

The Laughter Of The Future

Can the Rov explain what the “sechok” will be in the future when Moshiach comes, which is what we say in the possuk, **אז ימלא שחוק פינו** (“Then our mouths will be filled with laughter”)?

A

The sechok of the future will be that there will be no more free will, and then we will realize that all the things that ever happened in history the world are all a joke, because we will see that it was Hashem who made it all happen. This will be the complete, ultimate laughter which will emanate from our *emunah*.

Reward In Gan Eden & In The Next World

If a Jew keeps the *mitzvos* and he learns Torah but he doesn’t change internally (as many people are familiar with), will he not get any reward in Olam HaBa (the Next World), since he never changed his *pnimiyus* and he remained with all of his material desires?

A

There are always inner changes and growth that a Jew will gain, just by keeping *mitzvos* and learning Torah [even if he doesn't try to have any inner, spiritual growth]. They might be very minimal changes, or even very tiny changes. Even with the smallest changes that a Jew gains merely from keeping *mitzvos* and learning Torah earns him reward in the Next World. It is possible that there were some areas of his character which didn't go through any change at all, and there also may be areas where his character became worse on this world, and there may be other areas of his character will changed for the better. Any good changes of character which a Jew gained on this world become transformed into his reward in the Next World, from the seventh century and onward. However, in Gan Eden, reward is given also for any actions that are done even if a person didn't go through any changes because of them.

Can Mashiach Be A Woman?

Can Mashiach be a woman?

A

No. Mashiach's soul will reveal the "feminine" aspect of relating to the Creator [such as the relationship of a wife to her husband and how this corresponds to the relationship between the Jewish people with Hashem], as described in *sefer* Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs), but physically speaking, Mashiach is a man.

WOMEN'S INTEREST

Woman's Main Ability

- 1) What is the *avodah* (spiritual task) of a woman, and in what ways is her *avodah* different than a man's (besides for her obligation to keep all of the *mitzvos* and raise the children)?
- 2) I have heard the Rav say in a derasha that a woman has more of an obligation to learn about the human soul and understand it more, whereas a man doesn't have as much as an obligation in this, because a man's main *mitzvah* is to study Torah. Therefore, is the "Da Es" series and the "4 Elements" series more geared for women than to men, since these are courses which explain the soul?
- 3) More specifically, what is the *avodah* of a kolel wife? Does a kolel wife also need to build her inner world, or is it enough that she has mesirus *nefesh* for the Torah learning of her husband? (I am aware that the Rav says that if one has mesirus *nefesh* one doesn't need to build their inner world, because mesirus *nefesh* allows one to penetrate straight to the end point).

Yasher Koach, and much thanks, to the Rav.

A

1) It is well-known in the name of the *Vilna Gaon* that the main task of a man is Torah study, whereas the main task of a woman is tzniyus, modesty. The hint to this is the term "Safra D'Tzniyusa" – the term "safra" means "learning." and this is referring to the man's main obligation, while the term "tzniyusa" refers to the woman's primary task, tzniyus (modesty). A man's main task is depicted in the verse, "A wholesome man, who dwells in the tents." and "And you shall immerse yourself in it, day and night." and "In His Torah he is immersed, day and night." A woman's main task is depicted in the verse, "In the house of G-d we shall go, with feeling" and in the verse, "The entire glory of the daughter of the king is on her inside." This refers to a woman's world of inner feelings.

2) Most of a man's schedule [ideally] should be spent on learning Torah, and a little bit of his time should be spent of knowing about the soul, how to fix the soul, and how to balance the soul. For a woman, besides for bringing up the children and helping out with earning a livelihood for the family (according to whatever is needed), her main involvement should be with knowing about the soul and its abilities, and balancing the soul. This should be balanced with a love for the Jewish people and with an abundance of doing *Chessed* for others (when necessary).

3. Mesirus *nefesh* (sacrificing oneself) is a path that is only meant for individuals to take. Therefore, as a general rule, besides for a woman's devotion to her family, and especially to her husband, she also needs to build her own self, her inner world.

Woman's Path In Avodas Hashem

The Rav has said that generally, men are more gifted with the intellectual faculties (*Chochmah* and seichel), as opposed to the ability of "heart." whereas women are more gifted with "heart" and less with intellect, and that this was because Chavah was created from a state of sleep, where the intellect isn't working and only the heart is active. However, it seems that the *sefer* Chovos HaLevovos, which is explaining to us the duties of the "heart." is certainly teaching us how to approach the world with intellectual *Chochmah* and seichel, and not with spiritual feelings of "heart." What is the proper path in a woman's *avodas* Hashem? Is it the path of the Chovos HaLevovos (which seems to emphasize the use of seichel/ *Chochmah*/intellect), or is it the path which the Rav is explaining, that women are mainly meant to mainly use the heart and not the intellect....?

A

You have made a clear and proper definition. But the truth is that if there is just "heart" and there is no use of the intellect, a person will not succeed in *avodas* Hashem. Even more so, there is additional reason today why women need to use their intellect in *avodas* Hashem. Women today are worldlier and are anyways using their intellect, to think about other things that are not spiritual. If women would not be using their intellect at all, they would easily connect to the "heart." but since women are using the intellect more these days, for materialistic concerns, the only way to counter this problem is to put their intellect to holy uses.

So in essence, the heart is the main function of the woman, as opposed to the intellect; but in more recent times, where there are women who have become more intellectual as they are involved more with the outside world, they are using the intellect for non-spiritual purposes, so they are less drawn towards using the heart; and the only way for them to counter this is to use their intellects for holy purposes. However, in most women, the heart is the stronger point than their intellect, and thus the main *avodah* of a woman in most cases is to use the heart, and less with intellect. The language of our Sages, such as the words of *sefer* Chovos HaLevovos, is certainly a more intellectual

approach that is geared towards men and not towards women, but in our times where women are anyways using their intellect in all kinds of areas, they need to channel their intellect towards holy areas, to counter the use of their intellect that is being used towards mundane things.

Intellectual Women

If a woman is more intellectual and doesn't like to talk so much, does that mean that something is wrong with her heart and that she needs to open up her heart more?

A

This is a deep question. Generally speaking, a woman's heart is more open than a man's heart, and therefore a woman has a nature to talk more with Hashem about her feelings more than a man does. But although this is a rule, there do exist exceptions to the rule. There are some men whose hearts have been opened up much more than most women, and there are some women who are more intellectual than others. If a woman is more of an intellectual and has a hard time talking out her feelings, it might be that she is an exception to the rule, and it is merely upon her to learn how to speak out her thoughts. But no matter how intellectual a woman is, every woman is still a woman, and she has a heart which she can access if she works to get there. A more intellectual kind of a woman might have a harder time getting to her heart, but she still has a heart in her, and she can work to get to it.

However, in other cases, this may be stemming from an emotional issue that a woman has. Or, it may be coming from a difficult time she is going through, like if there are major problems in her marriage or in her household. These are emotional problems which can all be dealt with, and it doesn't mean that something is wrong with her natural heart.

Women & Hisbodedus

In previous generations, did women do *hisbodedus*?

A

You are asking a proper question. All of our prophets did *hisbodedus*¹³; *Chazal* say there were seven women prophetesses¹⁴, and there were others who came after them too. So there were definitely women who did *hisbodedus*. Is it for all women to practice? The A, clearly, is no. It was not for all women; it was only a way for the women who were prophetesses. This was the case in previous generations.

In recent times, however, women are much more involved with the materialistic side to life, in addition to being bombarded by running the home and raising the children; therefore, in our times, if a woman wants to truly serve Hashem, it is necessary for her to know how to disconnect from the world and connect to an inner place in herself.

Again, to emphasize, the way of *hisbodedus* that was presented here is not for all women. I have only given these shiurim because it has been requested of me to give shiurim on this topic. But this does not imply at all that *hisbodedus* is meant for all women to practice. I have said many times in the past that there is never any one way to serve HaKadosh Baruch Hu; there are many ways to serve Him.

The main purpose in giving this series was because there are many people who are in any case doing *hisbodedus*, so there is a need for those people to hear what the inner way of *hisbodedus* is. And I will say this again: it is **not** the only way that exists to serve Hashem.

My Husband Is Slacking Off In Ruchniyus

If a married woman is more spiritual [or more religious] than her husband – for example if the husband doesn't want to learn Torah or *daven* - how should she approach her marriage? What should a wife do in this situation? And especially if it's affecting the kids and causing the kids to lose interest in religion? What can a wife do in a situation where her husband is sorely lacking in *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven)? What will strengthen her and give her inner joy to get through this?

A

A woman should become strong and stable through developing her own inner world.

Through the inner joy that she will get [from developing her own inner world] she can be of influence to her environment, but she should do so with subtlety.

She should express unconditional love [to her husband and child].

¹³ The source for this is Sefer HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem

¹⁴ Megillah 14a

She should *daven* and cry for the other person [who needs help], but not in front of the other person.

She shouldn't speak about the topic to the other person.

She will need to do a lot of inner work when it comes to having *emunah* [faith in Hashem] and *savlanut* [patience].

She should recognize that all Jews are called the children of Hashem, and therefore Hashem will do [to them] whatever is good in His eyes.

She should not blame herself about anything she can't do.

She should accept the suffering with love.

For any step of improvement that her husband makes, she should express great, deep joy about it.

Importance of Modesty

Why is it so important to be modest? What is the external part of our modesty, and what is our inner modesty? The external kind of modesty is well-known – to dress modestly. But what is the inner meaning of modesty?

A

The Ato this is that modesty is part of the purpose of Creation, which is to reveal Hashem in the world. Hashem is modest, because He is hidden from the human eye. So must we be modest, because when we act modest we resemble Hashem, who is modest and hidden.

This reveals Hashem in the world. When we are modest, we keep ourselves hidden, which shows people that there is a Hashem in the world – and when we do this, we fulfill the purpose of Creation, because we are revealing Hashem onto the world.

Preparing For Labor & Childbirth

Is there any *hadrachah* (guidance) in *ruchniyus* (spirituality) pertaining to a woman before giving birth? Does the Rav have any *shiurim* on this topic, which would give inspiration in preparing for this?

A

Perhaps it would be beneficial to reflect about the following points, which will be presented here briefly, with *siyata d'shmaya*. Each person should try to implement any of the following reflections which they find close to heart.

1. Childbirth is a time period, and a power, of renewal. It means an entirely new situation, a new life. Just as Hashem renews life, so did He give us the power, so to speak, of bringing a new life into the world.

2. Childbirth means that one's inner self is expanding, because the Sages state the "a fetus is an extension of the mother." and therefore the baby is an expansion of the mother's existence.

3. It is written, "And it was evening, and it was morning." Before the "morning." there is "evening." That is why before a great thing happens, there is preceding pain. This is the depth behind the contractions of labor. And the greater spiritual light which will be brought into the world through the birth of this baby, the more painful the contractions are (generally speaking).

4. The Sages state the key to children is in the hands of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and it has not been given to any human being. Therefore, when a woman finds herself on the way towards having her child [amidst the pains of labor and childbirth], she should feel, "Behold, I am in your hands, Hashem." literally, for every step of the way, and throughout every part.

5. Bearing a child will mean that the mother will be accepting responsibility for this "complete world" that she will be receiving, because every person is a "complete world." and this soul who is a "complete world" is now being entrusted in your hands.

6. Reflect on the fact that just as a newborn baby is entirely dependent on its source, on the one who gave birth to him or her, so are we always dependent on Hashem.

7. A newborn baby is completely pure and innocent. This represents the *temimus* (earnestness) which is inherently found within each of us, which we lost touch with throughout our life. Now, through childbirth, we are being awakened again to a true desire to reveal this *temimus* that is

inherently within us. It is like the verse, “Like an infant upon his mother” - and, even more than that...

FESTIVALS

Spiritual Illuminations From Holy Times Of The Year

Is there a way for a person to know when he can access specific powers in the soul?

A

There is a level called “soul.” and a level called “time.” In the level of “soul.” a person can access any power in the soul depending on his own personal level. In the level of “time.” a person can access powers of the soul depending on the time of the year. For example, in the level of time, Rosh HaShanah is a time to access the power of *yirah* (awe), Yom Kippur is the time to access *rachamim* (compassion), etc. Certain times are meant to access certain powers of the soul because there is a spiritual illumination available during those times which enable a person to access certain powers in the soul more easily.

The Essence Of Teshuvah

The Rav explains (in Bilvavi Part V – How To Do Teshuvah) that yearly resolutions which people make during the days of teshuvah are only feasible for a person who sins occasionally. What, then, is the appropriate path for most people who are not included in this category, and what should most people focus on during the days of doing teshuvah?

A

The main resolution which is needed is for a person to set aside daily time for solitude to bond his soul with the Infinite, Blessed is He, simply and earnestly, and to speak to Him as one talks to a friend, and to beg Hashem to take pity on his soul and merit him to attach his soul with the Infinite, Blessed is He. Without doing this, all of one’s *avodah* is delusional, and it is included in

the category of one who takes a risky, dangerous path. This is the fundamental, and the basis, for the entire path of inner, true, spirituality: One needs to set aside time each day and bond his soul with the Creator, whether this is for a little bit of time a longer time. One should not ever miss this daily quota. You should leave civilization for at least once a week and bond your soul with your Creator, for several hours. Then you will merit to know of “Ain Od Milvado” (there is nothing besides Him) in the actual sense.

Teshuvah In Elul Through Renewal

How do we balance this idea of concentrating about the renewal with the work of Elul of inspecting what we did wrong and doing teshuvah?

A

In fact there is an *avodah* of the part of the soul that sees the continuation of day after day. A person should do a *cheshbon hanefesh* with his or her lower soul for 5–10 minutes a day and it will fix what is needed, but the majority of our outlook should be of renewal. The days of teshuvah are also days of renewal, because if the person only does teshuvah, and only looks at the past, he will only go into his shortcomings of the past. Going deep, the energy that a person has to do teshuvah is because he is renewing himself. The Rambam says that a ba'al teshuvah is called a “breiah chadashah” (new being). This is the how deep teshuvah goes, if the person regrets the past. A person who doesn't regret the past cannot feel the “mechadesh bechol yom” ... But if someone did teshuvah 5–10 minutes per day, then he should try to go back to the place of renewal. This is the depth of a ba'al teshuvah who feels like a new being.

What Should Be Our Attitude Towards Rosh Hashanah?

How can a person know if he should approach Rosh HaShanah mainly with feelings of *yirah* (as taught by the ba'alei *Mussar*), or if he should approach Rosh HaShanah mainly with feelings of *ahavah* (as explained in *Chassidus*)?

A

This is a fundamental question about all of a person's *avodah* (spiritual work). It depends on one's *shoresh* (soul root) and one's personal spiritual level. This question does not only concern Rosh HaShanah. Rather, it is a general question about all of one's *avodah*. The more that one attains self-recognition of his own soul, the better one will know which particular emotion is suited to his unique personality, and when Rosh HaShanah approaches, he will better recognize if his main approach should be *yirah* or *ahavah*.

As mentioned earlier, this is either a result of better recognizing one's *shoresh* (soul root), or recognizing one's current personal spiritual level. So this is a about a person's entire *avodah*, not only a of how to feel about Rosh Hashanah.

Overturning The Decree After Rosh Hashanah

Why do we *daven* throughout the year, if everything that will happen this was anyways decreed on Rosh HaShanah and sealed on Yom Kippur? When I *daven*, I always tell myself, "What will this help? It was already decreed on me what will happen, so nothing will help."

A

The *Gemara* says that a person is judged on Rosh HaShanah, and according to one view, one is judged every day of the year. Even more so, a person is judged every moment. This means that any good decreed on Rosh HaShanah can be held back from a person due to sins. We find this concept by Yaakov *Avinu*, who was concerned that his sins will hold him back from receiving Hashem's blessings of protection. It is the same vice versa: The *Gemara* teaches that if anything harsh was decreed on a person *chas v'shalom* that Rosh HaShanah, the decree can be removed, when a lot of people *daven* for that person.

The tefillah of an individual can also remove a bad decree on a person, when one's prayers are accompanied with complete teshuvah. This access the spiritual light of Yom Kippur [which removes any harsh decrees from Rosh HaShanah]. This is especially the case when a person *davens* with tears, which has the power to tear up any harsh decree. This is even more effective when a

person *davens* at special opportune times of the year (an eis *ratzon*). That is why our tefillos can always help eliminate any harsh decrees on a person and merit us to receive our due portion.

Even more so, if a person is close to Hashem and has an earnest relationship with Him, his tefillos can enable him to receive any blessing that wasn't decreed on him on Rosh HaShanah, because such a person is above the dimension of time.

What To Daven For On Rosh Hashanah

Can the Rav offer some guidance on what our main thoughts should be throughout the day and the tefillos on Rosh HaShanah? And, is it proper if one *davens* for personal requests on Rosh HaShanah?

A

PART 1:

(1) "Hayom Haras Olam" – Rosh HaShanah is the day when the primary creation, the human being, was created.

(2) Who created all of this? It is the Blessed One, Whom there is none other besides.

(3) For what did He create it all for? What is the purpose of it all? So that we become close to Hashem, and thereby reveal Hashem in His creation. This is the intention behind the concept of "Malchiyos" on Rosh HaShanah [declaring Hashem's dominion over the entire Creation.]

(4) The intention behind "Zichronos" on Rosh HaShanah is that one should try as much as he can to remember all of the different deeds he committed this year.

(5) The intention behind "Shofaros" is that one should improve his deeds, by doing complete repentance. Included in this is for one to clarify his aspirations and his purpose in life, and to take upon oneself a resolution for the coming year.

PART 2:

"Rosh HaShanah" contains the word "rosh." "head." from the word "raishis." the beginning point. On this day, a new start is revealed. It is the revelation of a beginning point. Therefore a person should connect himself to the "beginning point" of the soul, which is called *peshitus*, the

“simple point” of the soul. As a hint, the *Gemara* says that the more pashut (smoother) a shofar is, the better the shofar is. From connecting to *peshitus*, a person becomes connected to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, amidst this *peshitus*-simplicity. Therefore, the inner *avodah* on this day is to become connected, in the depths of one’s soul, to a simple sense of the Creator, which is above all reasoning and logic.

One needs to progress and regress, back and forth, between two different states [as follows]. For part of the time, one should be connected with this simplicity, by “running” towards the Creator with simplicity. For the other part of one’s time, one should retreat back into his thoughts, by thinking of the fact that Rosh HaShanah is the day when the world was created, and that there is a Creator, and that He created it for a purpose, which is for His creations to accept upon themselves His dominion. One should also remember his deeds and repent over them, and to once again accept Hashem’s rule over him.

PART 3:

It is customary to recite the piyutim (liturgies), of which a large part describes the greatness of the Creator. When one’s soul feels opened to this, one can feel a pleasure in reflecting on the Creator’s greatness, verbally expressing this greatness with words of praise to the Creator. This is an additional part of the closeness to Hashem which is revealed on this day. There is a way of connecting to Hashem on this day through simplicity, as explained earlier, by thinking of the One who created the world, and there is also a way of connecting to Hashem on this day by speaking of His greatness, which is revealed through His creations. This is the implication of HaYom Haras Olam, on this day the world was created.

