

Bilvavi on Tefillah

Selection of Shiurim

001, 003, 031, 032, 046, 050, 057, 061, 070, 077, 084,
093, 100, 101, 107, 118, 126, 131, 138, 146, 164, 170

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Editor's Introduction

Many wonderful commentaries are available on *Shemoneh Esrei* (the silent prayer), which explain the meaning of the words and what to have in mind. This is certainly necessary to understand what we are saying when we *daven*. But we can still be left with a void after we *daven*, wondering why we don't feel connected to the prayers, even though we know the meaning of the words well. And we can also get caught up in trying to concentrate and not space out when we *daven*, which makes us forget the basic essence of prayer- to stand before the King, aware of His presence, and to pray to Him from our heart.

In this unique series of *derashos*, the Rav explains concepts of serving Hashem which can come alive and receive greater meaning, through the words of *Shemoneh Esrei* that we say. It also draws light on many important issues of *hashkafah* (Jewish thought) today about current events, which further awaken in us the words we are saying and how they express various issues we face, both on a personal scale as well as on the communal and global scale.

The Rav begins each shiur by first explaining the simple meaning of the words, based on *Chazal*, and then explains a deeper meaning. A discussion about a certain important topic then ensues, and finally the Rav concludes by going back to the words of *Shemoneh Esrei* and explaining it with the deeper meaning.

These *derashos* are not “what to have in mind” as you are saying the words. Rather, the *derashos* here serve to awaken our inner world to us through the meaning of the words that we say, thereby enabling us to pray more from our heart and stand before our King with greater awareness.

If the lessons here are internalized, you will see changes in your *davening* – inner changes. And it doesn't necessarily mean that you will be “*shuckling*” more or swaying more when you say the words. Rather, you feel the words coming alive in your heart – an inner experience that cannot be described in the written word.

There are 170 classes in this series. This PDF is a selection including the last *derasha*.

001 | Before *Shemoneh Esrei*

Tefillah — A Ladder that Ascends to Heaven

Tefillah (davening — prayer), in essence, is to ascend to the Heavens. It is something we do here on this Earth, but it reaches Heaven, like we find by the ladder of Yaakov’s dream: “A ladder placed on the ground, and its head reached the Heavens.”

We also see this from the statement of the Sages, that *tefillah* is “a matter that stands at the height of the world.”¹ *Tefillah* is to ascend to the Heavens.

This doesn’t mean, though that *tefillah* is only in Heaven! What it really means is that if one ascends to the Heavens, he will find *tefillah* there; in other words, just because *tefillah* is such a lofty matter doesn’t mean that we can’t reach it. We reach *tefillah* by ascending the “ladder” found even on our physical world, which we will see.

The Difference Between Torah and Tefillah

We have two major vehicles that bring us close to Hashem — Torah and *tefillah*. What is the difference between them?

The sefer *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that learning Torah is called “*achdus hamochin*” (unity of the minds). This means that Torah is all-inclusive, because it is a power that comes and unifies things. Torah is all-inclusive in that it unifies the Heavens with the earth. *Tefillah* is also all-inclusive — but from a different aspect: it unifies **Earth** to the **Heavens**. *Tefillah* is in essence a ladder that ascends to the Heavens, but it is footed on Earth. Torah was in Heaven, but Hashem brought it down to this world. *Tefillah*, however, is found on this world — but it ascends to Heaven.

Tefillah is like Yaakov *Avinu*’s ladder: we begin from its foot here on Earth, and we ascend up it, step-by-step — until Heaven.

Chazal say that *tefillah* “stands” at the height of the world — and standing is *Amidah*, which is another term for the silent *Shemoneh Esrei*. This doesn’t mean that *tefillah* stands in Heaven while the person praying remains here in This World. The opposite is true: *tefillah* is the ladder

¹ *Berachos 6b*.

that a person ascends on — until the person himself reaches Heaven. Through *tefillah*, a person climbs a ladder toward Heaven, and he is actually standing in Heaven and praying there!

This has to be. Only in Heaven can a person be standing “in front of the King.” When a person *davens*, he is actually standing in Heaven — “in front of the King.”

How do we get from Earth to Heaven?! If we are to climb the ladder toward Heaven, through *tefillah*, then our *tefillah* cannot just be a lip service we do. There must be a specific path to take through *tefillah* in order to get to Heaven, and it must be a step-by-step plan.

How do we ascend this ladder toward Heaven? Before we get to the top of the ladder — which is the *Amidah*, the silent *Shemoneh Esrei* — we have to climb the beginning steps of the ladder. These beginning rungs of the ladder are the first three sections of *davening*, before we get to *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Our *davening* (before *Shemoneh Esrei*) is split into three sections:

- 1) The morning blessings and recitation of *korbonos* (sacrifices),
- 2) *Pesukei Dezimrah*,
- 3) *Shema* and its blessings.