PART 4 [REGARDING PERSONAL REQUESTS]:

Each person should act according to his current level. If one is at the level in which he feels a need to *daven* for personal requests on Rosh HaShanah, then it is proper for him to do so. This, however, should only be done in addition to what was said earlier, because *davening* for personal requests should not become the main part of Rosh HaShanah.

Simanim On Rosh Hashanah

Can the Rav explain the deeper meaning of the customary Simanim (symbolic foods) which are eaten on the night of Rosh HaShanah which we say accompanied with the Yehi *Ratzon* prayer?

A

On Rosh HaShanah, we are able to access the level that is called rosh, the “head.” There is a general level of rosh and an individual level of rosh. When we say “May we be a head and not a tail,” that is the general level of rosh. We can always find a point of good in everything, because everything is good at the root, at its “head” (rosh). From this power, we extend Heavenly blessing to all of the other branching points.

We can connect to this concept on three levels: in thought, speech, and action. In our thoughts, we connect ourselves to this concept by thinking of the point of good that is found at the root of each thing. In our words, we connect to this concept by *saying* the Yehi *Ratzon* prayer. And in our actions, we connect ourselves to this concept by eating the respective simanim.

Chanukah - Staying With The Neiros

What should a person do after lighting the Menorah? How much time should a person looking at the neiros (Chanukah lights), as well as singing and *saying* divrei Torah?

A

The *Mishnah* Berurah says that l’chatchilah (ideally), it is proper for a person to stay with the Menorah for a half hour. The root of everything is the revelation of HaKadosh Baruch Hu in His Torah, and that is why it is proper for one to say Torah thoughts about Chanukah and about the menorah. The days of Chanukah are called “days of hodaah” (thanks), to give thanks and praise. That is why it is proper for a person to give hodaah (thanks) to HaKadosh Baruch Hu for all of the miracles that happened during these days to the Jewish people as a whole, through singing, as well as thanking Hashem for one’s personal lot. (A hint to thanking Hashem for one’s personal lot is reflected in the *halachah* that a guest *staying* at another’s home for Chanukah needs to include himself in the *mitzvah* of lighting the Menorah, by donating a coin (perutah) to the one whom he is *staying* by. By donating a coin (perutah) to be included in the *mitzvah*, the guest “includes” his individual life, his “peratiyos.” with the collective whole of *Klal Yisrael*.)

It is written, “The flame of Hashem is the soul of man.” More specifically, the word “light.” ner, is an acronym for the words *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah* [the three basic levels of the soul]. The flame,

oil and wick of a Menorah, which in Hebrew is *ner* (flame), *shemen* (oil), *pesilah* (wick), which is an acronym for *Nefesh* (the soul). This is because the light of a flame has the power to illuminate and awaken and reveal one's soul – one's *nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *neshamah*. One needs to connect his perspective and his inner essence to the light of the Menorah and to the movements of the flame, by becoming inwardly connected to it. Looking at the Menorah lights, amidst inwardly connecting to it, has the power to awaken the *neshamah* (Divine soul).

This is a matter that is dependent on one's personal spiritual level and it does not apply equally to every person. Each person individually should recognize his current level and according to his current level. To the extent that a person connects his soul to the spiritual illumination of the Menorah's light, it becomes more appropriate for a person to sit with Chanukah neiros, according to his capabilities, and by remaining balanced in his other areas of *avodas Hashem*, such as his Torah learning and his *davening*, etc.

Even more so, some have the custom of making the wicks for the Menorah by using pieces of clothing, because the "*Chayah*" level of the soul is present on one's clothing. And, even more so, the Chanukah lights are called "the light of a man and his home." which is a hint that the Chanukah lights reveal the deepest level of the soul, the "*Yechidah*," which is hidden in one's house. This is the "spiritual light that is hidden away for the future." the light of Mashiach, and for this reason there are those who said that Chanukah will not disappear in the future. There are rare individuals who have a spark of the *Yechidah* level of the soul revealed with them, and the light of the Menorah on Chanukah can awaken this spark further.

Going even further, one who merits the revelation of the "*Yechidah*" level of the soul can feel a tremendous pleasure when viewing the Menorah lights, as in the teaching of the *Gemara* that "The species has found its species." like beloved friends who find each other. For a person who knows of such an experience, it is upon him to feel the light of the Infinite surrounding him on all sides, and that he is in the center and that he is nullified, to Hashem's Infinite Light. And this is a very deep and intrinsic pleasure of the *neshamah*.

Reflections For Tu B'Shevat

What is the *avodah* of a person on Tu B'Shvat? What points should I focus on? I have heard in some derashos from the Rav on Tu B'Shvat that a person should connect to the "beginning point" of the soul and also elevate the act of eating. But how can I work on this practically? I would like to add more depth to the custom of eating the symbolic fruits on Tu

B'Shvat, and I would like to know which points I should think about when I'm eating the fruits on Tu B'Shvat.

A

1) Since Tu B'Shvat falls out during the days of Shovavim, there is a connection between Tu B'Shvat and Shovavim. The Arizal says that Chanukah, Purim, and Tu B'Shvat correspond to the spiritual *Sefiros* of Hod-Splendor (corresponding to Purim), *Netzach*-Eternity (corresponding to Chanukah), and *Yesod*-Foundation (corresponding to Tu B'Shvat). Hence, Tu B'Shvat is connected with the spiritual sphere of *Yesod* [the idea of connecting to one's personal holiness]. This is also known as the soul faculty of *hiskashrus* (connection), and it is also referred to as the trait of the *tzaddik*. Therefore, it is appropriate for a person on Tu B'Shvat to connect himself to the trait of *tzaddik-Yesod*, the soul's power of *hiskashrus*/connection.

2) The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sheviis 5:1) states that if any trees has produced a shlish, one third of its produce, one has an obligation of maaser (giving away a tenth of produce grown in *Eretz Yisrael*) on it, whereas any trees that haven't yet produced a third of its produce are set aside for the next year's calculation of maaser. Hence, when it comes to produce [i.e. fruits], a third of the produce must be present, in order for the fruit to be deemed as a fruit. On an inner level, this hints to us that fruits remind us of the concept of shlish, a "third." This is a hint to our "tri-fold" connection: "Hashem, Yisrael, and the Torah are one."

There are three main sections to the body, which are called rosh (the head and face), geviyah (the middle section of the body, including the chest and torso), and the beten (from the stomach and downward). The upper third section of the body, where the head is housed, represents the spiritual. It is the place in the body where we use our intellect. The middle section of the body houses our emotions and desires. It represents the intermediate level between the intellect and the physicality of the body. The lower section of the body, from the stomach and downward, is used for our basest functions, and it represents gross physicality.

On Tu B'Shvat, our personal *avodah* [when eating the fruits, where we are reminded of this concept of shlish, a "third"] is to rise to the highest third section of the body, the head, by becoming more connected with our "head." the power of analytical thought. We must not allow ourselves to remain at the level of the middle section of the body [desires and emotions which are divorced from intellect], and certainly not at the lowest section of the body [gross physicality]. Our *avodah* on Tu B'Shvat is to become connected with the highest "third" of the body, our head [our thinking abilities], for it is the head which is connected with Heaven, as it is written, "And its head reached the Heavens."

Purim – To Drink Or Not To Drink

Every year Purim, I am not sure how I am supposed to act, with regards to becoming intoxicated on Purim. I have never gotten completely drunk, I just drink a little more than the usual and afterwards I rest, as stated in the Rema (Orach Chaim 696:1). But every year when Purim is over, I feel that I didn't experience true simchah on Purim. Every year when it comes Purim, I feel instead like a "mourner" who can't rejoice, and that everyone around me is happy while I remain "outside the camp." in solitude, for they are moving around and happy and enjoying and growing, utilizing their elements of water, wind, and fire, while I remain stuck in my element of earth. Maybe the Rav can guide me about this.

A

It is written, "To the Jews there was orah (light) and simchah (joy)." We should understand that simchah (joy) comes from "orah." from "light." There [are two levels of spiritual "light"]: the illumination itself, and the "sparks" of this illumination [a "partial" level of spiritual illumination].

For most people, the joy and laughter that they have [through getting drunk] on Purim is on the "animal" level of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*). In some cases, people will sin on Purim by engaging in improper jest of others (leitzanus), by insulting others, etc. Their joy is being manifest within the three impure "husks" (*kelipos*) and these people become attached to these *kelipos*.

In other cases, people will not sin on Purim, but their simchah on Purim still does not go beyond the "animal" level of the soul: they get joy from things that make the "animal soul" happy, such as meat, wine, and humorous things. There can sometimes be "sparks" of true joy that are contained in this, but they are merely "sparks" of joy. So their joy is a mixture of superficial joy with some sparks of true joy. When people have this kind of joy on Purim, they will express what's in their heart, and they will speak about what they aspire for and what they really want, amidst their state of intoxication. However, in almost all cases, there is still a joy on the level of the "animal" soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*, and at best, they have merely "sparks" of true joy.

However, of Purim it is said "To the Jews, there was light and joy." and this means that simchah (joy) comes from orah (spiritual light). So even though you say that "Everyone around me is happy." that doesn't mean anything! Because their simchah is only on a superficial level, as described above.

Regarding the fact that you feel as if you are stuck in your element of "earth." this can be coming from any one of the following two reasons: (A) It can come from a strong leaning towards the

element of earth, (B) It can be a subtle, inner recognition that the simchah which you are witnessing on Purim is not genuine, and deep down, your soul isn't interested in it – it only wants “*orah v'simchah*.” the joy that comes from spiritual light. Your soul merely connects to the serenity which they are having [but not to their joy].

For most people, it is appropriate to drink a little more than what they are used to, and in a way that will not cause them to lose their *daas* (objective thinking). Rather, they need to get to the point where they feel an inner “expansion” [of the mind], and where their heart becomes gladdened. This opens the heart, and it then becomes possible for a person to express things which he normally doesn't express during the rest of the year. However, as mentioned, this should not happen from [becoming intoxicated to the point that one has] loss of *daas*, nor should it come from a desire to unleash one's pent-up feelings that are stored in his heart. Rather, it should be a result of expanded *daas*, from an expansion of the heart. This is the depth of the verse, “For the heart of the king is good, with wine.” It is a subtle boundary to tread, and this is what is appropriate for many people.

There is also a subtler approach to take: One can [become intoxicated to the point of] “lose” his normal *daas*, and instead become attached with a more expansive kind of *daas*, which is in the category of “surrounding light” (*ohr makif*)...This is the depth behind the difference between the regular cities with the walled cities from the times of Yehoshua. The 14th of Adar, which is for the regular cities, represents the level of nullifying one's *daas*. The 15th of Adar, which was for the walled cities since the times of Yehoshua, represents the “surrounding light.” the *ohr makif*, the expanded level of *daas*.

In truth, “the of a wise person is half the A.” One needs to clarify the definitions of *halachah* of the subject at hand, by studying all of the opinions of the Poskim, and then one should clarify his current spiritual level. He should think about what the gains are, and what the disadvantages are. Therefore it is appropriate for each person to clarify all of the views of the Poskim about the *halachah* of becoming intoxicated on Purim, and then one should clarify what his personal level is, and if he will gain or lose by becoming intoxicated on Purim. If he feels that he will gain from it, he needs to clarify exactly what he will gain, as well as any detrimental results that may come because of it. This is the proper, clear approach to take, and it is *halachah* l'maaseh.

One should not draw any conclusions from great *tzaddikim* who became intoxicated on Purim. Nor should one conclude that he needs to be like most people on Purim who aren't careful with *halachah* when they become drunk. (Of this it is not said that “If they are not prophets, they are still the sons of prophets.” since we are dealing here with the “animal” level of the soul which seeks laughter, frivolity, lawlessness, and all other undesirable elements. The “animal” level of one's soul will seek to learn about happiness from observing animalistic behavior, either by observing animals, or by observing gentiles, who become very intoxicated - on their holidays specifically, and during

the rest of their lives in general.) So it is upon each person to act according to his current level, as mentioned above, by first clarifying the *halachah* and then clarifying all of the details of his current spiritual level.

The *avodah* of every person on this day [Purim] is to reach the innermost point of the soul, from his current perception, which is his current level of “*orah*” (spiritual light) that he has so far reached. From that point, one can draw forth *simchah*. There is no greater evil on Purim than one who copies others’ behavior, for this is totally ignoring the “individuality” of oneself. And although there is a custom to dress up in costumes on Purim, that is really because we are showing that the way we appear during the rest of the year is actually a “costume” [for during the rest of the year we are not revealing our true self]. That is how we reveal our true self. How pitiful is it when a person has to completely imitate the behavior of others around him, on Purim [because he doesn’t get to be “himself”].

The day of Purim is the day to reach one’s very core, which is above one’s *daas*. From that inner place, one will be able to sense the reality of the Creator, Whom there is nothing else besides. It is a day where “the King” is totally revealed, where the “King of kings” can be revealed even in the most mundane aspects. It is the revelation that the true “king” is really the King of all kings. On the day of Purim, the King is revealed in every place.

So the *avodah* on the day of Purim is for one to “divest” himself from all “garments.” This is the deeper implication of the word “Megillah.” which means “reveal.” Through this, one can touch upon the very essence of his *neshamah*, and from reaching that place, one can unify with others: to send *mishloach manos* to others in order to increase love and friendship with others, and to give *matanos l’evyonim* to others out of a deep, inner *simchah* that one reaches within. One finds the joy within himself and then he can make others happy. From there, one can find a Torah of revelation, a level of Torah that is called “*megillah*.” where all is revealed and there is no concealment. This is the meaning of what the Sages taught that the “light” revealed on Purim, the *orah*, is referring to Torah. It is a “Torah” of revelation, which brings one to have genuine, deep, inner *simchah*.

That is the true *simchah* on this day, and nothing else compares to it. During the rest of the year, the Torah is called “closed, and revealed.” but on this day, the Torah is entirely about revelation. This is the depth of the concept that the “Megillah is read”: from the spiritual light of the Megillah, one is able to “read” the entire Torah: the words of Torah will be “read” on their own, for it is entirely in the category of revelation. This is the complete *simchah*, joy at its root, a joy in the Creator: “The righteous will rejoice in Hashem.”

Women On Purim

1) What is a woman's *avodah* on Purim? What specific points should women focus on Purim?

2) And what should a woman on Purim focus on, especially if it's difficult for her to feel the holiness of Purim, when it seems that only the men can be happy on Purim, because only the men become drunk and they say Divrei Torah and the women feel left out from all of this? How can a woman truly feel on Purim that "The miracle of Purim came about through women." and "In the merit of the righteous women the Jewish people are redeemed"? How can a woman become connected to Queen Esther on Purim?

A

There are a lot of aspects to Purim. The *halachah* of intoxication applies only to men, and the parameters of this *halachah* is explained by the Poskim. But there are many other aspects of Purim as well which apply to both men and women. Here are some of those points to think about, and each person should try to do them on his or her own level, according to his or her personal capabilities – and not based on any reasons influenced by factors that are either social, or emotional, or family-based, because there are many times where people act based solely on "what's normal." and this uproots any serenity and joy that they could have on Purim.

1) Consider the aspect of reading the Megillah on Purim. Both men and women are obligated to hear the Megillah on Purim. And on a more inner level, both men and women can reflect on the events in the Megillah and see how there was Divine Providence laced throughout this story, because the word "Megillas Esther" means to "reveal" the "hidden." to turn the concealment (hester) into *giluy* (revelation of Hashem's Divine Providence). A person can go through all of the details in the Purim story, from beginning until end, and he can see how it was all an unfolding process of Hashem's Divine Providence - as opposed to a bunch of random details that have no connection to each other.

On an even deeper level, each person, whether man or woman, on his or her own level, can see Hashem's inner mode of conduct hidden in the Creation, as explained in *sefer Daas Tevunos*, and how every event in the world can be seen through the lens of Hashem's carefully planned Divine Providence, His goodness, and the revelation of His Oneness.

2) Consider the *mitzvah* of sending Mishloach Manos on Purim. The purpose of this *mitzvah* is to increase love and friendship. On the obligatory level, everyone is obligated to send two portions

of food to someone. On an inner level, one should also think about whom he will make happy by giving Mishloach Manos to. Then one should think, “What can I put into this Mishloach Manos package which will make the other person happy? What would that person really enjoy?” One should put thought into how much Mishloach Manos to send, what the quality of it should be like, how nice it should look, and what kind of nice messages he can send with it. Everyone should do this only according to her personal capabilities, and not to over-do it.

Even more so, when giving the Mishloach Manos, it should not just be an act of giving motivated by logic alone, but it should be given from the depth of one’s heart, with love and joy, to make the other person happy.

Included in this aspect (gladdening other people on Purim) is to make the children happy, with costumes and the like. But again, one should do this only within her actual capabilities, and only if she can do it with joy.

3) Consider also the *mitzvah* to give Matanos L’Evyonim (gifts to the poor) on Purim. One should look for a person who needs it the most, and who would be the happiest to receive it – and one should strive to give Matanos L’Evyonim specifically to this kind of person. A woman usually needs to ask her husband about whom she may give Matanos L’Evyonim to, mainly so that her husband should agree with her decision.

4) Regarding the seudah of Purim, try to serve good food to each person who is dining by you, fitted to each person’s particular tastes. The main point of the seudah on Purim is to think about and discuss Purim-related matters and what Purim is all about, and to stay away from words that disparage people, which only awaken the most impure forces in one’s soul.

5) The purpose of the day of Purim is to reach a deep place in one’s soul that is above one’s *daas* (logical reasoning and understanding). For men, whose main *mitzvah* is to learn Torah, their main work on this world is to develop the power of their logic throughout the year, by studying Torah. That is why men need the intoxicating effects of wine (or the dulling effect of sleep) in order to “nullify” their logical understanding and reach a place that goes beyond logical understanding. However, women, who are exempt from Torah study, are therefore closer to the concept of nullifying their understanding and to more easily reach a place that goes beyond logical understanding. This is the point known as *temimus* (non-intellectual simplicity or earnestness).

Thus the main *avodah* of the day of Purim is, “Be wholesome with Hashem your G-d.” to walk with Him in *temimus* (simplicity), without any intellectual thinking. It is about sensing His unlimited love for us, just as the people in the time of Achashveirosh re-accepted the Torah out of their great love of Hashem that they saw through the miracles of Purim. It is about feeling how He always give to us, out of His great love for us, by saving us from trouble, and by bestowing good

upon us. From this understanding, we can come to feel the sweetness and pleasantness of being close to Him. This is the root of true simchah on Purim, because by feeling close to Hashem a person feels physically lighter, in the body in general and specifically in the feet, and that is why one can easily sing and dance on Purim – just as by the song of Miriam.

And that is why the miracles on Purim happened precisely through women [Esther]. It is because women are closer to this *temimus* (simplicity and earnestness). Men need to drink as a means to reach this place of *temimus*, whereas women are closer to reaching it, without the means of drinking. It only requires a little bit of reflecting and calm silence, and to enter into the deepest place of one's soul – each person on her own level.