The “Actions” in Tefillah

There are three parts that make up a person — actions, feelings, and thoughts.

The actions are things done with your physical parts, like your hands. The feelings are in your heart. The thoughts are in your mind.

The three sections of the *davening*, as well, are made up of these human forces! The beginning of *davening* is action. One gets up, washes his hands, puts on *tzitzis* and *tefillin* — these are all actions. Then he sacrifices *korbonos* (which he recites). This is action manifest in our *tefillah*.

The better one’s actions are, the higher level his *tefillah* will be. It is written, “All my bones shall speak of You.” But if a person sins, the sins are entrenched in his bones, and his bones cannot speak of Hashem....

Pesukei Dezimrah, as well, consists of actions — the action of purifying oneself more and more. The purer one’s actions are, the more worthy his *tefillah* will be — and it can be said of him that his “mouth and heart are equal.”

The Arizal writes that one should do *teshuvah* before he *davens*. Why is this? The depth of this is so that when one *davens*, it can truly be said of him that “All of my bones speak of You,” because he has purified himself through doing *teshuvah* beforehand.

In *tefillah*, we make requests of Hashem. Why do we request something? Because we want to change our situation. This is actually the soul’s desire to change situations — a form of action. This force in our souls comes from the aspect of action within us.

This shows us that *tefillah* is not just saying words — it is in essence a desire for change.

The “Feelings” in Tefillah

The second section of *davening* is *Pesukei Dezimrah*. After we have hopefully changed our actions by purifying them, the soul now wants to change and purify its feelings. This is a desire for a “pure heart,” as it is written, “A pure heart Hashem created in me.” After purifying the actions, the next level is to break his “heart of stone” and to instead have a “pure” heart.

In *Pesukei Dezimrah*, we sing Hashem’s praises. In essence, this is the soul itself singing to Hashem. Why is the soul singing now? Because it now feels what it wants; we sing when we feel that we have attained what we wanted. *Pesukei Dezimrah* is not just saying over Hashem’s praises, saying one *Hallelukah* after another. It is the soul’s song to Hashem — an expression of purifying the feelings.

Pesukei Dezimrah also isn’t to reflect on Hashem’s praises. It is to reach a state that one’s feelings are dedicated to Hashem. When one overcomes bad *middos*, such as overcoming an evil desire or overcoming arrogance — the soul sings from this. The soul is singing because now Hashem can be found nearby, with the person who overcame the bad *middos* — the feelings have been purified.

To summarize: first, a person purifies his actions (by avoiding sin), which is in essence the soul’s desire to change. After this, a person sings a song of longing from his soul — *Pesukei Dezimrah*. Through this, a person sings the true song — a song of praise to Hashem.

The “Thoughts” in Tefillah

The third section of *tefillah* is *Shema* and its blessings. This is the aspect of the “mind” in *davening* — purifying the mind and thoughts. It represents the step that comes after one has purified his actions and feelings.

In this part of the *davening*, we ask Hashem to enlighten our eyes to the Torah, and we include the *Ahavah Rabbah* prayer — which speaks of Hashem’s love to our people. All of these prayers are, in essence, sanctifying our thoughts. We are not just mentioning here that we want to always think thoughts of learning Torah (we wish that too!). It is rather a different request — we are asking Hashem to help us live in the world of thought, which is in essence the Torah. It is written, “And you shall be immersed in it day and night.” This means to actually live in a world of thought — which is Torah.

The blessings that precede the *Shema* help us reach the level of sanctifying our thought — and to pray from there onward.

A person climbs this ladder of *tefillah* — first through actions, then through feelings, and then the person reaches the thoughts. These are thoughts that are in essence a desire, from our intellect, to long for Hashem.

Climbing the Ladder — Within

But one has to understand that he climbs the ladder within *himself*. Yaakov *Avinu*, who dreamed of a ladder, represents the ladder. This means that he himself was a ladder, climbing it within himself.

Thus, if a person’s actions, feelings, and thoughts are not worthy, and they don’t match up to his prayers, it is like what is written of Haman: “And he came to the king in sackcloth.” A person can’t stand in the King’s court wearing dirty clothing. Sins are like coming to the King with dirty clothing.

But if one’s conduct matches his prayers, it is then that he can enter the King’s court.

Shemoneh Esrei: Entering the King’s Court

If we accomplish these three steps, we can now proceed to the next part of our *avodah* here: *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Reb Chaim Soloveitchik² *zt”l* said there are two aspects of concentration in *tefillah*: 1) the actual meaning of the words, and 2) standing in front of the King.