Pesach - What To Say At The Seder

Regarding the Pesach seder, in a family that includes boys and girls of all different ages, is it better to focus on conveying the simple meaning of the Hagaddah, *relaying* parables and stories, which would disappoint the older children [because the older children won't enjoy this]? Or, is it better to focus on more intellectual-type insights of the Hagaddah, which the younger children won't understand?

A

One needs to run the Seder with wisdom, and to be attentive at all times to the level of concentration [of the family]. Accordingly, one can then decide what kinds of insights can be relayed.¹⁵

¹⁵ (Editor's Note: The Rav once delivered shiurim in Argentina, where he gave about 20 shiurim in different communities, of all different types. Some communities requested of the Rav to give in-depth shiurim, whereas other communities wanted the Rav to say a story and then deliver lessons from it. One Friday morning there, the Rav was invited to give a shiur on that week's parsha. The Rav prepared the shiur, but when he began to deliver the shiur, he saw that the crowd wanted a more interactive, give-and-take kind of experience, rather than listening to a lecture, and that it wouldn't be possible to give a derasha which required concentration and listening. Immediately the Rav changed the derasha to a give-and-take discussion on the parshah. In the course of delivering the derasha, the Rav pointed out several in-depth insights that sparked interest in the crowd, and the crowd became very involved, animatedly responding to the Rav's words. The crowd did not realize that the Rav had quickly 'changed gears' for them.)

Chol Hamoed Trips

On Chol HaMoed, many people go to parks and supermarkets, amusement parks, zoos, trips, hikes, etc. Is there anything wrong with having a little of this? Should we send our children to go to these places so that they shouldn't feel bored and thereby enjoy the Yom Tov? Or should we withhold children from all of this, because it can cause them to go to places that are inappropriate?

A

One should find the most refined kind of place possible in this generation to go to, relatively speaking, in order to calm their [children's] souls. At the same time, one also needs to gradually educate their children to live a life of an inner world: to get the child accustomed to searching for an inner kind of life. A child should be trained to always examine each thing he/she encounters, by breaking up a matter into details and seeing the different factors involved in everything.

Shavuos Flowers & Grass

What is the connection between having flowers in the house and Shavuos? When a person sees flowers on his table on Shavuos, what can he think, in order to transform it from a mere externality into a more spiritual experience?

(Also, I noticed that the word for “flower” in Hebrew is perach. Can this be an implication that the flowers on Shavuos are supposed to remind a person that the souls of the Jewish people were porcha, they “flew out” of their bodies, when they stood at Har Sinai?)

A

The roots of this custom are discussed in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim: 494, which cites the custom to hang grass in remembrance of the event of the giving of the Torah, where grass surrounded Har Sinai. The Magen Avraham (ibid) writes that there is also a custom to place trees in the shul and in houses, in remembrance of how Shavuos is the time where the world is judged on its fruit of trees. The Magen Avraham adds that one should pray for the fruit of the trees [to merit a

good judgment]. The *Vilna Gaon* abolishes this custom, since it is now the custom of gentiles to erect trees on their festivals. Refer to the *Mishnah* Berurah (ibid, 10) for more on this.

In *halachah*, only grass and trees are mentioned. But flowers are also included in this. The root of this matter is because at the time when Adam sinned, there were “288 sparks of holiness” which fell to the “side of evil.” The number 288 in Hebrew spells the word *repach*, an opposite arrangement of the letters of the Hebrew word *perach*, which means “flower.” At the time of the giving of the Torah, there was a temporary leave from death, for the curse of death was lifted at that time. At that time, the “288 sparks” were raised back to holiness (this is according to one opinion of the Sages in Tractate *Avodah Zarah*). Since the “288 sparks” were raised back to holiness, the souls of the Jewish people flew out of their bodies - as *Chazal* state, “*parcha nishmasan*.” their souls flew away from them. In other words, the “288 sparks of holiness” were raised back to holiness, together with this elevated state.

This is the depth behind hanging grass to remember the giving of the Torah. At the giving of the Torah, they were raised from the level of animal to the level of human being, for on Pesach there is a *korbon* brought made of barley, which is animal food, and on Shavuos there is an offering brought from wheat, which is food for people [therefore, grass is in remembrance to the food of animals, which we became elevated from, at the time of the giving of the Torah]. There are also those who have the custom to place roses, since the nation of Yisrael are compared to roses.

Practically speaking, the Magen Avraham writes that one should place trees in shuls and homes and pray for the fruit of trees. On a deeper level, this is really a prayer to rectify the sin of eating from the fruit of the forbidden tree, the *Eitz HaDaas*, the first fruits of the world which were eaten which were an act of sin, and in its place, we pray to reveal the fruit of the *Eitz HaChaim*, the Tree of Life. This can be accomplished through the study of Torah, for Torah is called the *Eitz HaChaim*, the “tree of life.” That is also why there is a custom to place the trees near the place in the shul where the Torah is read from.

Shavuos – Dairy

What is the connection between dairy treats and Shavuos, and how can a person make this a more spiritual experience?

A

Many reasons have already been explained [about why dairy products are eaten on Shavuos]. There is now a *sefer* which gives seventy reasons of why dairy is eaten on Shavuos. Here is an additional reason.

An infant's only food is its mother's milk. This is due to the very sensitive and refined nature of the infant. At the time of the giving of the Torah, when Hashem descended upon Har Sinai, and His Infinite Light was revealed to the people, all creations were on a level of little children, against the backdrop of the endlessness and unlimited light of Hashem which was revealed then. At the time of the giving of the Torah, all of the people reflected the verse, "Like a child on its mother's lap." an infant nursing from its mother. It was a state of deep *temimus* (childlike innocence). On Shavuos, we return to this *temimus*. From this *temimus* we become attached with Hashem, as in the verse, "You shall be wholesome with Hashem your G-d." meaning that when you are a tamim [pure and trusting, like a child], you are then "with" Hashem. This is how we become attached with the Torah, on the level of Toras Hashem Temimah, "the Torah of Hashem is perfect."

Avodah On Night Of Shavuos

The Rav has said that our *avodah* on the night of Shavuos is to connect, as much as we can, to the "50th Gate of Holiness." to the level of Torah that was before the sin, to Torah learning amidst mesirus *nefesh* (self-sacrifice). How can I do this, practically speaking? We know that in Torah learning, a person needs to be intellectually focused, and that a person shouldn't involve the heart or emotions in it. Therefore, how can I connect to the "50th Gate of Holiness" on the night of Shavuos, which is a "heart" matter? It would make sense if I was learning agadta, which is more of a "heart" kind of study, but what if I'm learning regular *Gemara*, which requires a focused intellect? How can I stay focused on my learning on Shavuos night while also trying to reach the "50th Gate" in my Torah learning on the night of Shavuos? (Obviously this will only bother a person who is interested in *avodas* Hashem, as opposed to those who only learn Torah for purely academic and intellectual purposes).

A

Before beginning to learn, concentrate with your heart, from the depths of your heart and from thoughts of repentance (as stated in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*, shaar IV). Your heart should mainly be used before beginning to learn, as a preparation for learning. After you have made this "heart"

preparation well, attach your thoughts, calmly, and with precise focus, as you calmly concentrate with your mind, in a deep and penetrating way [to the Torah discussions you are learning] until you have exhausted your thoughts, amidst inner silence, calmness, and pleasantness. Keep repeating this process, in a cycle, as much as you can on your own level, by using the abilities of your soul. Make sure that you do not exhaust your thoughts too much, to the point that you cannot think properly afterwards, *chas v'shalom* – for that is an error that many have fallen into. Every so often, you should break up your thinking process by calming your thoughts.

In this way, practically speaking, you can begin your Torah learning sessions with repentance and a clear heart, and then by connecting your mind to the Torah discussions you are learning about, concentrating with all of your focus, but amidst pleasantness, as stated earlier, and then by calming your mind. Keep repeating the cycle. This kind of learning closely resembles the way that the Chazon Ish would learn Torah for all of his life.

Learning On Shavuos Night From A Deeper Place

What does the Rav recommend to do on Shavuos night, besides for what the Rav has taught us that a person needs to prepare himself [for the upcoming festival]? What is the kind of learning that the Rav suggests? Should a person also go out to do *hisbodedus*? Should one learn with the program that is in the place he lives in, or should he learn alone?

A

One should learn from a deep connection of his mind and heart, each person according to his own level, from the deepest place in his soul, the “fiftieth gate” of the soul, on the fiftieth day [of the Omer]. Part of this is that a person should also reach the place of “alone” in his soul, which is the deepest place in his own individual soul.

Bein Hazemanim

I understand the importance of “*Bein HaZemanim*” from a deeper place in my heart. However, can the Rav elaborate on the true need for *Bein HaZemanim*, from the Torah’s perspective? Also, if a person works, does he need a longer vacation time?

A

Creation is designed in a way that we need action and serenity. We awake and we go to sleep. All of the creations – whether inanimate, organic, animal, or human being – need rest. Just as the body needs rest, so does the soul. The soul’s emotions and thoughts need to have rest. The soul is constantly in movement, whether it is expanding or contracting. This idea was explained in “Da Es Atzmecha.”

Therefore, whether a person learns Torah all day or works all day, there is no person who doesn’t need to take a break. The purpose of the break is so that the soul can cease from action and thereby have the strength to expand.

However, it is clear that the amount of time needed for this “break” is a factor that is relative to the individual. The length of time needed for *Bein HaZemanim* is not equal for all people. Also, the way that this break is spend, and what to do during this time, is a deep, subtle matter to know.

By definition, a “break” is about having time to calm down. Sometimes a person returns to his previous place after having this quiet time, and at other times after having this quiet a person does not go back to his previous place as before, and instead he becomes involved with something else, and at a later point one can return to his previous place as before. Therefore, the purpose of *Bein HaZemanim* is for a person to take a break when he needs it, and as much as needs it. At the start of *Bein HaZemanim*, a person needs to calm himself. After that, sometimes a person will return to his original place [to resume what he was learning before], and at other times he will become involved with learning something else, which continues his “break.”

For one kind of person, a “break” means learning a different sugya. For another person, a break means learning at a different pace, such as learning bekiyus [superficially] instead of iyun [in-depth], or by focusing on *halachah* as opposed to iyun or bekiyus. Others, instead of learning *Gemara*, can take a break by learning *Mussar* and Aggadta – instead of exerting the mind, they exert the heart. Instead of learning in a system, one can learn in a way that is more tailored to his unique soul, such as by studying other areas of Torah that are more appropriate for his soul to be immersed

in. Each person needs to clarify where his main part of Torah is, and how can learn in a more relaxed manner.

Also, it should be noted that sometimes *Bein HaZemanim* arrives and a person may not have actually have a need such a long break. Or, a person may not need *Bein HaZemanim* at all. If that is the case, one should continue to learn, on his own level, as if he is continuing the zman.

Bein HaZemanim is also a time to acquire more inner achievements that one does not ordinary reach during the regular routine of the year.

Therefore, the idea that *Bein HaZemanim* has been turned into a time to seek a wide array of enjoyments and materialistic, sensual pleasures is simply a hedonistic lifestyle, which originates from the gentile nations. It has no place in the life of any sensible person.

To conclude practically, it is up to each individual to figure out what relaxes him. Examples may include listening to songs (which are of a pure source), observing a scenic view, going to a new place, reading something light (as long as it contains meaningful content), etc. One also needs to determine which area of Torah learning and *avodas* Hashem is more “relaxing” for him.

Reflections For Tu B'Av

1)I have heard two wonderful derashos of the Rav about Tu B'Av, and Baruch Hashem, this has given me much meaning and inner content to this day, which I never had much knowledge or connection to. I heard many points the Rav said about Tu B'Av, such as the fact that it is the “light of the future.” the festival of the future which shines even now, that it is a day of absolute unity, a day of baseless love (*ahavas chinam*), etc.

My main is: What is the inner *avodah* on this day, and how can I connect to this day on a practical level? Which action can I do, together with an inner thought, so that I can connect to the light of Tu B'Av?

A

Firstly one should identify where the power of *ahavas chinam* (baseless love) is, in his personal soul. Going further than this, one should focus with inner, deep concentration, as phrased in the . Finally, one should actualize the potential of this love, on a practical level in the areas of prayer and

action, from a desire to expand his love. These are the three garments of the soul – thought, speech and action.

2) I also want to know: Is the power of *ahavas* chinam (baseless love) on Tu B'Av the same thing as the power of “unconditional love.” or is it a different power?

A

Ahavas chinam, baseless love, is a higher power than “unconditional love.” The gematria of the word ahavah (love) is the same as echad (one), as is well-known. There are three levels: 1) Conditional love, 2) Unconditional love, 3) Echad – oneness.

GUIDE TO LEARNING THE RAV'S SEFARIM & SHIURIM

Gaining From The Rav's Deep Insights

(1) When I study the Rav's lessons, I do not understand certain lofty concepts which the Rav discusses, because it is above my current grasp, but I get a certain *chiyus* (vitality) from it. What is the nature of this *chiyus* that I get from it - is it a materialistic kind of *chiyus*, is it a spiritual kind of *chiyus*, when I am just intellectually connecting to the Rav's words but I am not acting upon them on a practical level? (2) Also, is there any gain at all in learning the Rav's words about concepts which are totally above my current level of comprehension? Is there any way to really get any inward grasp on these matters [even when they are above one's comprehension]?

A

(1) There is certainly a connection you are having to the spirituality of the concepts described in the *sefarim/shiurim*, in spite of the fact that your connection to the concepts is incomplete because you aren't expressing them in any of your actions.

(2) The very studying of these concepts described in the *sefarim/shiurim* will provide a *romemus* (enlightened perspective) to some of the people who learn about them. If you are asking this also about yourself, then you can apply this *Ato* yourself personally. As for getting to the depth and clarity of the matters, for this a person really requires constant inner work. Amidst the process of one's inner work, the concepts described in the *sefarim/shiurim* will become self-explanatory to a person, both on the intellectual level and on the "heart" level. In order to properly understand any matter in the *sefarim/shiurim*, one will need to be able to relate to the matter by finding the matter in his own soul. Without this, it will be impossible to properly understand any matter discussed in the *sefarim/shiurim*.

Guide To The Bilvavi Sefarim

(1) I want to ask about the order of how I should work on implementing the nine volumes of the "Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh" *sefarim*. Should one learn all 9 volumes of "Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh" before beginning to act upon it practically? Or should a person first focus on implementing the first two "Bilvavi" *sefarim* (Parts One and Two)?

- (2) What does the Rav recommend in how I should learn and implement “Bilvavi” Parts One and Two?
- (3) Is the first step “Clarifying the purpose of life” meant to be a precedent before all other steps? Meaning, do I need to spend an hour a day on this point, and to continue to do this for several weeks or months? Or is it enough if I just reflect on it with myself for several days, and after that I can advance?
- (4) In “Bilvavi” Part One, the Rav says that the purpose of life is *d’veykus* (attachment) to the Creator, and in Part Two, the Rav says that the purpose of life is *emunah* (faith in G-d) – is this the same thing?
- (5) How can a person maintain his level of “clarifying the purpose of life” when he advances to the next steps after that [as explained in the *sefer*], so that he still remains very aware of the purpose and he doesn’t lose this awareness, as a result of being bombarded by the daily issues of life on this world?
- (6) What is the reason that a person need to always think about this purpose – is it because this is the will of Hashem, or is it because this is the true perfection and the true good? In other words, is it about what I personally gain, or is it because this is the truth of “Ain Od Milvado.” “there is nothing besides Him”?
- (7) I feel a need to advance quickly through the steps [that are explained in the *sefer*]. How can I know when I am ready to proceed to the next level?
- (8) How can I hold onto the gains of the previous stages, now that I am no longer working on those steps and I have proceeded to a more advanced stage?
- (9) The Rav writes in one place that if one wants to take the path explained in *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, one will need to set aside several amounts a day for self-recognition. What exactly does a person need to do during this time?

A

- (1) The 9 volumes of the “Bilvavi” *sefarim* can be divided into three parts: 1) Parts 1, 2, and Part 5 (specifically, the section that deals with the matter of talking to Hashem). There is a general basis for all of these volumes: the idea of *peshitus*, “simplicity.” which is expressed through *emunah* peshutah, simple, unquestioning belief in G-d. One needs to then work on these ideas in the

practical sense. 2) Parts 3, 4, 6, and the first half of Part 5 clarify the structure of a person's *avodah*. 3) Parts 7, 8, 9 and the second half of Part 5 are based on the inner dimension of Torah, and accordingly, the *avodah* of a person that is based upon the concepts there. Therefore, it is recommended to first peruse Parts 1 and 2 and the first section of Part 5 (which discusses the subject of talking to Hashem), and to review these parts several times. After that, one should implement the ideas in the practical sense, according to the structure of his own soul.

(2) The Ato this is the same as the above A: First a person needs to peruse the *sefarim* [Parts One and Two] several times, and then he should work to implement the stages practically, step after step, according to the structure of his own soul.

(3) Yes, but the intention is not that a person needs literally an "hour" [60 minutes] of time for this. Many times *Chazal* use the word "shaah" which implies an hour, but it does not literally mean an "hour."

(4) *Emunah* is the power that attaches a person to the Creator. The clearer one's *emunah*, the more closeness (*kirvah*) and attachment (*d'veykus*) one will have to the Creator.

(5) This is a very fundamental point. During this time that one sets aside, it is important for a person to reflect on all of the previous steps which he has already been through and acquired until now, so that he remains consciously aware of them. Every once a while, a person should also set aside to reflect about a specific level he has worked on and acquired, if he feels a need to do so – whether it is because he feels a burning need in his soul to do so, or whether it is because he feels that he has noticeably slackened off in that particular area.

(6) "From shelo *lishmah* (acting not for the sake of Heaven), one comes to *lishmah* (acting for the sake of Heaven). At the level of shelo *lishmah*, a person seeks to become closer to Hashem because he personally benefits from this. He wants more closeness to Hashem, true bliss, self-perfection, etc. because it will fill his spiritual needs. At the level of *lishmah*, a person seeks greater closeness to Hashem because he knows that is the will of Hashem from him. If a person has a very truthful nature, he will seek greater closeness to Hashem out of a desire for truth. However, most people do not seek greater closeness to Hashem out of a desire for truth, because most people do not have such a burning desire to live a life of truth. A deeper reason to seek more closeness to Hashem is because it is natural for the *neshamah* to do so, just as it is natural for a bird to fly; as the Mesillas Yesharim writes about the level of humility. But this will only be true for one who has revealed his *neshamah* and he is consciously aware of its presence. This level is essentially the inner core of *lishmah*, because it is above intellect and mental reflection; it is the very essence of the soul, which has a natural desire to do the will of her Creator.

(7) When a person finds that any certain level has become second nature to him, meaning that he doesn't need to strain himself in order to work on that particular level, it is a sign that he is ready to proceed to a more advanced level. At a deeper level, a person should eventually penetrate to the very essence of the soul, where seeking closeness to Hashem is not only "second nature." but "first nature" for the soul.