Let us explain more the meaning of his words.

² *Chiddushei Reb Chaim HaLevi, Hilchos Tefillah*

Until now — the three sections preceding the *Shemoneh Esrei* — a person feels that he is here on this Earth, while Hashem is in Heaven.

But in *Shemoneh Esrei*, there is *amidah* — standing in front of Hashem! This is where a person actually feels that he is in front of Him. It is to literally be “*nochach*” — opposite of Hashem — as real as can be. In *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are not on this world — we are with Hashem, in Heaven, as we stand in front of Him.

תפילה 003 א.שכתי.תפתח.ופי.יגיד.תהלתך

003 | Hashem, Open My Lips

What Are We Asking Permission For?

In all of *Shemoneh Esrei*, there are no private prayers. We either praise and thank Hashem, or we ask for general requests that affect the public. But in the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*, there is a personal prayer — “*Hashem, open my lips.*”

We don’t start *davening* in *Shemoneh Esrei*; we *daven* as soon as we get up, saying *Modeh Ani*. So why do we have to ask Hashem in the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei* to open our lips, if we have already been *davening* as soon as we got up?

The answer to this is as follows: Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik *zt”l* said that there are two aspects of concentration in *tefillah*: to know the meaning of the words, and to “stand in front of the King.” We only stand in front of Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei*, and this is why *Shemoneh Esrei* is called the “*Amidah*.” This is a unique level, the level described by the Rema in the beginning of *Shulchan Aruch*: “

A person’s movements are not the same as when he sits in the King’s Palace.” Of course, Hashem hears us even when we aren’t actually standing in front of Him. But in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we stand in front of Him — we are in His place.

Before *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are talking, and Hashem is listening. We don’t need to be in Heaven in order to talk. But when we stand in front of Hashem, we are in His place — and it is really unbecoming for us to talk now. This is why we ask Hashem to open our lips — **to give us permission to talk**. We are not merely asking for permission to talk; we are asking for permission because really, this isn’t the place to talk.

“And Let My Mouth Speak of Your Praises”

Then we ask, “And let my mouth speak of Your praises.” We are asking that all of our talking now should come from a lofty place, not from ourselves. We are asking Hashem to “talk” specifically because of Hashem’s ability to let us talk here, and our talking now is not of the same source that we are used to.

We are not talking like we are used to.

Shemoneh Esrei Is to Daven for Klal Yisrael

When we *daven* for personal requests, we are *davening* from only a private aspect in ourselves. We are *davening* each for our own personal welfare. When we request things from Hashem for ourselves, we are only using the outer parts of our soul.

Shemoneh Esrei, though is a prayer for the public. It is a prayer that emanates from a deeper place in our soul. Even the *chazzan's* repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei* is not personal, because it is only to fulfill others' obligation. *Shemoneh Esrei*, by essence, is not personalized — it is about praying for others.

Why is there no requirement for the *chazzan* to repeat *Pesukei Dezimrah* and the blessings of *Shema*? It is because there are two kinds of praying with the public (*tefillah b'tzibbur*): Praying silently with the public, and praying loudly with the public. Even when one prays *Shemoneh Esrei* alone, he is still praying a public prayer; it's not individual. Every *Shemoneh Esrei* is a public prayer.

There are two kinds of *tefillah* we find in *Tehillim*: *tefillah l'oni* (the poor person's prayer), and *tefillah l'Moshe* (the prayer of Moshe). These are two unique ways of *davening*.

Pesukei Dezimrah, the blessings of *Shema*, and the *Shema* itself are like the prayers of a poor person, who prays for himself. But *Shemoneh Esrei* is like the prayer of Moshe — Moshe represents the entire nation of Yisrael. Moshe's prayer is in essence a prayer on behalf of all of Klal Yisrael; he didn't pray for himself.

If one only *davens* for himself and is only worried about himself, he cannot enter the King's Palace in *Shemoneh Esrei*, because he's not really utilizing the idea of *Shemoneh Esrei*. *Shemoneh Esrei* is to *daven* on behalf of the Jewish people, to think about others — and it is not about oneself.

“Hashem, open my lips.” What are we really asking? We are asking Hashem for help that the *tefillah* that we are now *davening* — *Shemoneh Esrei* — should be a prayer for Klal Yisrael, not for ourselves. It is not about me; it's about *Klal Yisrael*.

Summary of the “Hashem, Open My Lips” Prayer

We have mentioned two reasons why we ask Hashem that He open up our lips. 1) Because really we have no permission to speak in Heaven, and we are asking permission. 2) We are asking to be helped that our prayers come from a truthful part of our soul, an inner part - a concern for *Klal Yisrael*, not for our own self.

Two Ways to Understand How We Relate to Hashem

The kind of understanding of *Shemoneh Esrei* that we have just given applies to one who serves Hashem with *daas* — intellectual awareness of Hashem.

But there is an even simpler way to understand it: because we need to have a palpable kind of *tefillah*, a real sense of what it is.

Tefillah is how we perceive life! Hashem created the world and all of Creation. He created two kinds of ways in which we can perceive Him:

- 1) That He is “*Kel Mistater*” — a “hidden Almighty.”
- 2) *V'Shochanti B'tocham* — “And I will dwell among them.”

The fact that He is a “hidden Almighty” means for us that we know there is a Creator, and that He resides in Heaven while we are here on Earth. This represents the understanding based on our *daas*.

But there is also a view of “And I will dwell among them.” This means that one literally feels Hashem’s existence, and that he can feel it no less than the sunshine. It is a very real sense. This feeling is granted only to one who truly seeks Hashem.

Tefillah is not defined as requests from Hashem. What we need and request are merely a means to achieve a greater goal. *Tefillah* does not exist to thank Hashem for everything and give praise to Him; that is also just a part of what *tefillah* is.

The essence of *tefillah* is to utterly realize *Who* we are praising, and from *Whom* we are asking. Although we give thanks and praise to Hashem, “*lehodos u'lihallel*,” this is not the purpose. The purpose of thanking and praising Hashem is to realize to Whom we are thanking and praising.

When we request something of Hashem, or when we thank Him, it is only a means to a greater goal. It is not a purpose unto itself. The goal of all requests and thanks to Hashem is to come to a palpable sense of Hashem’s existence. This is really why we ask that Hashem open our lips — we are asking that we should realize that until now, all of our *tefillah* was only a means to a greater purpose, and that now in *Shemoneh Esrei*, all of our *tefillah* should come from a sense of Hashem’s existence, the level of “standing before the King.”

With What Mindset Are We Davening Shemoneh Esrei?

To give an example of this, when one *davens Refaeinu* — “Hashem, heal us” — what is the purpose? Is the purpose to ask that all of the sick be healed? Or to realize that Hashem is the true

Healer of all? The purpose of this *tefillah* is not that He heal the sick. It is to reveal to all who the true Source of healing is: Hashem. That is what *Refaeinu* is about!

Some people are *davening Shemoneh Esrei*, but they are still on the level of the morning blessings. They are not *davening* from an inner place in their soul; they are only *davening* for themselves.

The Intellectual Approach and the Simple Approach

A person needs to clarify for himself what life is. In the outside world, the meaning of “life” is hidden to us. But the meaning of life can be clarified in the inner place of the soul.

The holy *sefarim* mention that there are two general ways to serve Hashem — through *daas* (lit. intellectual awareness) or through *p’shitus* (lit. simplicity). The ways to serve Hashem with *daas* are mentioned in *sefer Derech Hashem* and *Daas Tevunos*. But there is another way to serve Hashem — through the way of *p’shitus*. This means to live with a real sense of Hashem’s existence.

How Do You Come to Really Feel Hashem?

The tools to achieve this are toiling to our utmost in Torah. When a person is connected to Torah and *mitzvos*, he will definitely come to have this real sense. But if one doesn’t really feel Hashem’s presence in life, it is a sign that something is missing from his learning and his *mitzvos*.

031 | *The Intent In Giving Tzedakah*

The “Shield of Avraham” –In Avraham Avinu’s Merit of Tzedakah

The end of the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* concludes with “ברוך אתה ה', מגן אברהם” “Blessed Are You, Hashem, Shield of Avraham.” Our *Chazal* reveal to us that the fact that Hashem is our Shield is not just the end of the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*; it is a reality that applies to all the generations.

Hashem made a promise to Avraham that He will protect him, due to the merit of his great *chessed* and *tzedakah* which he did for the world. This carries over into all the future generations, throughout all the exiles we go through.

In particular, the power of *tzedakah* is enjoying much abundance in our generation; there is much *tzedakah* being given, much more than in the previous generations. This is not by chance. Our *Chazal* already revealed a long time ago that in the final generations, there will be more *tzedakah* given.

Let us reflect into what’s going on in our times, what we are missing, and what is needed to be added on.

Our Tzedakah Upholds The World

There are three pillars that hold up the world – Torah, *Avodah* (*Korbonos*) and *Chessed* (kindness). *Chazal* state that “Torah will be forgotten” in the future generations. Our *Avodah* as well, our *Korbonos*, are not here with us in exile. But our pillar of *Chessed* always remains. So although our Torah and our *Avodah* has weakened in the exile, our *Chessed* still remains strong.