(8) The Ato this is the same as the Ato #5.

(9) First, one needs to regain conscious awareness of his existence. Going further, one should become aware of the powers of the soul that he is consciously aware of, to the extent that it is noticeable to him. If possible, one should also write it down. In this way, one slowly acquires keen self-awareness.

How To Learn Sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh

I am in yeshiva and I want to know, what is the best way to learn *sefer* "Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh"? Is a half hour a day of learning it enough, or is it better to learn it for an hour a day and really think into the words, and to enter into the *avodah* that the *sefer* describes?

A

Chazal state that one should first "learn, then explain." Therefore it's recommended practically that one should first peruse Part One, from beginning until end, reading it lightly and quickly, to acquire the general perspective: to see the general picture. It is appropriate to do this on a day where you have time off, such as *Bein HaZemanim*.

After one gets the general picture, it is recommended that one learn a section or two from the *sefer* every day, and then review it several times. One should review it on an intellectual level and also on an emotional level, sometimes with passion and sometimes with a quiet calmness. One should do so until the words have been absorbed well in his thoughts, and in his calm, refined emotions in his heart. It's appropriate to do this for 10 minutes a day, or a little more.

After one completes a section of the *sefer* (for example, the chapter about "Creator and the creations." one should make an order of the steps of *avodah* which he will try to practically implement, as described in the *sefer*.

At any period when one is working on implementing these matters, it is appropriate to review a little bit of the *sefer* each day, so that one can remind himself mentally and awaken his heart, and to internalize the matters to a calm, refined place of one's heart. It is appropriate to do this for a few minutes each day.

Besides for this, it is clear and simple that it's appropriate for a person on any level, and throughout one's life, to learn the classic, fundamental *sefarim*, of the earlier centuries and later centuries, so that one can know and recognize the ways of our Sages and be able to go in their footsteps, for all of our life.

When To Learn The Bilvavi and Da Es Sefarim

Can the Rav also explain how the Bilvavi and Da Es *sefarim* can be learned during the day for one who is either: 1) a working man, 2) a working woman, 3) a stay-at-home mother, and 4) a seminary girl?

A

The way to learn the *sefarim* was described in the aforementioned response: to review the *sefer* whenever one has spare time, and afterwards to review each day a small section and to review it with reflection, emotion, and calmness. Sometimes one can learn it with more emotional intensity, when the need calls for it.

1) For a working man: it would be appropriate before going to work to learn [the *sefarim*] for a few minutes as described above. One should return his thoughts every so often throughout the day to a fundamental point [described in the *sefer*] so that this thought can accompany his mind and feelings throughout the day. One should stop his thoughts for a few seconds a day and involve his mind with a point described in the *sefer*. (A father who needs to be involved for much of the day with his children should refer to Point 2 below.) The goal is that one needs to enter into all of this from a serene place in oneself.

2) For a working woman: If possible, she can get up a bit earlier in the morning before the alarm clock goes off, and sit in a quiet and calm place, and do the above. Every so often throughout the day she can pause her thoughts and think about a point described in the *sefer*.

3) For a stay-at-home mother: After things are calm in the house, she can do as above, and it's also possible to read from the *sefer* 3 times a day for about 2 minutes. If she can do so before the day begins, that's better. Every so often she can pause her thoughts and think about a point in the *sefer*, and if possible, she should do so in a relaxing manner, while drinking something, so that she can be involved in the *sefer* amidst calmness and relaxation.

4) For a seminary girl: She can do as explained in Point 2 above [regarding a working woman], and study the *sefer* after the morning, and if she doesn't have such a choice, she should study the *sefer* before going to sleep. Slowly after getting used to this, if possible, she can begin the day with studying the *sefer*, as explained earlier. Once a day, she should pause her thoughts and think about a point in the *sefer*. Gradually she can train herself several times a day to do the above, until it becomes a consistent part of her schedule, several times a day, when working on this will come more naturally.

In What Order To Learn The "Da Es" Series

What is the proper order of how to learn the "Da Es" series?

A

This is different with each person. Generally speaking, one should first learn Da Es Atzmecha (Getting To Know Your Self), then Da Es Nafshecha (Getting To Know Your Soul), then Da Es Hargoshosecha (Getting To Know Your Feelings), because these are the root, introductory concepts. After learning those *sefarim*, one can learn any of the other *sefarim* in the series in which order he chooses, which suit his individual needs.

Guide To The "Da Es" And "4 Elements" Series

I have seen a response from the Rav regarding the order of how to learn the "Da Es" *sefarim*, where the Rav said that the order is to first learn "Da Es Atzmecha" (Getting To Know Your Self), then "Da Es Nafshecha" (Getting To Know Your Soul), then "Da Es Hargoshosecha"

(Getting To Know Your Feelings) as the introduction to the rest of the series, and any of the other *sefarim* in the series can be learned according to one's individual taste.

In my humble opinion, though, one should also learn "Da Es Machshovesecha" (Getting To Know Your Thoughts), "Da Es Daatcha" (Utilizing Your *Daas*), and "Da Es Havayasecha" (Reaching Your Essence), as part of the introduction to the series, and then one should learn another two important series, which are: "Da Es Dimyoncha" (Getting To Know Your Imagination) and "Da Es Yichudecha" (Getting To Know Your Inner World). These two series are a basis for the rest of the "Da Es" series. After that, one should choose to learn the rest of the series based on personal preference. Can the Rav please give us some clarity on what order we should learn the "Da Es" *sefarim* in, so that we can purify the ego and thereby become closer to Hashem?

A

One's essential being is comprised of two parts: the intellect (*seichel*) and the character traits (*middos*). With most people, the intellect is used as a means to improve the character traits. In contrast, those who are true Torah scholars will build the intellect as well. Therefore, most people need at least a little bit of building of the intellect for the purpose of improving their character traits, as they consider the character traits to be of primary importance. That is why it is recommended to first learn "Da Es Nafshecha" and "Da Es Hargoshosecha," which explain the general structure of the abilities in the soul, by showing how the intellect can be built for the purpose of improving the character traits. The main purpose of these *sefarim* is to reach the world of character traits that are within the soul.

In contrast to this, the series "Da Es Machshovesecha" and "Da Es Daatcha" explain how one clarifies the character traits at their root, in a fundamental manner. Those who are mainly drawn towards character improvement alone will find these two series more difficult to learn, in spite of the fact that this will detract from the full picture; it is not possible for one to completely clarify the character traits unless he sees the roots of them that are in the intellect. As is known, Reb Yisrael Salanter's path is the path of "*Mussar*," ethics. The *sefer* of the Alter of Kelm took this further, with "*Chochmah U'Mussar*," "wisdom and ethics." Reb Yeruchem Levovitz developed this further into "*Daas Chochmah U'Mussar*," "understanding, wisdom and ethics." Meaning, there is a wisdom that is revealed through the character traits, and there is also the root of the wisdom as it is.

The *sefer* "Da Es Dimyoncha" explains the bridging point between the intellect and the character traits, which is the very concept of *medamehl*/imagination/comparing/resembling: to bridge one

world with another, the bridge between the created and Creator, as in the term *adameh l'Elyon*, "I will resemble the Creator." It is the bridging point between intellect and character traits, because the word "*medameh*" is from the word *middos*/character traits.

After that comes "Da Es Yichudecha" and "Da Es Nishmasecha" (Torah Way To Enlightenment), which explain the ways of *avodah* that speak more to the *neshamah*, a more inner level of the soul. We should be clear that we have an *avodah* in our realm of action, which is through observing *halachah*, and we also have an *avodah* in our world of *middos*/character traits, as well as an *avodah* in our world of *seichel*/intellect. We also have a personal *avodah* based on the nature of the *neshamah*, and the series "*Da Es Hisbodesecha*" takes this path.

Finally, there is "Da Es Havayasecha." which is a guide to help one reach his very *havayah* – his essential being. Everything else in the Da Es series are essentially the "branches" and "garments" of one's *havayah*.

The *sefer* "Da Es Atzmecha" is a general introduction to the very idea of self-recognition and attaining inner quiet. The *sefer* "Da Es Menuchasecha" also explains more about inner quiet.

All of the aforementioned *sefarim* of the "Da Es" series, which have been released so far with *siyata d'shmaya*, are mostly "general paths" which are not individually tailored to one's particular soul. It cannot explain to a person about how he can understand his personal, individual soul, because of this *Chazal* state, "Therefore, a person was created individual."

In order for a person to attain self-recognition about one's personal, individual soul and one's corresponding personal *avodah*, we have the series of "Da Es *Middosecha*" (Understanding Your *Middos*) and the series of the "Four Elements" (which include Fixing Your Earth [this includes Sadness and Laziness, series 1 and 2; Fixing Your Water; Fixing Your Wind; Fixing Your Fire [this includes the series on Conceit, Anger and Honor], Four Elements Series - Self-Recognition and Roots of the Four Elements] which explain about our personal elements of fire, wind, water and earth. In this series, one can learn about the soul in general and its details. This requires a deep, in-depth study about many different facets of the soul, so that one can gain the general structure of the soul and its details, down to the subdivisions of each of these details. This is a way by which one can come to recognize his individuality, and if one merits it, he can even help others learn about their own souls.

The order to learn the **Four Elements series** is: 1) To first learn the lessons of the "Introduction." 2) The series on Four Elements – Self-Recognition, and 3) Roots of the Four Elements. After that, one should learn the *shiurim* that explain about each of the character traits in general [Fixing Your Earth, Fixing Your Water, Fixing Your Wind and Fixing Your Fire], and one

should mainly learn the shiurim that are more applicable to the *middos* which are more personally relevant for him to learn about.

How To Learn Sefer Da Es Atzmecha

As I was learning the wonderful *sefer* “Da Es Atzmecha” (Getting To Know Your Self), I identified that I have a long way to go until I stop living a life of “taking” and instead living a life of “giving.” The Rav has emphasized in the *sefer* that a person needs to progress gradually. What are the steps of this gradual process supposed to look like? And how do we know if we have acquired the level and that we can proceed to the next level?

A

1) Learn the *sefer* from beginning until end. 2) Peruse each chapter and draw conclusions on how you have understood the lessons. 3) Begin to review the *sefer* again from the first chapter, and contemplate the lessons and internalize the lessons in the heart. Then you can act practically upon the lessons. Do the same with each chapter you learn. [You are ready to move onto the next level] whenever you feel that a level has become simpler to you, and it is no longer a novel concept to you, and you don’t feel any opposition to it, for the most part.

Guide To Learning The 4 Elements Series

What is the best way to learn [the Rav’s series on] the 4 elements and guide ourselves accordingly?

A

Step 1 of this learning process is to learn the series of Four Elements – Self Recognition.

Step 2 is to learn the series Fixing Your Focus.

Step 3 is to learn the series Fixing Your Earth-Sadness, Fixing Your Earth-Laziness, Fixing Your Water-Desire, Fixing Your Wind, Fixing Your Fire-Conceit, Fixing Your Fire-Anger [and Fixing Your Fire-Honor].

Getting To Know Your Seventy Forces, Soul & Feelings

What is the purpose of the Rav's series **דע את כוחותיך** (Getting To Know Your seventy Forces of the Soul) and how does it contribute to the development of one's soul? Also, what is the difference between the approach of the *sefer* **דע את נפשך** (Getting To Know Your Soul) with *sefer* **דע את הרגשותיך** (Getting To Know Your Feelings)? Both of these *sefarim* are explaining character development, from different angles. Getting To Know Your Feelings emphasizes the removal of negative traits, whereas Getting To Know Your Soul deals with developing the positive aspects of the soul. So I would like to know what the relationship is between these two *sefarim*.

A

The series **דע את כוחותיך** explains the more detailed aspects of the soul's abilities. Everything contains roots and branches. The three root forces of the soul are in the three forefathers, which correspond to the right, left, and middle. The offspring of the forefathers are the 12 tribes, which correspond to the 12 senses of the soul, as explained in *Sefer Yetzirah*. After that, the soul subdivides into the seventy descendants of Yaakov *Avinu*. The "seventy forces of the soul" [as described by the Gra, and which is explained about in the series **דע את כוחותיך**] correspond to the seventy descendants of Yaakov *Avinu*.

Therefore, the rest of the "Da Es" series deal with the "roots" of the soul, whereas the series **דע את כוחותיך** deals with the "branches" of the soul.

דע את נפשך deals with the faculties of the soul in their potential form. In contrast, **דע את הרגשותיך** deals with the soul's abilities in terms of emotion. In general, the world of emotion is synonymous with the world of *middos* (character traits), which are rooted in the soul's abilities, and which are revealed by way of the emotions.

How To Use The Rav's Shiurim On The Festivals

What are we supposed to be learning from the Rav's many shiurim on the festivals [i.e. the Rav's shiurim on Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Succos, Chanukah, Tu B'Shevat, Purim, Pesach, Lag B'Omer, Shavuos, Bein HaMitzarim, etc.] ?

A

The purpose of these shiurim [on the festivals] is to give an inner, deep perspective on each of the festivals. This deep analysis and perspective of the festival helps a person connect to and enter within, to some degree, the very essence of the festival. It can be compared to a person entering a perfume store, who enjoys the fragrant aroma there.

On a practical level, each person needs to be aware of his current *avodah*, according to his current level, before the festival arrives. One needs to know what his current *avodah* is right now, and how the coming festival can further illuminate one's personal *avodah* as of now. However, one should not digress from one's current *avodah* and begin a different *avodah*.

Random Additional Q&A 5780-5781

Is Yomim Noraim 5781 Also A Time To Be Alone With Oneself?

Q

The Rav said that during corona our avodah is to be alone with ourselves. Is this also true for the approaching days of Yomim Noraim? Should we remain quarantined or should we go back to life as usual, to invite our family and guests for meals (while keeping to the precautions of course)?

A

The *avodah* during the corona period, on the external level, is to have “social distancing” from others, keeping away from the space of others, and on the internal level, it is to have your own inner world within. That was the revelation of this period, which is preparing us for the Geulah, may it come speedily, Amen. Therefore, the main direction to take during Yomim Noraim is not to host guests, but for one to build his own inner world. We need to recognize and internalize that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is asking of us to change our direction, to change our thinking. He doesn’t want the social life that weighs upon us so much. He doesn’t want telephones, cellphones, sending e-mails, and all of the daily interactions every second that people have with each other. He wants instead that each person should build his own inner world. The external aspect of this is to keep a social distance from others, but of course this should be done sensibly and not in an insulting way towards others. That is our avodah for the coming year, may it come upon us for good: Internally, for each person to build an inner world for himself, and externally, for one to maintain a distance from the space of others [by not communicating with them so much]. This is something internal and true, and this is what Hashem wants and is begging, from this generation. This particular path, and the period which we have now entered, is the path that is leading towards the illumination of the “Yechidah” part of the soul, and it will be completed with the illumination of Mashiach’s actual arrival.

Q

Which factor determines what kind of actions a person needs to do that will be uniquely tailored to his own soul? Is the source of this the *neshamah*, or does it come from the physical experiences a person has undergone, such as how he grew up, environmental factors, etc.?

A

Any behavior of a person can be influenced either by internal factors or from external factors in one's life. A person may act a certain way because of external factors that shaped his personality, because that is how he grew up, that is what he saw, etc. Or he may be acting based on internal factors. When he is acting in a way that comes from his inside, this is coming from his own *nefesh* (lower soul).

The *nefesh* is rooted in a higher source, the *neshamah* (Divine soul), but the actions mainly come from the area of the soul that is called "*nefesh*," which is the root of a person's power of action. Each person needs to do actions that are in accordance with his unique personality, and accordingly, that is how he can "redeem" his soul in the area of the actions that he does.

The Birth Contractions Before Mashiach

Q

When corona first began 6 months ago, can it be said that we have entered the 9-month period in which the "Roman exile" will take over the entire world before Mashiach's arrival?

A

The 9 months are not to be literally understood as 9 months, but as a period of "pregnancy" [which will precede the "birth", a metaphor for the coming of Mashiach]. We are already in it.

Surviving The End

Q

During these times we can actually feel how the end is near. From what I've heard from Rabbonim, we are slowly seeing with our own eyes how this is happening. All of the news I hear is terrifying to me, though I am trying really hard to disconnect from all media, and I am hearing enough from the people I meet and speak with. 5G tracking technology is everywhere, and it's directly in front of my house. And there are other things too. How should I view all of this in the proper way? And what does the Rav recommend I should do? Every time I hear the latest news development, it drains me, whenever I think about the current state of affairs.

A

Repeat to yourself the *emunah peshutah*, the simple belief, that Hashem does everything that and that He will do everything, and that there is no force which has any power in the world except for Him. This is discussed in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim shaar III*. By reviewing these facts, you will be “moving” all the time near the Creator and with the Creator, instead of “moving” all the time with all the human beings on the world. This is the way a true, inner life looks like, for anyone who seeks truth.

Gog and Magog & Amalek Today

Q

1) Is the “war of Gog and Magog” [the final war in the End of Days] the same thing as Amalek's war against G-d?

A

At the root, the war of God and Magog is a war against G-d, and this branches out into a war against the Jewish people, just as the war of Amalek is. Amalek is the evil “wind” which includes all evil forces in it, and Gog and Magog is the container [earth] which holds it and actualizes it.

Q

2) What is the final rebellion against G-d all about (both the war of Gog and Magog and the war of Amalek)?

A

It is about fighting a war against G-d from all directions.

Q

3) What is “Gog” about and what is “Magog” all about?

A

Same answer as before.

Q

4) Why will Gog and Magog merit burial? Does that mean they will do *teshuvah* before their deaths?

A

Gog and Magog represent the element of earth [on the side of evil], because they are the “container” [for the war of Amalek against G-d], and therefore they will be buried in the earth.

Q

5) Will Amalek be erased before Mashiach comes or after Mashiach comes?

A

I don't know of an explicit source which discusses this. However, the “light of Mashiach” has already begun to wage war against Amalek. It seems that both will take place simultaneously: The destruction of Amalek, and the coming of Mashiach, will probably take place at the same time.

Q

6) The Rav said that from 5760 and onward, the power of “Amalek” began to dominate the world. How exactly do we see this? Is it referring to the dominance of the media?

A

Yes.

Q

7) Amalek is all about “My strength and the might of my hand”, and this arrogance seems to characterize the most powerful countries of the world, such as America, Russia, China, North Korea, and Israel, who all boast of their power. Are all these countries a branch of “Amalek”?

A

The countries of *chutz l'aretz* (outside Eretz Yisrael) are a branch of Amalek, while Israel is entirely under the exile of the “Erev Rav”.

Q

8) When America defeated the Germans in World World II, was this a degree of erasing Amalek, since Germany is synonymous with Amalek? If that's the case, then America can't be a branch of Amalek, since it was America defeated “Amalek”. Or perhaps America is still a branch of “Amalek” because they did it for their own interests, and it was all about showing their power, which would still categorize America as “Amalek”?

A

Amalek is able to be at war within itself [hence different countries of “Amalek” are able to wage war against other countries of “Amalek”]. Part of the “war of Amalek” includes the war of “Esav” against the Jewish people, and the war of “Yishmael” against the Jewish people.

Q

9) Amalek's main characteristic is *leitzanus*, they mock G-d because they think they are powerful and they represent a life where everything is about “me” and not about submitting to the authority of G-d. Since the world today is centered on pursuing pleasure and self-gratification, would that place all of the nations of the world under the category of Amalek?

A

At their root, all of the nations are included in Amalek, each nation in a different way.

Lockdown In Eretz Yisrael

Q

What should we do about the Health Ministry's lockdown regarding shuls for the next 3 weeks? Should we be *moser nefesh* and come to shul and learn as usual, in big numbers as always, or should we listen to the government's rules?

I am asking this question because I think that at this point, it is clear that corona is no longer an epidemic and it's not a reason to quarantine everyone. That is what even the expert doctors are saying, and according to them, the government is lying grossly. Not only that, but the government has also lied about the numbers of people who have died from the virus, because it's within their jurisdiction to write about anyone who dies, that the person died due to corona. It's clear and simple that they're just trying to tear apart Chareidi society, and that this was their intention from the start. (What was once known to only a few people is now known to most of us, and now *Baruch Hashem* some *Rabbonim* have even spoken about this.)

What does want Hashem from us? That we should be *moser nefesh* and come to daven and learn as usual, even if this will cause us to get the virus? Or should we listen to the government's rules and accept that this is all *gezeirah* from Hashem and we should accept Hashem's will with love...? Maybe it should be like in the previous generations, when everyone knew that certain troubles affecting the Jewish people were all a *gezeirah* from Hashem and they had *mesirus nefesh* for *Yiddishkeit* because they knew it was Hashem's will that they be *moser nefesh* against the government, and to wage war against the government that was seeking to destroy the *ruchniyus* of our children. Or maybe we just need to *daven* to Hashem that He erase this *gezeirah*, and in the meantime do what the wicked government is saying to do....?

I am asking this question specifically because during the first wave of corona the Rav said that it's all the will of Hashem that this is happening and that our *avodah* now is to be alone with oneself and with Hashem directly. Does that also apply now, to the current wave? And if it does, why should it be different than the decrees made in previous generations, where we had to be *moser nefesh* and wage physical war against those who sought to destroy our *ruchniyus*?

A

We need to be mainly interested in HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and not in the government. The period we are in is a period in which the *Yechidah* point of the soul is shining, and therefore it entails an *avodah* of being individual with oneself. However, this [inner *avodah* of being alone with oneself and with Hashem, through being quarantined] is not allowed to compromise on the parameters of the *halachah*. And in that aspect, this *gezairah* is different from any of the decrees of past generations.

Second Wave of Corona In Eretz Yisrael

Q

I have thought a lot about what the Rav has said recently regarding the coronavirus and how it is all a physical manifestation of the depth of the “50th Gate of Defilement” which the world is in. The closing of yeshivos has caused untold destruction. Many bochurim who were in yeshiva before are simply roaming the streets now. This pandemic has done more spiritual destruction than physical destruction, by wreaking havoc on people’s souls more than their bodies, on a level that was unprecedented here in Eretz Yisrael. Many bochurim, due to our sins, will not even be returning to yeshiva after this is all over, as expert educators have testified and from what I’ve heard.

Throughout this entire period, all of the emphasis of our leaders has been primarily on our physical safety and on our financial situation, way beyond proportion, and it seems to give the impression that our physical safety is more important than our spiritual situation. Young *yeshiva bochurim* definitely got that message, and they have forgotten any aspirations in having *mesirus nefesh* in Torah, they have forgotten that which they have been taught that it is only learning Torah which protects from danger. When the yeshivos partially opened, with either halfway or a third or a quarter of the amount of people allowed, only a few yeshivos had the *mesirus nefesh* to open up their yeshivos fully. Who knows what tomorrow will bring, and what is the coming Elul going to look like??

This leads me to ask the following questions to the Rav, and perhaps the Rav can light up the darkness for us during this troubling time.

1) Does the Rav agree with these feelings I've written? What is the reason for all the silence of all the leaders of our generation about the damage that has been done to our spiritual situation now? Why is all of their concern all about physical safety and our financial situation?

A

1) When we consider the external, physical side of the situation right now, it is reminiscent of the period between World War I and World War II. At that time, *Klal Yisrael* had the guidance of the two world leaders of Torah Jewry: Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky and the Chofetz Chaim zt"l. Even with such leadership, though, it is well-known that the situation for *Klal Yisrael* at that point was very complex, and loaded with problems.

If we compare the physical situation of today with the physical situation then, we can see the similarity but we can also see the differences. However, when we consider the internal aspects that are taking place behind today's situation, it is totally different than in previous times. It is much more complex today, and from many angles. Even before this pandemic came, the Torah world and all of Jewry were like dying people, from a spiritual standpoint (and there is a rule in the Gemara that most people who are in the throes of death end up dying). Only someone who was truly *moser nefesh* in his *Yiddishkeit*, in our times, was not part of this category.

The only way to fix the situation until now would have been by taking apart the entire situation of today, collectively and in detail, down to the last detail of all the issues in our generation today, and then to see what could be done about, along with *siyata d'shmaya*, step after step, working on one issue at a time. But this did not happen, and for many years already the situation for Jewry and the Torah world has remained with so many unsolved issues. The current situation [i.e. *bochurim* roaming the streets or simply not returning to yeshiva] is merely a continuation of all the many unresolved issues that have been dredging on for many years already. Prior to the situation of today, anyone who wished to dedicate themselves to the cause of *Klal Yisrael* did whatever they could to help the situation, each according to their own capabilities.

Q

2) How can we educate our children now that they shouldn't become callous to *ruchniyus* and so that they shouldn't consider their body more important than our spiritual strivings?

A

Speak about Torah truth to them, simply and from purity of heart, and try to act upon your beliefs – on your own level, and according to the level of your family.

Q

3) Should we encourage the Roshei Yeshivos who were *moser nefesh* to open up their yeshivos as usual and without fear of the government, since enough time has passed to prove their move successful and that Torah learning has indeed protected the yeshivos from physical harm?

A

Each situation needs to be weighed separately, about what the parameters of the *halachah* are. After knowing what the *halachic* parameters are, one can then act with *chassidus* (piety) and consider all the factors and see what the appropriate should be, as the *Mesillas Yeshtarim* teaches with regards to *mishkal hachassidus*. The *halachic* authorities discuss when and where we apply the rule of “Torah protects and saves” from danger. If one does decide to act on the level of *chassidus*, it needs to come from the heart, and it should not be a purely intellectual decision alone. And, even when deciding to open a yeshiva, it must be done within the proper framework of *kedushah* (holiness) and it should not be done with comprises that make *tumah* (media and internet use) available to the yeshiva students, and if this condition is not met, it is clear that the yeshiva will not be protected by their Torah learning. Also, in most cases, the reopening of a *yeshiva* doesn’t depend on the any view – it depends on the actual spiritual level of the students. Our entire focus when it comes to this pandemic should not be about the government or the health ministry – instead, our focus needs to be on HaKadosh Baruch and on doing His will, on what He wants from us.

Q

4) Are the COVID-19 government restrictions really a *gezeiras shmad* (decree of spiritual genocide) on the Torah world, since they are using the pandemic as an excuse to stop all of our Torah learning and all of our davening in *shuls*?

A

Some of the restrictions make sense, but there are other restrictions which are a matter of speculation, if they make sense or not. Some of the restrictions come from a lack of understanding, and there are also some restrictions which are not being sensitive to the Torah world, due to lack of value for Torah and *ruchniyus* (the spiritual). There are also some restrictions which are being used by the government as a way to have control over religious Jews. It will take wisdom to know what the intention of each detail of the restrictions is, and it will not suffice just to look at the general picture of the situation.

Q

5) Do we need to listen to the health ministry's rules for physical safety, such as the wearing masks? Or should we not rely on the health ministry's rules at all (as the Rav said right at the beginning of the pandemic)?

A

First, we must clarify what the *halachah* is. If many experts [doctors] say that certain behaviors must be adapted or avoided, we should be careful with those behaviors on a halachic level, and keep to the guidelines that are protecting our health. We need to be careful in each situation according to the level of severity involved.

Q

6) We can see that the virus is no longer so dangerous. From all the thousands of people that have gotten the virus, very little of them were in danger. Therefore, if there is a small chance that someone already had the virus, is he endangering other people by not keeping all the safety measures? Would he need to take a blood test and quarantine? Would he need to be concerned if anyone in his family gets a fever or sore throat, etc.?

A

As long as one has a strong reason to suspect that he has the virus, he should go for a test. Even those who weren't endangered from the virus were still affected by the virus, on a financial level, on an emotional level, and on a spiritual level, and there were other repercussions as well. Therefore, a person is indeed damaging others if he has the virus and he goes out into public places.

Q

7) According to the government's laws, one needs to quarantine if he was near someone who was ill with the virus, but this is a self-imposed quarantine which only he would know about. If he does not feel any symptoms, would such a person still need to quarantine himself and not *daven* or learn in a *beis midrash* and keep away from anything that requires him to be near people, etc.?

A

We would need to clarify how much of a risk of danger there is, and accordingly we can then know how to act *halachically*.

Preparing For 5781

This coming year [5781], Rosh HaShanah falls out on Shabbos and there is no *shofar*. Does this mean that it will be a more dangerous year for *Klal Yisrael* since we don't have the *shofar* to protect us from the Satan?

A

Sefer Nachalei Binah discusses this question and answers that when Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbos, the Shabbos itself accomplishes the same spiritual effects as the *shofar*. Briefly, the concept is that whatever can be done through the actions of the *shofar* can also be accomplished through

“non-action”, Shabbos. Even more so, Shabbos itself is even more powerful than *shofar*, so there is no danger. (This is because *shofar* corresponds to *binah*, whereas Shabbos corresponds to *chochmah*, which is higher than *binah*). It is true that there have been more tragedies in the years where Rosh HaShanah fell out on Shabbos, and refer to answer #2 below for more about this. Simply speaking, when a person wants to do a mitzvah but he is not able to, it is considered as if he did it, and so too when we can’t hear *shofar* because it’s Shabbos, it is considered as if we heard the *shofar*.

Q

If it is indeed a danger for us when Rosh HaShanah falls out on Shabbos, what can we do to be saved from the troubles?

A

Without tapping into the spiritual illumination of Shabbos, there is a danger, as explained above in answer #1. Therefore, one needs to become attached to the illumination of Shabbos, in which everything is returned to its root above, out of love for Hashem. *Shofar* evokes *yirah* (awe) while Shabbos brings *ahavah* (love), it is a “serenity of love”, because everything is returned to the root, on Shabbos. And on a deeper note, the *shofar* on Shabbos also returns to its root, when the *shofar* isn’t blown because of Shabbos. This has an awesome spiritual effect.

Q

Is there a unique *avodah* we have during a year where Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbos, since we don’t have the *shofar* to protect us from the Satan?

A

The shofar sound confuses the Satan, whereas Shabbos [and hence when Rosh HaShanah falls out on Shabbos] puts the Satan to rest and nullifies the Satan’s power.

Q

The Rav explained that this year of 5780 was a year where Hashem allowed some of His wrath to be shown, by bringing the coronavirus. Does that mean that each progressing year we will be seeing harsher and harsher displays of Hashem's wrath, *chas v'shalom*? Is Hashem increasingly minimizing His trait of patience, *chas v'shalom*, and do we have a lot to worry of what's in store for us??

A

If you only look at the external aspect of the period we are in, then yes, it is a difficult time to live through, because we are in the “birth contractions” leading up to Mashiach, and the closer we get to Mashiach, the more painful the birth contractions are. Chazal said that in the period before Mashiach comes, there will be increasing *tzaros* (troubles and difficult situations). But at the inner layer of all of this is the light of Mashiach, which is becoming increasingly stronger with the closer we are getting to the end of the current 6000 year era. Therefore one should connect himself to the illumination of Mashiach by entering into an inner world of simple, earnest belief and unquestioning loyalty to Hashem and all that will happen. This will open up the gates of understanding to a person, and it will also open the gates of the heart, through increased deeper feeling and recognition. This illumination, when accessed, can send blessing into the external dimension and sweeten the pain of the birth contractions, making it an easier period to deal with.

Q

The Redemption is very close, and we need to be prepared. Rav Dessler said that if one doesn't get spiritually ready for Mashiach and he doesn't work on himself from beforehand, he will have little to gain from Mashiach's arrival, and those who don't fix their souls before Mashiach comes won't be able to soar to new spiritual heights when he comes. Here's the question: We have so much *avodas Hashem* to do!

The details of what we need to fix, both on a general scale and on a personal scale, are endless. We have the *avodah* to more connected with Hashem and to talk to Him and to develop a deeper bond with Him, and as the Rav explains in the “*Bilvavi*” sefarim. We also have the *avodah* to fix our middos, which is a lifelong work. And doing so entails knowing our 4 elements, so that we can know our personal soul and what each of us needs to do work on personally. We also have the *avodah* of *ahavas Yisrael* and we also have the duty to learn Torah and to dedicate ourselves completely with *mesirus nefesh* in our Torah study, and to learn Torah *lishmah*, and we also have the *avodah* now to reach our “individuality” and to

reveal it, and there are so many other important details as well, which we need in our *avodas Hashem*, and it's endless. We can see that quite well from all of the different series that the Rav has given.

“The day is short, and there is a lot of work to be done” – and certainly now, when we are at the end of the *ikveta d'meshicha*, and Mashiach is at the door, and we have so much to fix! What *avodah* do we need to focus on? *Ain Od Milvado*? To recognize our soul better? To speak all the time with Hashem? To learn Torah with *mesirus nefesh*? To fix our character? All of the above? Does Hashem want all of us now to work on every possible detail in *avodas Hashem*, each person at his own level?

A

Each person, at his own level [should work on whatever he can do]. One should set aside a few minutes to talk to Hashem, simply and earnestly. One should also set aside time, according to his capabilities, for learning Torah until he uses up all his energy. (This is explained in the series on *Darkei HaLimud - Mesirus Nefesh*, “Getting To Know Your Devotion To Torah”). Usually this cannot be done by most people for the entire day, but only for specific times of the day, each person on his own level. But it should also be noted that some people cannot do this [learning until all of their energy is used up], because it only makes them lose the sensitive balance in their soul, when they try to do this.

May you, and all of *Klal Yisrael*, be written and sealed for a good year. [May this be] the year of Redemption, the revelation of the inner light on the lower realm, the revelation of recognizing the Creator completely, the revelation of recognizing His reality, wisdom, traits, and handiwork. And may we receive all of the tools that are necessary to contain all of these revelations completely.

To Daven In Shul Or Not This Rosh HaShanah

Q

I live in...and although there is only a small number of people getting the coronavirus now, the numbers are climbing, of course not nearly as much as the first wave, but enough to be concerned about again. Our shul has a tent outside where everyone can maintain social distancing and I am hoping that I can hear shofar there. I can daven at home and someone

will blow shofar for me, but which option is better [shul/tent or davening at home]? Also, is it fine to have over guests [on Rosh HaShanah] with social distancing? And what about having over family and grandchildren?

A

1) This depends on how concerned you are, how calm versus how worried you are [about getting the virus] and it also depends on how much you gain spiritually from davening with a minyan. 2) This depends on how much they [the guests or family members] need it and also on how much you need it, and it also depends on how much *ahavas Yisrael* [genuine love for another Jew] that there is here.

Getting Out of America & Making Aliyah

Q

With the recent words of the Rav about corona being an outcome of the “50th level of *tumah*”, is it better now to move to Eretz Yisrael if one will still be able to have *parnassah* (livelihood) there and is it for sure better to live in Eretz Yisrael at a time like this when the world is falling apart? In America we are in the aftermath of extremist groups who are wreaking havoc on the country in a short amount of time, and now they want to defund the police. The danger of living here seems imminent. Currently Israel is only allowing in to the country those who have an Israeli passport. But if a person is indeed able to go to Eretz Yisrael now, would it would be wise to quickly move to Eretz Yisrael before the situation here in America becomes more severe?

A

Generally, yes [it makes sense to move to Eretz Yisrael especially at a time like this]. Each specific case, though, needs to be carefully weighed and thought about, before making the move.

Making Yeridah – Leaving Eretz Yisrael For Chutz L'Aretz

Q

Can the Rav help us decide if we should continue living in Eretz Yisrael or if we should move back to *chutz l'aretz*?

A

Yes.

L'chatchilah (ideally) it is certainly better to live in Eretz Yisrael, both from a *halachic* viewpoint, because there are views in the Poskim who maintain that there is a *mitzvah* to live in Eretz Yisrael, and also from a spiritual standpoint, because Eretz Yisrael is a place where one can grow more in *ruchniyus* and *kedushah*.

Sometimes, there is a need to move to *chutz l'aretz*, *mainly* for any of the following reasons:

1) To benefit a *tzibbur*. 2) For *kibud av v'aim* (honoring parents) purposes. 3) If moving to *chutz l'aretz* will help one have more personal growth. 4) For *parnassah* (livelihood) purposes. 5) For medical purposes – either physical health or mental/emotional health. 6) For *chinuch* purposes (educating one's children). 7) For *shalom bayis* (marital peace) purposes.

Practically speaking, clarify with your wife, if you can, about the pros and cons of leaving Eretz Yisrael. Then you can better figure out how to ease your difficulties [with living in Eretz Yisrael]. Along with this, you should try to slowly internalize the gains and qualities of living in Eretz Yisrael, but do this sensibly and with wisdom.

If possible, decide that you will stay in Eretz Yisrael for some more time, like another year or at least another half a year. After your 'deadline' comes, re-evaluate your situation again. The very fact that you are giving yourself a deadline sometime later this year, where you will re-think your situation again, is enough to ease your difficulties [of living here].

Make sure to give your wife a true feeling that you genuinely want what's best for her, and let her know that if there is indeed a pressing need to move to *chutz l'aretz* that you are prepared to move, if need be it.

Lockdown In Eretz Yisrael

Q

What should we do about the Health Ministry's lockdown regarding shuls for the next 3 weeks? Should we be *moser nefesh* and come to shul and learn as usual, in big numbers as always, or should we listen to the government's rules?

I am asking this question because I think that at this point, it is clear that corona is no longer an epidemic and it's not a reason to quarantine everyone. That is what even the expert doctors are saying, and according to them, the government is lying grossly. Not only that, but the government has also lied about the numbers of people who have died from the virus, because it's within their jurisdiction to write about anyone who dies, that the person died due to corona. It's clear and simple that they're just trying to tear apart Chareidi society, and that this was their intention from the start. (What was once known to only a few people is now known to most of us, and now *Baruch Hashem* some *Rabbonim* have even spoken about this.)

What does want Hashem from us? That we should be *moser nefesh* and come to daven and learn as usual, even if this will cause us to get the virus? Or should we listen to the government's rules and accept that this is all *gezeirah* from Hashem and we should accept Hashem's will with love...? Maybe it should be like in the previous generations, when everyone knew that certain troubles affecting the Jewish people were all a *gezeirah* from Hashem and they had *mesirus nefesh* for *Yiddishkeit* because they knew it was Hashem's will that they be *moser nefesh* against the government, and to wage war against the government that was seeking to destroy the *ruchniyus* of our children. Or maybe we just need to *daven* to Hashem that He erase this *gezeirah*, and in the meantime do what the wicked government is saying to do....?