When a person gives *tzedakah* or does a *chessed* for someone, even if he doesn’t have the best intentions, *Chazal* say that he still gets rewarded, because someone still received from him. Therefore, *chessed* and *tzedakah* doesn’t require as much holy intentions as our Torah and *Avodah* does. The reason for this is because *chessed* nourishes other people, whether we do it with intention or not. Thus, the merit of our *chessed* always remains strong.

It’s unbelievable how much *chessed* and *tzedakah* is going on in the world. If not for *tzedakah*, we couldn’t survive. The Torah and *Tefillah* going in the world are also unbelievable, but Torah and *Tefillah* require purity of heart in order to really protect us. But our *tzedakah* always remains

pure, because it doesn't require holy intentions; as long as we just give *tzedakah* to others. *Tzedakah* upholds the world even when we give it *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motivations).

The Problem That Results From Giving Tzedakah "Shelo Lishmah"

However, this creates a problem. If our entire *tzedakah* is always *shelo lishmah*, then it follows then that *shelo lishmah* is upholding the world. If our *shelo lishmah* is keeping the world alive – if we are only giving *tzedakah* because we want reward, such as *parnassah* and *shidduchim*, etc. – then our entire existence is being sustained by *tzedakah* that is being given *shelo lishmah*. If *shelo lishmah* is running the world, then our entire life is turning into *shelo lishmah*....

Again, to emphasize, the amount of *tzedakah* in the world is amazing. I do not mean *chas v'shalom* to invalidate this. But we have to know what our *tzedakah* is missing these days. If the reason in giving *tzedakah* is only to get rewarded, then the entire world is thriving on *shelo lishmah*, which is not a true kind of life.

This is also the root of the misguided thinking in today's times. In the last 10 or 15 years, the world of *tzedakah* has grown amazingly, but, this takes its toll on our clarity of "things.". When there is a lot of *tzedakah*, and it's all being given *shelo lishmah* – and this is what is supporting the Torah – then there will be a lot of *tzedakah* in the world, but not much Torah. Our Torah learning loses its worth when it is being supported entirely by intentions that are *shelo lishmah*.

To give an example, much of the money going through the *tzedakah* organizations is not always being given out according to *Halacha*. People aren't so careful with how they give out the *tzedakah* money.

Uncovering A 'Spark of Lishmah' In Our Acts

What should we do about this?

We can't change the generation. But each of us, on our own personal level, can make the following reflection. Each of us has an ability to act either *lishmah* or *shelo lishmah*. *Chazal* say to act *shelo lishmah* and eventually we will arrive at *lishmah*; Rav Chaim Volozhiner explains that this is true only if we have a "spark of *lishmah*" even within our acts of *shelo lishmah*.

Therefore, practically speaking, every person should do the following exercise. Try giving just one shekel as *lishmah*, in every donation that you give. Give one *shekel* purely for the sake of giving *tzedakah*, and not because you want *zechusim* (merits), and not even for another person's *zechus*. Don't give it for any *zechusim*. Just give it purely for the sake of giving *tzedakah*.

We don't mean to suggest that for every donation you give that you should give half of your donation *lishmah*; that is too much of an undertaking. That is only for rare individuals to practice. Instead, just give one *shekel* from the pile as *lishmah*.

The more you get used to this, the more you will weaken your *shelo lishmah* when you give *tzedakah*. You will begin to notice your intentions and become more aware of what it means to really give. You will feel uneasy at giving your *tzedakah* because you want to get rewarded for it – and you will naturally start giving it more with more intentions of *lishmah*. The more we give a little bit of our *tzedakah* to go for *lishmah*, the more we uncover the inner point of our heart - which is the power to act *lishmah*.

We should also try to take this point of *lishmah* and carry it over into our Torah learning as well, that we should try to uncover just one small spark of *lishmah* in all that we do.

May we all merit to “return with *tzedakah*” – with the coming of *Moshiach* speedily in our days.

032 | Our Middos Enable Hashem's Middos

Hashem's "Might" – His Attribute of Judgment

The second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* starts with **אתה גיבור לעולם** - “You, Hashem, are eternally mighty.” Later in the blessing we praise Hashem for His kindness and mercy, that He supports the world through His kindness and revives the dead. What does the beginning of the blessing have to do with the end of the blessing? What does praising Hashem’s strength have to do with His kindness and mercy upon Creation?