I am asking this question specifically because during the first wave of corona the Rav said that it's all the will of Hashem that this is happening and that our *avodah* now is to be alone with oneself and with Hashem directly. Does that also apply now, to the current wave? And if it does, why should it be different than the decrees made in previous generations, where we had to be *moser nefesh* and wage physical war against those who sought to destroy our *ruchniyus*?

ANSWER

We need to be mainly interested in HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and not in the government. The period we are in is a period in which the *Yechidah* point of the soul is shining, and therefore it entails an *avodah* of being individual with oneself. However, this [inner *avodah* of being alone with oneself and with Hashem, through being quarantined] is not allowed to compromise on the parameters of the *halachah*. And in that aspect, this *gezairah* is different from any of the decrees of past generations.

Lockdown In Eretz Yisrael – Part 2

Q

- 1) Is there really a new wave of corona now or is it all a conspiracy?
- 2) If someone goes without a mask now is he committing an *aveirah* (sin)? Do we need to listen to the government's regulations regarding corona, and if someone doesn't listen is he doing an *aveirah*?
- 3) Was there any time in our history that was like the current period (and can we learn from anything from past history and apply it to our current situation)?
- 4) Is it true that there are really people trying to take over the world?
- 5) Does the rule of *dina d'malchusa dina* (the obligation of listening to a government's laws) apply now in Israel with all the government's laws about corona?
- 6) What is the way to go about the current period properly?

A

- 1) Partially yes (it is real) and partially it is not [it is just hype].
- 2) One should keep a distance from others out of respect for others. One should mainly be careful about social distancing.
- 3) Nothing can be drawn from past history regarding our current situation. It is *ikvesa d'meshicha* (the footsteps preceding Mashiach), and the end of the *galus* (exile).

4) Yes. But part of it is true, and part of it is not true.

5) The Brisker Rov already negated the concept of the Israeli government a long time ago, and said that it doesn't have the status of *malchus* (government) which we are required to listen to.

6) The *avodah* of a person is now is to be alone with Hashem, and to form an internal bond with Hashem, from the depths of one's *neshamah*!

Is There Really A New Wave of Corona Now?

Q

When the Rav was recently asked if the new wave of corona is a real concern or not, the Rav answered that it is partially true and partially false. I can understand that it is partially a real concern, but what did the Rav mean that it is partially false? Haven't people died from it so far?

A

The details of the current situation are partially a real concern and partially fabricated – sometimes a little fabricated, and sometimes largely fabricated. Part [of the reason of why the current corona situation is exaggerated] is due to a lack of thinking and understanding [on the government's part], part of it is being done on purpose by the government because of all kinds of agendas they have, and also because of politics, money, trying to weaken religion in Israel, a desire of the government to take more control over the country, etc.

Can I Get Married During Corona?

Q

1) The Rav has said that ever since corona began, our avodas Hashem is to find our individuality and be alone with Hashem when we are in seclusion. Currently I am dating and trying to get married, but I'm wondering: Why should I get married and join my life with another person, if my main avodah now is to find my "individuality" and be more alone with myself, which is the very opposite of the entire idea of marriage? Especially because I know that I won't be able to do either avodah 100% if I try to somehow o both.

2) Also, how can I get married and have a successful relationship with another human being, which requires me to exit my private existence and be joined with another human being, if I am mainly supposed to be alone and finding my individuality now during these times?

3) Also, how can I get married now and be happy, when the entire world is going through something painful and difficult? It feels selfish of me to get married now during these times. Also, maybe I should push off marriage until the Redemption arrives, when I can then get married with true complete joy, and amidst total purity and holiness [as opposed to getting married now, when my joy cannot be complete because the rest of the world is suffering]?

A

1) The current *avodah*, of having time alone to yourself every day and finding your holy individuality, is not meant to take up your entire day. It is only meant to be for a small part of the day. You have times of the day where you are involved with people, and you can also have some time of the day when you are alone with yourself and getting in touch with your private self. We cannot be successful 100% at anything. The point is just to change your perspective, which can only happen at a gradual pace.

2) You can feel pain for what others are going through, but you cannot be that way all the time, because for most people, it is unhealthy to be in a state of pain all day over others' suffering. The rule is: "Serve Hashem with joy", in every situation.

3) Don't wait [until the *Geulah*] to get married. Remove all your *cheshbonos* (calculations) and continue to live normally like the rest of the world.

Individual & Communal Response To COVID

Q

The dissension taking place in frum communities over the world now due to Covid, both in Eretz Yisrael and in America, is greatly disturbing. Without pointing fingers at anyone, *chas v'shalom*, what are we supposed to be thinking now, what is the teshuvah that we need to do, what should be our response to all of the recent events? What can each person do as an individual, to stop the Heavenly wrath against us? And, what can we do as a *kehilah* (community)?

A

It is upon us to realize that we are found in the depths of the *galus*, where darkness covers the earth. Almost everything now is covered in a darkness of confusion and the unknown. We need to be less involved with “what’s going on in the world”, and instead become more focused on our own self-development, on our family and those whom we are close with, and to awaken and reveal the inner point within us – to recognize it, connect to it, live with it, and activate it from its potential.

As a *kehillah* (on the communal level), we need to develop an approach in which people can become more involved with their internal world, by having regularly established shiurim on this subject, along with each person’s personal avodah.

To the extent that we succeed in doing the above, with *siyata d’shmaya*, we should expand this kind of movement, more and more, introducing this movement to wider and wider circles, and each person should try to do it according to his capabilities which Hashem has given him.

Chilul Hashem (I)

Q

Many of the general Chareidi public kept all of the tefillos and learning in shuls throughout Yom Tov and Chol HaMoed in the shuls, and they didn’t give up Simchas Beis HaShoievah either, and

this angered the police, who came down and applied force to stop all of the praying and festivities. The ensuing fighting caused the media to go wild with all the reports against Chareidim fighting with the police. This took place at many different Chareidi communities with all different types of Jews from all walks of life. What is the right attitude to have about all this?

We can argue on one hand that it's a *chilul Hashem* when it's all over the media and news, because they say, "Look how frum people act." Both *baalei teshuvah* and *kolel avreichim* look at it this way. On THE other hand, we can argue that we don't need to care about secular opinion, because secular society doesn't understand religious values, and our *frum* lifestyle and values is not important to them. And, we should not compromise on even one bit of *davening* or learning just because of the "Erev Rav" government that rules in Eretz Yisrael, and the government should understand that just like they allow people to go into a supermarket now and buy what they need, because it's "necessity", so is religion no less a necessity for Chareidim. It's all a matter of values, and we are not going to compromise on our values. And although the Gemara says that a *chilul Hashem* is whenever a person behaves disrespectfully and others are disgusted at his behavior, that is only a case where the observers themselves have Torah values, but if the observers don't have Torah values then we do not care what they think.

Since we are not sure of how to approach this issue, we have brought this question before the Rav, to ask us what the daas Torah is, on this matter.

A

All I can do is offer you an inner perspective on this present situation.

Firstly, let us consider the following. Before the Holocaust, Jews were secularized with the gentiles. Part of the process of the Holocaust, as it is well-known, was that a clear separation was made between Jews and goyim, to show the distinction of whoever was Jewish. The *Gedolim* explained this as well.

The same concept is taking place in Eretz Yisrael [we are being shown a clear distinction of who is a real Jew or not]. The Chazon Ish said that he is not afraid of the battle that we have to wage with those throw away the yoke of Torah and mitzvos, but he is afraid that maybe the Torah observant will become drawn towards the secular and fall in with them. The Chazon Ish said that the Israeli government will not be able to hold their power for more than 60-70 years. In current times, when so many have become close to the secular influence in Eretz Yisrael, Hashem has arranged that certain events should happen which are causing the Chareidim to be afraid and to feel a total sense of separation from the Israeli government. That is the process which is unfolding now.

Therefore, the issue to be concerned with now should not be about *chilul Hashem*. Rather, it is all the unique conduct of Hashem which is making a separation between those who sanctify His Name, with those who so far haven't been *zoche* (worthy) to do that yet.

We need to separate from the government: in what we do, in what we feel, and in how we think. And we need to do it all with a sense of *ahavas Yisrael* that must go very deep. This is the way for us to go in!

Deadly Vaccines and 5G

Q

Ever since corona started, there are a lot of rumors of various world leaders and organizations who are plotting to use the epidemic as a way to gain control of the world, mainly by forcing everyone to take vaccines [for corona], which are made intentionally to be deadly. A law recently was made that the government can give these vaccines to children even without parental permission.....There are all kinds of legitimate proofs and videos that are making this information available to the public. The question is: Is there anything we can do to protect our children and families? What is the *hishtadlus* (effort) that we need to do, in such a situation?

A

For now, this particular concern is a concern about something that can happen in the future, and it is not a concern for the present. Therefore, we only need to walk in *temimus* (pure, unquestioning trust) with Hashem, and to ask Him to bring the complete Redemption today, and we should align our entire life according to that aspiration.

In general, whenever it is unclear if there is presently a danger, we should not be concerned about it. This is because there is no end to how suspicious we can be. Chazal [our Sages] already taught, "Do not worry about tomorrow, because maybe tomorrow will come and the concerns won't happen, and then you will have tortured yourself for a world that wasn't yours [you tortured yourself needlessly for something that was never a legitimate concern]." However, if there is legitimate concern for our situation about something that can happen in the near future [and not in a long time from now], then we would need to *daven* [pray] and strengthen our *bitachon* [trust] in

Hashem, and at the same time we would also have to behave according to whatever the situation would demand.

QUESTION [#9707]

The Rav explains that we need to see all of the recent events all coming from Hashem, and that the “Erev Rav” government and all those joined with them to get rid of the Chareidim are all just messengers to carry out Hashem’s plan [but it is not them doing it, it is all from Hashem]. We know that they have plans to bring the next Holocaust to all of the Chareidim, as simple as that sounds. They plan to force a vaccine on all the Chareidim, under the pretense of making everyone to take the vaccine for corona, and they have placed 5G technology which can be used for war purposes, on all Chareidi communities. And they have all kinds of other plans as well. Obviously Hashem wants us to do teshuvah and to return to Him. So what is the main thing that Hashem wants to see from us so that He will send us Mashiach already? I hope that Hashem saw all our mesirus nefesh this past Yom Kippur, and even the mesirus nefesh of secular Jews, who davened outside in the heat, on Yom Kippur, with masks. That certainly aroused the *middas harachamim* of Hashem on us. And also because even the Chareidim in our generation today are regarded as “captured children” (*tinokos shenishbu*) who don’t know better, and that we should all find favor in Hashem’s eyes because of all the long list of suffering that we go through, the Holocaust and the Inquisition, pogroms, massacres, and all kinds of atrocities committed against the Jewish people throughout all the generations, where we have so much physically and especially in our *ruchniyus* (like in the times of the Haskalah). But even with all of this, can the Rav tell us what the main thing is that Hashem wants to see from us and how we should be doing teshuvah? What does Hashem want us to do that we should change?

A

We need to search for Him alone, for His will (the mitzvos) and for His wisdom (the Torah), with all the depths of our heart, with a simple, earnest bond to Him, connected to Him in both our mind and heart.

The COVID Lockdowns In Eretz Yisrael & America

Q

1) Are the closing of yeshivos and shuls in Eretz Yisrael, and also in America (in New York and other places) all a *gezeiras shmad* (decree of genocide on the Jewish people)?

A

In some places and in some situations, it is *shmad*, and in other places and situations, it is not. However, the epidemic itself is an outcome of *Keser D’Kelipah* (the highest point in the side of evil), which manifests on our world as a *gezeiras shmad*.

Q

2) Is the closing of shuls and yeshivos now the “war of Amalek” against the Jewish people? Is it all a fulfillment of the words of the Vilna Gaon that right before Mashiach there will be decrees of the Erev Rav against the Jewish people, and is it starting in Eretz Yisrael and spreading to all other countries from there?

A

Refer to the answer above. It is all coming from “*Keser D’Kelipah*”, which is the final-hammer blow from the side of evil, a final attempt to obliterate all holiness from the world.

Q

3) Do we need to see the closing of shuls and yeshivos as a “decree of the Erev Rav” against us? Or is it all coming from the hidden *rachamei Hashem* (as the Rav implied)?

A

Both.

Q

4) Does Hashem want us to be deeply saddened and pained at the closing of yeshivos and shuls, so that we should be broken-hearted and thereby be worthy of Redemption? Or should we not be sad at all, and we should only be happy, because we now have the *avodah* to be “alone” with Hashem when we are in quarantine, and as the Rav explained at the onset of corona, that our *avodah* now is to become more alone with Hashem when we are secluded in our homes? Is this a time to be sad or happy? Are we supposed to see it all as *rachamei Hashem*?

A

On our outside, we need to mourn and cry over the pain of the Shechinah and over the suffering of the Jewish people, as well as for everyone in the world, who are suffering. On our inside, we should rejoice over the inner light that is now with us more than ever, because we can now develop an inner, holy world of solitude with Hashem.

Corona Lessons

Q

1) I couldn't go to shul on Simchas Torah because I had corona. Is it considered as if I went to shul on Simchas Torah and danced with the Torah, etc.?

A

It is considered “as if”, but not entirely.

Q

2) I lost my taste and smell due to COVID and I still didn't get it back yet. I keep wishing that I will get my taste and smell back but on the other hand I know it's an opportunity to accept a bit of suffering and also it's a degree of overcoming the lust for food, because right now I barely have any desire for good since I can't taste it anyway. What should be my attitude about this? Is it all coming from Hashem's compassion on me that I should overcome my *taavos* for food and that this suffering is an opportunity for me to get a soul cleaning, and therefore I shouldn't want to get my taste back? Or do I need to daven that Hashem should give me my taste back, especially because I've heard that some people never got their taste back yet for a few months already since they got COVID, and I'm worried that this will happen to me to – so should I daven to Hashem to give me my taste back, or should I just accept it?

A

It is a gift from Hashem which is showing you what a life without *taavos* (lust) for food looks like. It enables you to work on your *taavos* and all that results from it, and accordingly you can learn the proper attitude towards *taavah*.

Q

3) My children's schools don't allow me to send my kids to school until at least 12 days after my symptoms of COVID started. I can understand that I have a special *avodas Hashem* to be quarantined at home, as the Rav explained, that being quarantined at home is an opportunity to work on a private relationship with oneself and with Hashem. But what good is this situation for my kids? They are only falling behind in school from it and it doesn't seem to be of any good to them that they have to be home for so many days and they can't go to school. How is it all *rachamei Hashem* (in the words of the Rav) for my kids? What message is Hashem showing us in making our children stay home from school because I have to be quarantined? (It feels like Hashem doesn't want our *ruchniyus* and our *avodas Hashem*, just like on the first night of Succos when it rains, when He is showing us that He is not interested in us sitting in the succah with Him...)

A

It is also *rachamei Hashem*, because it is teaching us to live without being dependent on anything in our surroundings, because our surroundings and environment today isn't pure enough for Hashem. Rain on Succos night prevents us from sitting in the succah and we aren't able to fulfill the mitzvah of sitting in the succah as a result. But when Hashem is forcing us to stay at home with our children, you are able to serve Hashem in the most inner way possible. This entire period [of corona and its aftermath] is to teach us how to live a life of *pnimiyus* (inwardness, a life of the soul), without being dependent on anything external to us.

May you have a complete, speedy recovery amongst all the other ill in *Klal Yisrael!*

Chilul Hashem (2)

Q

1) The Rav recently responded that the concern today [with the corona restrictions in Eretz Yisrael that especially affects the *Chareidim*] should not be about causing a *chilul Hashem* or not, because it is the conduct of Hashem Who is making a distinction between those who sanctify His Name and those who don't. Does this also apply to America?

A

1) The previous question regarding the question of *chilul Hashem* [#9637] was a question if people are acting *halachically* correct or not when they don't keep the government's restrictions, since the secular crowd doesn't value Torah and mitzvos and the frum lifestyle - and therefore, the question was if they are causing a *chilul Hashem*. However, the answer given to that question did not get into if they are acting *halachically* correct or not.

Q

2) The *frum* communities in America, for the most part, didn't obey the government's restrictions about corona, in spite of growing numbers of coronavirus victims in the frum communities... During Chol HaMoed, the Rabbonim put out letters and signs begging everyone

to be careful with the restrictions, and that carelessness about corona had already caused so much anti-semitism and *chilul Hashem* and also because it was causing Jews to get sick *Rachmana Litzlan*. Still people didn't listen. Now people are being a little careful in places in America where fines are given out for disobeying the corona laws, and in places where they closed down yeshivos and shuls. But there are still many who aren't listening to the restrictions at all and they don't care.

Is this all coming from Hashem running the world? Or is it coming from negligence of people who are misusing their free will? Will they not get punished for causing a *chilul Hashem* and for all the anti-semitism they have caused and which they can keep causing? And what about causing people to become deathly ill? Just because it is all Hashem running the world, does that exempt people from being careful not to cause Jews to get sick, not to cause *chilul Hashem* and not to cause people to hate religious Jews?

I'm sure the Rav would agree that the communities in America which don't feel like they are in *Galus*, are in much bigger danger. Is it possible that in *chutz l'aretz*, Hashem is also making a separation between Jews and the other nations, just as He is doing in Eretz Yisrael, where He is making a separation between the Torah observant and the secular?

I could understand that we should have *mesirus nefesh* not to close our yeshivos and shuls, but what *mesirus nefesh* is there to go around without a mask, dance with hundreds of people, and make a wedding with thousands of people? Perhaps I'm wrong and it's all Hashem's conduct that is causing all of these troubling events to happen...?

I have had to be lengthy in writing this question because it's a painful issue to me, and I mainly want to know how to view the situation in Eretz Yisrael and especially in America.

A

2) This is a broad, and delicate, issue. We will try here to explain it briefly.

Everything in Creation is complex, made up of many different elements, a giant mixture. This is especially true in our generation, where the "*Erev Rav*" is dominant in Creation, meaning to say that not only are there soul-reincarnations of the "*Erev Rav*" which are in control of this generation, but everything in Creation is mixed up by the "*Erev Rav*". Understand that very well. So the issue you are asking about is no different – it is also a mixture of many different elements.

This epidemic (coronavirus) is a physical expression and outcome of the "*Keser*" (crown, the highest point) on the side of impurity, which counters the "*Keser*" on the side of holiness, which is the "crown" of Hashem's Kingship that we await every day – the royalty of Hashem which will be

revealed soon through Mashiach Ben Dovid, which will be the final blow of history to the world [ending the non-spiritual reality in front of us as we know it]. This will be the greatest revelation of holiness ever, and it is being countered currently by the “*Keser*” on the side of evil, which is the “final-hammer blow” that the side of impurity (evil) is wielding [as evil’s last attempt to obliterate holiness from the world and to prevent Mashiach and all that will be revealed with the Redemption]. It is essentially all of the 50 forces of impurity being revealed upon the world.

Thus, the root of this epidemic of coronavirus is really a decree of spiritual genocide (*shmad*) upon the Jewish people. Understand that very well. And besides for this, there are also some countries and some parts of the government which are using the epidemic as a way to declare a war of genocide (*shmad*) on religious Jewry.

This epidemic has disoriented the entire world, on so many different levels. Part of the disorientation is that it has caused an upheaval in the lifestyle of frum Jews. First and foremost, it has caused massive *bittul Torah* (wasting time from Torah study). The *sefer Meshech Chochmah* in the end of *Parshas Terumah* says that Torah study of many people outweighs a life-threatening situation. There is a lot to say about that, but based upon his words, there are *Poskim* who ruled in actuality that *bittul Torah* of the community at large is a more important factor than endangering lives – even if the COVID restrictions are not a decree of genocide (*shmad*) on Jewry.

Even more so, we need to understand that each situation has to be weighed differently. Each time one goes out to yeshiva or to the beis midrash or to shul, and there is a situation where we are not sure if there really is an epidemic taking place, we cannot consider the actions of such a person to be endangering to another individual’s life. From a collective view, such behavior can indeed cause death and illness to others *Rachmana Litzlan*, but that is only from a general perspective, and it is not necessarily true in every case as an individual. Therefore, when it comes to *halachah*, we cannot consider the issue in terms of how it affects the general public, but of how it is affecting individuals. And therefore, every situation, in most cases, is not in the category of endangering another’s life.

But since such behavior is causing death and illness to others on a general scale, we would need the Rabbonim to give general guidelines for the nation, as was done in all other generations before. The Chazon Ish said that if there would be a *Beis Din HaGadol* today that prohibits people from driving a car, although it is not forbidden every time to drive a car, it would still be causing death to others on a general scale. Understand very well this idea.

Therefore, we need to reflect and understand that on one hand, the epidemic is causing death and illness to others, sometimes on a harsher scale and sometimes on a milder scale. But on the other hand, if we are to come and close all the yeshivos and *batei midrashim* – which is what indeed happened – such a thing shakes us up very deeply. Such a thing has caused thousands to abandon

Torah observance, and it has caused many people to weaken in their *ruchniyus*. And many, many Jews started to become more connected with media and internet [ever since the quarantines started]. And there have been many other losses as well to the *ruchniyus* of people. This is all besides for the emotional problems, *chinuch* problems, health problems, financial problems, *shalom bayis* problems, and more, which all of this has caused. So there is a lot of thinking needed, so many factors have to be weighed, and it needs to be decided by the Sages who guide our generation.

All of it is being done by Hashem's Divine Providence over us. The entire situation now, which has created so much confusion, and so much divisiveness, with each community following those whom they turn to, has caused a great *chilul Hashem*, which made a big division now between the Torah observant community with those who were not observant of Torah and mitzvos. And since all of it is coming from the great mixture that is in our generation today, on one hand it has caused a separation between the Torah observant with those who are not, but at the same time it has caused those who criticize the religious community to become involved with those who are not observant of Torah, to the point that they badmouthed their own fellow Jewish brethren to the government [committing the horrible sin of slandering another Jew to the government and essentially alienating themselves from the Jewish people in doing so].

And it seems that the same thing as happened in *chutz l'aretz*: There is a separation that has been made now, between the observant Jews and the non-observant Jews, but at the same time, there are also those within the observant community who were critical of their brethren to the point that they involved themselves with the world at large which made them become more mixed [and identified] with world outside of religious Torah Jewry.

Bringing Mashiach Closer

Q

Is the purpose of all of the Rav's teachings about inner *avodas Hashem* so that we can bring Mashiach? It is hard for me to understand how the Rav's approach will help people bring Mashiach, because I am under the impression that all of one's *avodas Hashem* is supposed to excite a person and feel a great yearning that Mashiach should come. Yet I don't see the Rav's approach emphasizing this. Maybe I'm mistaken. Can the Rav help me understand?

A

When one reaches his individual revelation of the “*Yechidah*” part of his soul [one’s private connection with Hashem and being one and integrated with Hashem], from there one spreads the light of Mashiach to the rest of the world.

[As for excitement and passion versus inner calm:] Even after we become excited and passionate in our avodas Hashem, we also need inner silence and calm in our soul, because Hashem is not found amidst inner noise, but through a still, subtle sound (*kol demamah dakah*). Inner excitement and passion is inspiration for the soul, but it must be followed by inner calm. There is a whole different way of looking at life from the way you are looking at....

Avodas Hashem In Current Times

Q

What is the practical difference between the *avodas Hashem* we have had to do throughout the duration of *galus* (exile) versus the *avodas Hashem* of current times?

A

The unique *avodah* of today’s generation is to connect to Hashem earnestly and simply (with unquestioning loyalty), and from this we will merit the light of the Torah’s wisdom, because wisdom comes from *ayin* (the spiritual), for the Torah’s wisdom is longer than the land, wider than the sea, and vastly deep. In our times, besides for attaining the Torah’s wisdom by warring against the impure forces, the Torah’s wisdom is also attained through the pleasantness of this earnest and simple connection with Hashem.

Kosher Smartphones

Q

Is there any *heter* to own a filtered smartphone?

ANSWER

The *Mesillas Yesharim* already wrote that anything which if there is anything which even remotely distances a person from Hashem, one should run from it as if he would run from a fire.

Non-Jewish Psychology

Q

There are certain methods of therapy, such as NLP and guided imagery, which are very effective in the non-Jewish world. Why doesn't the Rav approve of such methods to be used by a Jew? Also, every wisdom is ultimately rooted in the Torah. Since non-Jewish psychology is ultimately rooted in the Torah and there are Torah sources for everything (though I don't know exactly where the sources are, but I've heard Rabbis say that it's all in the Torah), why then can't non-Jewish psychology be used for a Jew?

A

Everything has a source in the Torah. The gentile nations can get spiritual energy from the Seven Noachide Laws, which are written in the Torah. And therefore, the fact that something is found in the Torah and it is helping non-Jews does not necessarily mean that it is appropriate for a Jew.

In order for me to state my view on any of the methods of psychology or therapy, I would need to know very well what exactly the method is, and since I do not fully know about any of the non-

Jewish methods of therapy, I cannot give my view on it. One needs to be completely familiar with the method and where exactly is rooted in the Torah, and then one can know if it is appropriate also for a Jew to use, and one would also have to determine which particular type of person should be using the method in question.

Having A Positive Self-Concept

Q

We know that there's a basic rule that a person needs to have a basic sense of self-esteem and happiness about himself in order to serve Hashem *b'simchah* (with joy) and in order to achieve any growth in avodas Hashem, and Rebbi Nachman of Bresslov says that everyday should keep reminding himself of his *nekudos tovot* (good points). But what should a person do if he is naturally drawn towards certain sins which are severe in the eyes of Hashem, like if he has a nature to talk *lashon hora* or to enjoy *lashon hora*, or if by his very nature he gets easily turned on towards lusts after women, or towards same-gender relationships, or if he feels all the time a desire to touch people in appropriate places, etc.? How is such a person supposed to be happy with himself, even with his good points, when he is naturally drawn towards certain sins or behaviors which anger the Creator and he is regularly rebelling against Hashem?

A

A person is comprised of opposite aspects in his character, because the entire Creation is composed of opposites. Therefore, there is a time for a person to feel good about himself and to reflect on his good and positive points, and there is also a time for a person to feel sad about his sins. During the time that a person is reminding himself of how good he is, he must be immersed in a state of joy, to the point that his joy transcends all logical reasoning – in spite of the fact that he has good, logical reasons not to be happy with himself.

How Evil Imagination Works

Q

The Midrash Tanchuma says that when Avraham was taking Yitzchok to the Akeidah, the Satan tried to stop him in many different ways, by creating a mirage of a dangerous river in his path with different perils to stop him, and Satan kept appearing as different people in order to convince him to turn back. When Avraham waded into the illusory “river” he felt how deep and dangerous it was and he was considering turning back, but he kept resolving that he will fulfill Hashem’s will and he will carry on no matter how hard it was for him. Here’s my question: Was the river being imagined or not? The Satan was creating an illusion and it wasn’t a real river, but how then was Avraham able to feel it when he waded into it?

A

The *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) is entirely the imagination. The angel in charge of Gehinnom is called “Dumah”, from the word *medameh* (the imagination), and when a person sins because of listening to his *yetzer hora*, he becomes attached to the imagination, and therefore he is under control of the angel Dumah – who then uses the imagination to further control the person. Think about this very well:

The entire secret of evil and sinning thrives on the imagination!!! The power of the *yetzer hora* is that it can make a person actually feel that what he is imagining is real. This faulty perception entered man ever since Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas* (the Tree of Knowledge), which is identified as the power of imagination, as explained by the Sforino and the Gra. It is the ability to mix reality with fantasy.

The depth of nullifying the *yetzer hora*, then, is by separating from our imagination and connecting ourselves more with reality. This is a deep and subtle matter.

How To Increase Self-Esteem

Q

What can a person do if he or she feels a low self-worth about himself (or herself).... to the point that a person doesn't feel like getting out of bed in the morning and going to *daven* in a *minyan*, and certainly whenever he has to do anything different from what everyone is else is doing?

A

The person should make for himself a list of all of his qualities. One should also try as much as possible not to be “into” others’ lives and other’s successes, and instead be focused on one’s own personal development of their own inner world. Sometimes, lack of self-worth comes from being overly involved with thinking about how others are successful. In order for one to get past this issue, one needs to develop their own rich and expansive “inner world” within oneself, and this is actually a degree of *kedushah* (holiness) because it resembles the concept of the those *tzaddikim* who would not look out of their own *daled amos* (their direct space) [because they each had a personal, inner world within themselves to always be focused on].

Friendship, Loneliness and Dependency

Q

1) My entire future lays in this question. I am in a large kolel for several years already and I feel like I have no friends. Once in a while I bump into an old friend but that's it. I don't know a soul where I learn. I often wonder where my friends are, whatever happened to them, and if they're still my friends.

Lately I feel that I only have one really close friend, but I suspect that he feels uncomfortable from me because I am hanging on to him as the one and only true friend that I have in my life. I

am scared that he will sever our friendship. As a result of that fear, I feel very empty and terribly lonely, and my suffering is unbearable.

I have trouble concentrating on my learning because of this. I keep thinking of the terrible thought that I don't have any friends and that I'm in the wrong place, and that perhaps I should switch to a new kolel, but it would be too stressful for me to change kolels. Also, I think it would just be running away from my issues and it wouldn't be the solution, because it seems that my problem is that I feel dependent on having friends and I feel like I don't have even one stable friendship that I feel secure about, and therefore I think the time has come for me to let go of my need for friends and to just be "alone" with myself, a concept which the Rav often explains.

I understand very well the need to live in the state of "alone", however I also feel a legitimate need for connection with certain friends, and to a certain extent I'll admit that I do feel some kind of dependency on my friends. For example, if theoretically my friends would leave the kolel I am in or even if they would go out to work, I would feel way too lonely without them and feel that there's no point in me continuing to learn in a place where I don't have my friends. On the other hand, all of this makes me feel more of a need to live in the state of "alone" with my inner self, and not to feel so dependent on friends, and even more so, because I think it's time for me to form a deeper connection to my learning that goes beyond my social situation, and it's more about doing what Hashem wants from me and to totally connect my being with my learning.

Here are my questions. (1) Is my way of thinking correct? Is it time for me to let go of my need for friends and to feel dependent only on Hashem and no one else? (2) Do I need to try to make new friends? For example should I try to seek out new friends to "talk in learning" with, or just to smile and say hello to? (3) If I have a friend whom I suspect is keeping a distance from me, do I need to go over to him and ask him if he's upset with me? Should I speak to him about my insecurities about losing my friends, or is that not recommended? (4) What is the inner advice regarding all of the above?

Thank you to the Rav for all of the amazing guidance.

A

1) Yes – your main connection in life should be with HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and also with your inner self, balanced with genuine *ahavas Yisrael* (love for the Jewish people). You can have friends "by default", according to whatever Hashem sends your way. But you should never allow yourself to become dependent on any of your friends.

(2) For now, don't try to make new friends. This is because you are currently forming relationships of dependency with others, which is unhealthy. After you become balanced in your relationships with others [which will only happen after you gain a strong, secure connection with yourself and with HaKadosh Baruch Hu and you are not allowing yourself to become dependent on your friend], you can then make new friends whom you will not feel a dependency on, and when you reach that point, it will be proper for you to do so [to form healthy friendships with others]. The fact that you said that your "entire future lays in this question" shows that you are in an unhealthy, imbalanced situation.

(3) Don't go over to a friend [asking him if he's keeping a distance from you, or if he's upset at you]. Leave it alone.

(4) You need to change your relationship style with others. You are looking for deep friendships with others and you are looking for someone who will always smile at you, and most of the time you will not be able to find such a friendship. That is why you are suffering from so much disappointment in others. Even if you would find such a deep friendship with another person that you're looking for, it would be in the category of "I put in effort and I found", and often people put in effort but they don't always "find" what they're trying to get.

When you become more balanced in your soul, your inner state will improve and you will be able to connect to others and have friendships with no agendas and with no unhealthy dependency on others, and it will become easier for you, with Hashem's help, to find healthy relationships with others. When others sense that you are dependent on them and they start ignoring you, it is usually because they have chosen to sever their friendship with you [because the intensity of the friendship felt too overbearing for them. Therefore, to the extent that you are less dependent on others and you can form healthy friendships with others, you will have lasting friendships with others].

Healing From An Emotionally Distant Father

Q

What can we say to a person who's a fully grown adult man, who feels deeply angry and hurt at his father, and he has endless complaints about his father?

As a therapist, I keep meeting clients who will say something like, "My father never saw me", or "My father didn't care about me, he was too into himself all the time", or, "He was too self-

absorbed in his religious pursuits such as in his lengthy prayers or consistent Torah sessions, and he didn't take the time to develop a relationship with me, and there never was a relationship between me and him, and there still isn't. He shows absolutely no warmth or emotion towards me, and because of this I fell into all kinds of weird behaviors or crazy lusts that drove me crazy to fill the void inside of me, and all of my problems in my life were because my father didn't have a relationship with me, and that's why I'm so messed up and I have imbalances in my personality, that's why I have all kinds of emotional issues and issues with G-d. It's because I didn't develop emotionally as a child because of I had no relationship with my father."

In my opinion as a therapist, I think that the client is right on many different points, and it makes sense that he was a hurt as a child whenever he felt unseen by his father, especially because a child is totally dependent on his father for love, and he didn't get his basic childhood needs met. And a child doesn't have the maturity to admit that he doesn't understand his parents that well, so he is right for having felt hurt from his father in his childhood. A child's perception and feelings have a powerful hold on a child and don't let him enjoy anything when he is having these overwhelming feelings, and he simply is not mature enough to let go of his emotional dependency on his parents and to become more connected with himself. We can't expect to act like a mature adult and just "let go" of his imagined need to feel dependent on his parents, if he feels that his parents didn't give to him enough.

What is the therapy for such an adult who is still hurting like this from childhood? In my opinion, he needs to be helped both on an emotional and on a spiritual level. On an emotional level, I need to help him deal with his intense negative feelings, and to help him focus on the positive experiences of his childhood, if possible. And on the spiritual level, I should help him become grateful to Hashem, help him find meaning in his suffering and in what he experienced, and to help him see how Hashem loves him, and to help him feel love towards Hashem – to help him see that he has a Father in Heaven, with a mature perspective, and not merely out of a sense of obligation without any sense of connection to Hashem.

Or, perhaps I should try an alternative approach, by helping him deal with the trauma through mitigating his negative feelings, which will change his perspective and help him connect more to Hashem. After all, of his trauma began in childhood, so it makes sense to help him go back into the negative feelings that he suffered and to help him out of there and weaken them for him so that he won't find them overwhelming anymore. He has been so traumatized from his childhood neglect that he told me, "I don't understand how we can say in Selichos that Hashem is our Merciful Father. I don't know of a father who is merciful."

A

You can integrate together both approaches that you mentioned.

The first thing you need to accomplish with him, though, is to help him achieve an emotional detachment from his father. We shall refer to this first stage as *havdalah*, separation. The next stage is to help him become his own individual and develop his own internal world, as if he is a convert, like a person being born anew. Help him open up his emotions and feelings in general, and especially in his feelings towards Hashem. After that, you can help him repair his relationship with his father. This stage can be called *hamtakah*, sweetening.

Marital Intimacy Issues For Men

Q

What are possible reasons that a newlywed husband doesn't initiate marital intimacy, and instead he waits for his wife to initiate, and he acts as if he's doing her a favor but he's personally not interested on his own in being intimate with her?

A

It can be for any of the following reasons. (1) Something may have happened to him in his past when he was still in his childhood development, either something that was physically done to him or something that he merely saw, which hampered his development. (2) He might have either a general emotional blockage [his emotions are closed in general], or he may have a specific emotional blockage [a particular emotion of his is closed up]. (3) Perhaps he is disgusted with the very idea of physical vulnerability and intimacy. (4) It can be because he lacks confidence if he will be successful at doing this *mitzvah*, and this is causing him to be afraid and be passive about doing it.

Are The Rav's Primary Teachings Mentioned In Our Sefarim?

Q

How come we don't find any mention of the Rav's teachings about "revealing the soul" and "feeling Hashem's Presence in the heart" in any of our classical *sefarim*? I have not come across any of these concepts in *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* or in the *Kuzari*, or even in the *Ramchal's* *sefarim*. Most of the early *sefarim* which speak about *emunah* and *avodas Hashem* do not openly mention this point. Certainly when we analyze the *sefarim* we can find that they are describing a certain inner dimension, and there are many hints to the "inner world" contained in the *sefarim*, but it seems that this concept is largely being explained by the Rav and other recent authors of *sefarim*, which explains openly about revealing the soul and revealing the presence of Hashem in our heart. But the classical *sefarim* only hint to it and they do not speak about it openly. What is the reason for this?

A

It is because we can now receive the illumination of Mashiach, as the Sages teach, that the closer we are to the coming of Mashiach, the more we can receive the light (the revelations) of Mashiach, and since we are currently very close to the coming of Mashiach, we can receive more revelations that Mashiach will reveal to the world.

I Can't Deal With Life

Q

On Yom Kippur I cried from the depths of my heart to Hashem as I uttered the 13 *middos harachamim*, begging Hashem that troubles should not befall me, and I cried so much. I didn't even have *kavanah* at all for what I was *davening* for, I just kept crying. Is it possible that just by crying alone, I was able to circumvent any *nisyonos* (difficulties) from coming to me? I simply do not have the strength for any more *nisyonos*. I have no desire or will to just accept any more *nisyonos*

by trying to have more *emunah*. I just want to see the light already, in all that has been happening to me from the last couple of years.