The Midrash reveals that first Hashem wanted to create the world with *middas hadin* (the attribute of judgment) and He saw the world wouldn’t last, so He “included” in it the *middas harachamim* (attribute of mercy). The Sages also state that the way a person acts is the way Heaven deals with him. If someone acts merciful, Hashem is merciful towards him; if he is not merciful to others, he does not merit Hashem’s mercy.

However, just because Hashem created the world with *middas harachamim* doesn’t mean that Hashem stopped using the *middas hadin*. The *middas harachamim* was “included” into Creation, but it didn’t cancel out the *middas hadin*.

That is the meaning of **אתה גיבור** – first we praise Hashem’s *gevurah* strength, which is describing His *middas hadin*, and then we praise His kindness and compassion, which is His *middas harachamim*.

Our Middos – The Tool to Receive Hashem's Sustenance

There are all kinds of *middos*. Our “*middos*”, our behaviors, are not the same as the 13 “*middos*” of Hashem and the 13 “*middos*” which the Torah are expounded with. Rather, our *middos* are a tool to contain the 13 *middos* of Hashem and His Torah. If we have good *middos*, Heaven deals us with accordingly, as we brought earlier from *Chazal*.

Our avodah with our *middos* is not just to fix our bad *middos* and use our good *middos*. That is just the superficial perspective. It is also superficial if a person thinks that “Hashem will hopefully purify my *middos*.” Fixing our *middos* is not just another subject we add to our list of learning Torah and doing mitzvos. Rather, it is part of the general picture of our life’s mission; it is not just another subject of our life.

To illustrate, when we are missing something in the house, we still realize that we have a house, and it is just that the house is missing something. If the house is missing the door, this is unpleasant, but the house is still livable. But if our house is missing a roof, we are not just missing a roof; we basically don't have a house. Without a roof, a house is unlivable.

Fixing our *middos* is therefore not just “another” part of our life. When a person doesn't take out the garbage, the house begins to smell bad. Neglecting to take out the garbage is not just a lack of a certain detail in one's life. It ruins the whole house. In the same way, fixing our *middos* is necessary in order to live our life. It is not just another one of our obligations in life.

Through having good *middos*, Hashem's good *middos* are able to shine through to us, and then our Torah learning will look different. When a person learns Torah but he doesn't work on his *middos*, it might seem like he's learning Torah, and he's just missing good *middos*. But the truth is, his bad *middos* are preventing him from having success in his Torah learning. Without good *middos*, a person doesn't receive Hashem's mercy.

All success that comes to us can only come through Hashem's *middos* which are being channeled down to us from Heaven. Anything we see or sense can only be enabled through Hashem's *middos*, which keep the world going. Therefore, if a person doesn't seek to purify his *middos*, he is missing the tool to receive Hashem's *middos*, and his life will be very shaky.

Whatever we do, without exception, depends on Hashem's *middos*. Therefore, if we do not have the tool to receive Hashem's *middos* – in other words, if we don't have good *middos* - we won't succeed in our life.

When a person gets angry, he can feel it very strongly. But there is more to the *middos* than the emotional response that we feel from them. A good *middah* means that Hashem's good *middos* are being channeled into us, and a bad *middah* is the absence of this.

It is not only our *middos* which get affected by this concept, but even our actions can only be enabled by Hashem's *middos*. When we eat breakfast, we can only do so because of Hashem's *middos* of mercy that allow us to do anything and have it good. (The source for this concept is in *sefer Chovos HaLevovos (Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh, Chapter 5)*

We must come to an inner recognition that our *middos* are constantly at work, and therefore, we must constantly work on them to fix them.

If a person's *middos* are left unfixed, he won't be able to properly understand the Torah. Working on our *middos* is thus not a 'separate' issue from our Torah learning. It has direct ramifications on our understanding of our learning. Everything is enabled through *middos*, thus,

we cannot succeed in our learning if we don't have good *middos*. Our tefillah and our chessed as well is affected by our *middos*, because every single action we do is affected by the *middos*.

If a person doesn't work to fix his *middos*, he might think he understands his learning, but his learning is all superficial. His Torah learning is like Achitophel and Doeg, of whom the Sages said that they only learned Torah externally and superficially. Bilaam also knew a lot of Heavenly secrets, but all of his vast knowledge about spirituality was impure, because he did not purify his character.

If Hashem's *middos* are working for us, we will succeed with our actions and understand our Torah learning. But this is only if we have good *middos*, when we seek to purify our *middos*.

In Conclusion

This is the meaning of אֵתָהּ גִּיבוֹר – when we realize the *middas hadin* of Hashem, that Hashem only sustains us when *we act accordingly* [by having good *middos*] we can then merit His mercy, which we describe later on in the blessing.