A

Whenever your *davening* is accompanied by tears, especially during the Yomim Noraim and especially on Yom Kippur, there is special power of such *tefillos* to tear up any harsh decrees, as Chazal taught. It is not guaranteed to erase the decree entirely [but your tears during *davening* always have a significantly good effect for you].

You will always need to live a life of *emunah* (faith in G-d), whether you are in a more pleasant situation or a less pleasant situation. Build a life of pure, unquestioning trust in Hashem, and it should not matter to what your life is looking like, whether you are experiencing a lot of *nisyonos* or not as much. You want to see the “light” already, but the main thing you really need to experience is the light of *emunah*!

Advice For Joy

Q

My main element is earth and therefore I am drawn towards sadness, and the most difficult *middah* which gets in the way of my *avodas Hashem* is, my pull towards sadness. Can the Rav give me any practical advice on how I can quickly enter into a state of joy (*simchah*) and get rid of my bad moods (especially when I need to be in a basic positive state in order to *daven* or learn Torah)? And are there any specific pesukim in *Tehillim* I can say, to become more *b'simchah*?

A

1) Move quickly. 2) Eat a light diet. 3) Get excitement from something holy. 4) You can verbalize any of the following pesukim in *Tehillim*:

Tehillim 9:3, 12:2, 14:7, 16:9, 16:11, 19:9, 21:2, 21:7, 30:12, 31:8, 32:11, 33:21, 34:3, 35:26, 35:27, 40:17, 45:9, 45:16, 46:5, 48:12, 53:7, 53:10, 58:11, 63:12, 64:11, 66:6, 67:5, 68:4, 69:33,

70:5, 85:7, 86:4, 90:12, 90:15, 92:5, 93:11, 97:1, 97:8, 97:11, 97:12, 100:2, 104:15, 104:31, 104:34, 105:38, 106:5, 107:30, 107:42, 109:28, 113:9, 118:24, 119:74, 124:1, 126:3, 137:3, 137:6, 149:2.

A Good Mussar Sefer For Our Generation

Q

Is there a particular *mussar sefer* which is suitable for our generation to learn?

A

Every person is different when it comes to which *sefarim* are best for them to learn, but a good example of a *mussar sefer* for our generation are the *sefarim* of Rav Shimshon Pincus [i.e. the *Nefesh Shimshon* series, the series of *Sichos HaGaon Rav Shimshon Pincus*, and *sefer She'arim B'Tefillah*].

Breathing & Avodas Hashem

Q

The *sefarim* of Rav Yurevitch speak about the power of deep breathing and how a person can heal his negative emotions and become closer to Hashem, through working with the breath. Can this approach [of breathing] be fused together with the Rav's approach?

A

[There are three general areas of our *avodas Hashem*, beginning from most spiritual to least spiritual: 1. Working with our *Nefesh Elohis* (G-dly soul), 2. Working with our *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul), and 3. Working on our *guf* (body).]

There is an *avodah* that we have to do with our G-dly soul (*nefesh Elohis*), which includes the 5 parts of our soul: the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*. This includes improving our actions (*Nefesh*), our character and emotions (*Ruach*), our analysis in Torah learning (*Neshamah*), the higher source of our Torah learning that is above regular thought (*Chayah*), and *d'vekyus* with Hashem (*Yechidah*). There is also an *avodah* we have with our animal soul (*nefesh habehaimis*): Repairing the 4 elements in our lower soul (repairing our earth, water, wind and fire). We also have an *avodah* with our body (*guf*), such as through working with our breathing, and this also improves part of our animal soul (*nefesh habehaimis*).

I do not deal that much with teaching about breathing, and the reason for this is because many times, if someone is not spiritually pure enough, instead of using breathing as a way to leave behind his physical pull and reveal his soul more, the person will actually become even more involved with his body and more attached to it. Also, when people focus a lot of their inner work on breathing, they are often following their imagination, and imagination naturally gravitates towards the body's physicality, because imagination is *medameh*, from the word *adamah* (earth), hinting to the connection between imagination and the earthy materialism of the body.

Also, working with breathing is an approach that is very popular with the gentile nations, and therefore I am very concerned that if people involve themselves a lot with their breathing, they will be led from there into non-Jewish approaches of breathing exercises.

More About Soul Roots

Q

1) How can person figure out his personal soul root and from which *partzuf* he is mainly from?

A

One needs to undergo self-purification, attain self-recognition, and understand the concept of each *partzuf*.

Q

2) How can person know which of the Ten *Sefiros* he is mainly from?

A

2) Same answer as above.

Q

3) Can the Rav describe the different unique parts of Torah learning (*Gemara, halachah, gematria, Kaballah, Midrash* and learning about the *nefesh/soul*) that will uniquely apply to each of the four primary soul roots (*Asiyah, Yetzirah, Beriah* and *Atzilus*)?

A

3) With regards to the different kinds of Torah learning, those who have a soul root of *Asiyah* are mainly drawn towards learning and understanding the Chumash. Those who have a soul root of *Yetzirah* are mainly drawn towards learning Mishnayos. Those who have a soul root of *Beriah* are mainly drawn towards Gemara. Those who have a soul root of *Atzilus* are mainly drawn towards Kaballah. Getting more specific, there are four kinds of learning: *psbat* (simple meaning), *remez* (hints), *drash* (expounded meaning) and *sod* (secret meaning). Those who have a soul root of *Asiyah* are mainly drawn towards *psbat*. Those who have a soul root of *Yetzirah* are mainly drawn towards *gematria*. Those who have a soul root of *drash* are mainly drawn towards learning *agadta* and studying *Midrashim*. Those who have a soul root of *sod* are mainly drawn towards recognizing the roots of the soul.

Q

4) Can the Rav explain what the different soul roots of “Rachel” and “Leah” are, and if possible, can the Rav get into the further details of this topic?

A

4) The soul root of “Leah” is all about *daas*, the maturity of the intellect (and there are 18 subdivisions of this), and this is an elaborate topic. The soul root of “Rachel” is all about action (since Rachel is called the younger sister, and youth implies more action).

Alternatives To Fasting

Q

There are rabbis today who say that people need to fast for a certain amount of times in order to be forgiven for certain sins, just as the Arizal taught. Does the Rav agree with that approach? And is there an alternative way, other than fasting and other calculated forms of repentance, by which a person to be forgiven by Hashem for the sins he committed?

A

This is a lengthy discussion, and I will mention just a few of the alternatives to fasting.

1) Through a combination of Torah learning and doing acts of chessed, one’s sins are forgiven. We learn this from the Gemara that even though Eli HaKohen’s descendants were decreed to die young, their descendants Abaye and Rava lived longer because they applied themselves especially to Torah study and in doing acts of kindness for others.

2) The Vilna Gaon said that the main suffering a person needs to go through on this world is not through fasting and physical pain, but through breaking one’s desires that are verbal-related [i.e.

lashon hora] and breaking one's sins that are lust-related, and included in this is nullifying one's wishes and desires.

3) Another method of being forgiven for sins is, when one lovingly accepts any of his suffering that Hashem sends his way.

Why Didn't I Change After Yom Kippur?

Q

How can it be that the day after the holiest day of the year [Yom Kippur] when I experienced so much loftiness, I feel so indifferent the next day and I feel like my learning and davening is a far cry from what it should be, and even though I resolved to improve, it didn't turn out like how I thought. Don't we all resolve in our prayers on Yom Kippur that we won't return to sinning again? Why do I feel so indifferent and callous to *ruchniyus*, like I don't care about anything? Why am I having these feelings now, of all times? And how can it be that I feel so uninspired like this even in the days between Yom Kippur and Succos, which are very holy days of the year, of which it is said that Hashem cherishes His relationship with His children even more now that we have all been purified from our sins on Yom Kippur? [Why don't I feel any different during these days and why haven't I changed?]

A

There are several reasons.

1) [When you feel that your learning or davening is a chore on you and you feel lethargic and indifferent about it] this is called "heaviness" in the soul, which is a result of physical and emotional exertion, causing you to feel drained, and this makes you feel like a child who wants to run away from school.

2) Another reason may be because it is difficult to return to the physical world again after you have just had a spiritual high [and you are feeling this frustration].

3) Another reason for this may be because sometimes, during holy times [such as the *Yomim Noraim*], a person may be living a bit in his imagination, or he is mainly living in outer spiritual

revelations (*ohr makif*) that are normally not present, which are above his actual level, and then when he returns to his normal level, he finds the reality of his current level to be heavier upon him [and therefore he doesn't feel as motivated now as before].

Personal Interview With The Rav

Q

I want to understand a little more about who the Rav is. Which “crowd” does the Rav belong to? Who is the Rav [or guiding figure] of the Rav? What “type” is the Rav? I am asking this because when I learn the Rav's sefarim with others many times they will ask these kinds of questions.

A

Unfortunately I cannot really answer your question. Rav Yitzchok Hutner said (in the biography called *Sefer HaZikaron L'Pachad Yitzchok*) that it is difficult for him to talk about himself. I suffer from the same thing. It is very difficult for me to write about myself, and in fact, even just writing that alone is difficult and uncomfortable for me. And the very question of “what kind of crowd do I belong to” is something that I am totally uncomfortable with.

If you want to understand what “type” I am, you can discern this from my sefarim and especially from the q&a (printed in sefer *Sha'al Libi*) regarding the material written in my sefarim.

Why Does The Rav Give Brief Answers?

Q

Why does the Rav give such short answers? Sometimes the brevity of the answer causes the reader to be unclear of what the answer is...

A

Chazal already taught, “One should always teach his student in a manner of brevity.” The Chazon Ish said that sometimes there can be a long path which is really short. First of all, giving long or short answers depends on the personal soul root [of the one giving the answer]. Some have a soul root that is more contracted, so they are inclined towards brevity, and others have a soul root that is more expansive, so they are inclined towards elaboration.

It also depends on how much time I have. Many times I can spend several hours a week answering questions, and I need to consider how energy and how much time I need to invest in writing responses, and how much time and energy needs to be spent on other areas.

An additional difficulty is because of the type of questions that come in. It is very easy for people to send in a very general question without learning about the topic at all beforehand, and in order for me to give an answer, I have to be very lengthy in order to give background on the topic of the question [and not always do I have the time for this]. The best thing is that when people send in a question, they should try to send in a question that is in the category of a “wise question”, which already contains half the answer, and the question should be coming from sources and from first being clear about the topic of the question, and after that a person should send in the question.

If there is anything unclear about an answer, you can try sending in another question for clarification of the answer.

Zionism Vs. Making Aliyah To Eretz Yisrael

Q

I very much want to make *aliyah* to *Eretz Yisrael*. I understand that Mashiach is very close and that now it's time for us to “return home” now. However, I'm afraid of transgressing the “Three Oaths” [as taught by the Satmar Rebbe zt”l]. I know that now's the time for *aliyah*, and if not now, then never. However I need to make the move correctly and I need to know how to live in Eretz

Yisrael with the proper attitude and *hashkafos*. How can I live in Eretz Yisrael without transgressing the Three Oaths?

A

Aliyah is about moving to Eretz Yisrael (the Holy Land) - and it is not about “moving to the country of Israel.” There is no *halachic* issue of going to live in “Eretz Yisrael” – there are only *halachic* issues for a person who wishes to live in “Israel”, the country of Israel that is associated with what is called “*Medinas*” *Yisrael*, the Israeli government [meaning that it all depends on what your attitude is, if you are coming to live in Eretz Yisrael because of the holy land that it is, which is the right attitude to have, or if you are coming to live in Israel due to Zionism, which is the wrong attitude to have and which is problematic].

The Vilna Gaon wanted to come live in Eretz Yisrael, and so did the Baal Shem Tov, and Baba Sali came to live here, and so did many other great holy leaders from all different sects of Jewry from the past. And even many *chassidim* of *Satmar* are living in Eretz Yisrael. The attitude you need to have towards aliyah is that you will be moving to “Eretz Yisrael” [the holy land], and not to the “Medinas Yisrael” (the country of Israel, which is the secular, Zionist culture that is not Eretz Yisrael).

Integrating Into Chareidi Society In Eretz Yisrael

Q

We are a family of *baalei teshuvah* and we moved to Eretz Yisrael in the hope of integrating with Chareidi society. However, my son is having a hard time in yeshiva here, he’s tired all the time and he gets up late, he’s not focusing on his learning, and he’s overly concerned about his social stance with others and if he appears dressed “Chareidi” enough for his friends. On one hand we’re very happy that we’re living in Eretz Yisrael where Hashem wants us to be, but at the same time we feel out of place here amongst Chareidi society. Our son is trying so hard to fit in, but it’s never enough. We’re constantly feeling left out and turned down.

It seems like we have much more problems than your average person. We have so much aspirations to grow, and we even had a lot of *siyata d’shmaya* from Hashem to get to where we are

today, and we feel that Hashem was with us every step of the way. But on the other hand we feel like we need to do so much work on ourselves and that we need to come out of so many old childhood habits. We struggle with many issues and certain *middos* that are easy and natural for Chareidim to deal with but which are much more difficult for us to deal with and fix, given our not *frum* background.

I also understand that corona has created all kinds of new opportunities to do *teshuvah* and that it has shown us who we truly are, though the picture isn't clear yet. We really want to work on ourselves and do what Hashem wants from us. What is it that we need to fix exactly, and what can we tell our children to help them integrate better with their peers and environment?

A

Firstly, you should be credited in that have accomplished a lot so far throughout your journey through life and you have shown exemplary *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) for Hashem, from how you started out and until now.

For most people who try to integrate themselves into Chareidi society in Eretz Yisrael, the process does not go smoothly and pleasantly. The environment here does not fit everyone's personality, and in fact, it is not for everyone. The proper attitude to have is that instead of trying to fit into society here, you need to be focused on how you can personally become closer to Hashem, and you can use Chareidi system and schools according to your abilities as a tool to get closer to Hashem. However, you should not be trying to fit in totally with Chareidi society, because in most cases when people try to do this, they become very disappointed and miserable in the process. Your main drive should be to build and develop your own self, along with making sure that you have some friends who share similar goals to you, and you can also try a little to integrate yourself with the Chareidi environment as much as needed. Accordingly, you can then know where you should live, which schools you should be sending your children to. It's not always best to look for the "best school" that has the highest success rate.

Concerning your son, you should also find a study partner for your son, and he should be someone who is married, with a warm and understanding personality, who can create a relationship with your son and tutor him, and to be a friend to him for life. This will hopefully help your son develop into his own unique personality and an inner world of his own, so that he isn't mainly concerned about how well he is competing with his peers.

Can We Meet The Rav?

Q

We really wish we could meet the Rav in person and have a session with the Rav to sort our issues, is that possible?

A

For several reasons, I cannot do any sessions with anyone, and the most I can do is write responses [to those who reach out to me]. I hope that you will understand and give me the benefit of the doubt.

Women & Studying The 4 Elements

Q

The Rav suggests (in the series *“Inner World of the Bas Yisrael”*, chapter 8) that both men and women should learn about the 4 elements in order to understand their souls and develop their inner worlds. However, the Rav said elsewhere that the 4 elements is not suitable for anyone who doesn’t have the patience and the subtle understanding to learn about such refined details, and certainly that includes women who don’t have the mental capacity to learn about like men can. So which of the Rav’s series on 4 Elements should women learn? If they are not meant to learn it so in-depth like men can?

A

The in-depth series on the 4 elements is not suitable for everyone to learn because it requires a lot of patience and in-depth analysis of many different refined details. Women only need to gain a general understanding of the 4 elements without going into all the details. [For a basic overview of

the 4 elements, refer to *Getting To Know Your Soul (Section 1)*, and the more recently given introductory series to the 4 Elements series, which is called *4 Elements – Self-Recognition*.]

Women & Bringing The Geulah

Q

What is the source that the *Geulah* (the Final Redemption) will be in the merit of the women? And how do women bring the *Geulah*?

A

The personifying trait of women is *malchus* (royalty)¹⁶, which is also the trait of Dovid HaMelech. Mashiach ben Dovid (the Mashiach who will descend from Dovid HaMelech) is rooted in Rus – the “mother” of royalty (*malchus*).

Chanukah and Purim Miracles Through Women

Q

What is the depth behind why the Chanukah and Purim miracles came about through women (Yehudis and Channah on Chanukah, and Esther on Purim)?

A

¹⁶ Editor’s Note: *Malchus* is sometimes referred to as the concept of *kabalas ol malchus shomayim* (accepting the yoke of Hashem’s Kingship upon us), or *emunah* (faith in Hashem), or *tefillah* (prayer), or *shiflus* (feeling humbled).

The Torah's festivals came about in the merit of great men [the Avos/forefathers], whereas the Rabbinical festivals [Chanukah and Purim] were allotted to be in the merit of women.

What Exactly Is The Bilvavi Sefer About?

Q

1) Who is the “Bilvavi” sefer especially catering to? 2) What type of audience did the Rav deliver the classes to upon which the *sefer* is based on? It is targeting *kolel* people or working people? 3) Also, what is unique about this *sefer* which isn't included in *sefer Mesillas Yeshtarim*?

A

1) It is a *sefer* that is speaking to the simple, earnest part of every Jew's soul. It is meant to fulfill the words of the prophet Chavakuk who said that the entire Torah can be summed up in one point: “*A righteous person lives by his emunah (faith in G-d).*” 2) It is meant for all of *Klal Yisrael* to learn and it is not targeting any specific group or community of Jews. 3) *Sefer Mesillas Yeshtarim* is based on ten steps of growth that are rooted in the Ten Expressions which Hashem created the world with, which span the entire gamut of the soul. The *sefer Bilvavi*, in contrast to this, is addressing the simple, earnest point of a Jew's soul.

Why Does The Rav Emphasize 4 Elements?

Q

The Rav mentions that there are other paths of *avodas Hashem* besides for the “4 elements” approach, and I would be happy to know what those other ways are. Also, I want to know why the Rav chooses to go with the 4 elements approach more than any other path in *avodas Hashem*.

A

The *sefer Tomer Devorah* lists 13 steps of *avodas Hashem*, based on the 13 *middos* of *rachamim* of Hashem. The *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* lists 10 steps of *avodas Hashem*, based on the ten steps of growth taught by the Sage Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair, and this is based on the Ten *Sefiros*. However, the path of 4 elements is closer to home with most people, because it speaks even to the animal level of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*) since it is an approach by which one can repair his natural imbalances. This is because the 4 elements are really part of the secret of the *Iggulim* (the circles), as explained in the *sefer Leshem*, and the *avodah* that corresponds to *Iggulim* is the *avodah* of repairing the *nefesh habehaimis*. The 4 elements approach is also an approach that balances even our *Nefesh Elokis* (G-dly soul). That is why Rav Chaim Vital in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah* explains how to repair the animal soul by working with the 4 elements (fire, wind, water and earth).



Questions in all spheres of life in general
and the *nefesh* in particular
are welcome in the Q&A system
and will be transferred to the Rav, *Shlita*
email: rav@bilvavi.net



The Rav's classes appear
on "Kol haLashon" Torah Bank Service
USA 718.521.5231 | Israel 073.295.1245

For Inquiries on "Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh"

Contact: mobile 052.763.8588

Email info@bilvavi.net