The Vilna Gaon said that if a person doesn't break his bad *middos*, there is no point in living. What does this mean? Isn't the main thing on this world to learn Torah? But the depth of this is that if a person doesn't fix his *middos*, he doesn't really understand the Torah and he can't be close to Hashem. Maybe he will know a lot of Torah, intellectually, but he doesn't really understand it, because without good *middos*, a person is missing the tools that enable him to understand the Torah.

May we merit to fix our *middos*, whereupon Hashem shine His *middos* into us. May we merit to connect ourselves and cleave to the *middos* of Hashem, which will give the tools to reach any success.

046 | *Disconnecting From The World*

A Relationship of Both Awe and Love

The third blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* begins with **אתה קדוש**, “You are holy.”

Hashem is totally separate from this world. We have a mitzvah of “*You shall be holy, for I am Hashem.*” *Chazal* say that this possuk would imply that maybe we can become as holy as Hashem. For that reason, Hashem said “*For I am Hashem*”, which implies to us that Hashem’s holiness is way above any of the holiness we can reach. Hashem is completely removed from this world.

There are two aspects in our relationship with Hashem: to have *yirah* (awe) of Him, which means that we realize He is separate from us and totally removed from us, and that nothing comes close to His holiness. At the same time, however, we are also able to having a loving relationship with Hashem and talk to Him as if He is a friend, as the *Mesillas Yeshtarim* states [based upon the words of *Rashi* to *Shabbos 31a*].

So on one hand, Hashem is “holy” and thus completely separate from this world, yet at the same time, we are able to have a relationship of love with Him.

Although we need both aspects in our relationship with Hashem (fear and love), we will mainly discuss here the second aspect of our relationship with Hashem, which is that we can relate to Hashem as a loving ‘Friend’ that the *Mesillas Yeshtarim* describes.

Disconnect So You Can Connect

In order to enjoy a close relationship with Hashem, we need to sanctify ourselves on this world. Later in the blessing we say, **וקדושים בכל יום יהללוך סלה** – “And the holy ones praise You, every day.” We are called the “holy ones”, for we are designated for Hashem; we are meant to sanctify ourselves to Him.

But if a person is too attached to the materialism of this world, he won’t be able to talk properly with Hashem and relate to Him as a Friend. Just as Hashem is separate from this world, so must we separate ourselves from our connection to the materialism of this world, in order to talk with Him.

Besides for the fact that we need to disassociate ourselves from this materialistic world, we also need to separate ourselves **internally** from this world – we need to enter the depths of our soul, the “Jew” within us, and be apart from the very outlook that society has.

We all have things on this world we worry about, such as our families and our livelihood, and we need to take care of what we needs to be taken care of, but, in our inside, we must feel like we are a stranger towards this world.

Two Kinds of Separation We Need

In the later generations, and especially in our generation, people are too connected to the world. People these days are connected to the world on a constant basis – much more than in the previous generations - and it has attached people way too much to this world.

That is one aspect of the problems today: the attachment to materialism of this world. Because people are attached to materialism, they find it very hard to fulfill the mitzvah of “*And you shall be holy.*”

But in addition to this problem, the constant connection to this world makes a person feel an inner contradiction. The soul inside us feels the truth, and it feels contradicted by the lifestyle of the generation. Our soul, deep down, feels that the way that the world lives now totally goes against who we really are. So besides for the problem of being attached to materialism, the light of our soul is being prevented from access.

Feeling Like A ‘Stranger’ Towards This World

We must clearly be aware that the way of life in the world now contradicts who we really are deep down. If someone in this generation doesn’t feel how this world is not his real place, there is no way for him to get in touch with the light of his soul.

We are not talking about having high aspirations to grow in spirituality. We are talking about something else entirely: we must feel like strangers towards this earth (as is it written, “*I am a stranger in this land*”), that this place is not our real place!

You don’t have to be on such a high level these days to realize how the current lifestyle contradicts how our soul deep down wants to live like. The whole situation today is like an exile to our soul. Our soul was already in our exile by having to be in our body, but now it is in a whole new profound kind of exile. We need to feel like we are a **stranger** to this earth!

To illustrate, if a Jew who keeps Shabbos goes to a place where people openly profane the Shabbos, he feels like he is in a strange place. In the same way, we must feel like we are a *stranger* towards this earth.

Of course, we all have ups and downs in our spirituality, but whatever the situation, we must realize that we do not have any connection whatsoever to this world.

Becoming Holy: Two Requirements

This is the meaning of how we fulfill the *mitzvah* of “*And you shall be holy*”. There are two aspects to how we separate ourselves from this world and become holy.

Each person, in his unique way, can sanctify his life, by not indulging; as we know that this *mitzvah* entails for a person not to fulfill all his permitted desires and live an indulgent kind of life.³ But besides for this, we need to sanctify ourselves by separating ourselves from society and not feel like we are a part of it.

Once you feel like you’re a “stranger” towards this world, you have begun to redeem your soul. It will feel painful, of course, because you will feel like you’re apart from everyone. But the words of the Rambam are famous: that we need to separate from society, when society is evil (except for rare individuals, who can be connected with society yet still remain deeply attached with Hashem), and we need to be prepared to go into the desert if we must.

‘Ahavas Yisrael’ Required

We will emphasize, however, that this should not compromise on our love for other people. We must love everyone in the Jewish people (except for members of the *Erev Rav*). But we must still be able to separate from society, at the same time.

A Time For Serious ‘Hisbodedus’

This is the main kind of *hisbodedus* (solitude) that we need these days.

This is not about doing *hisbodedus* in a forest; there are people who do *hisbodedus* in the forests, yet they are still very connected to this world...

³ See Ramban in the beginning of Parshas Kedoshim (Bamidbar 19:1)

(The Alter of Kelm once made a sharp statement: The whole world consists of fools, and the wise people of the world are like ‘strangers’ here.)

The Two Aspects of Reaching Holiness

So in order to reach holiness in our times, there are two layers to this – an external layer and an internal layer. The external layer of sanctity is to avoid indulgence in materialism. But the inner layer of how we sanctify ourselves is to feel separate and apart from this world.

To Be ‘Alone’ With Hashem

Most people in our times (except for some rare individuals, as we mentioned) need to separate from society (along with having a love for all Jews) in order to have a true relationship with Hashem. We must feel that Hashem is like a friend that we can talk to. We need to sense Hashem’s existence in our lives.

The more inner solitude we have, the closer we are to attaining sanctity. Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote that our greatness is reached in our inner world of solitude (*hisbodedus*).

Of course, we need to help others, and we were created to help people, as Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes. However, helping people is only the outer layer of our existence. Our true greatness is reached when we are in solitude, when we are separated from the world.

The *mitzvah* to sanctify ourselves – “*And you shall be holy*” - is essentially for us to build within ourselves a place in which we can live apart from society. Of course, we need to go out into the world sometimes to take care of our needs. But in essence, we can live in an inner place in our soul.

Otherwise, a person is enslaved to the world in a personal kind of exile. When a person is able to live in his soul, he has a personal redemption – he goes free from the ‘jail’ of the body.

There is a kind of life a person can live in which he lives “alone”, separate from society. May we merit to sanctify ourselves - along with loving others - so that we can bond with Hashem.

050 | *How Learning Gemara Brings You Closer To Hashem*

תַּעֲתָהּ חוֹנֵן לְאָדָם דַּעַת – “*You bestow man with understanding.*”

We are talking to Hashem in first-person, “You”, just as we said in the previous two blessings of אַתָּה קָדוֹשׁ, “You are holy” and אַתָּה גִּבּוֹר, “You are mighty.” This is because when a person *davens* to Hashem, he should talk to Him no less than how he talks to a friend, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* says, that when we *daven* to Hashem, it is as if a person is talking to his friend.

In this blessing, we ask Hashem for understanding in Torah. The Torah is the *bris*, the covenant, which Hashem made with us. Through the Torah, we are connected to Hashem. “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” Our whole existence is due to the Torah. Everything stems from Torah; there is nothing in Creation which did not come from the Torah. Hashem is revealed to us through the Torah.

However, there are levels to this revelation. A person who learns Torah on a lower spiritual level does not attain as much revelation of Hashem as a person who learns Torah on a higher spiritual level.

Many times I hear the question (often from *baalei teshuvah*): “How is it possible to become close to Hashem through learning the discussions of Abaye and Rava [in the Talmud]?” People understand that learning *Gemaras* that have to do with *Halacha L’Maaseh* bring you closer to Hashem, because this is a kind of learning that affects how you act and causes you to live in the right way. But when it comes to learning *Gemara* that doesn’t have to do with *Halacha*, people have a hard time wondering how it can lead a person to reach love of Hashem through debating a piece of *Gemara*.

If a person learns Torah and tries as hard as he can according to his natural abilities in addition to exerting himself a bit more than usual, then he can reach the spiritual light of Hashem, contained in the Torah. The light of Hashem is in the Torah, but it is hidden. When someone only enters a little bit into learning the Torah, he doesn’t see Hashem’s light in the Torah. If, however, someone lives a life of purity and holiness, and learns Torah properly, entering fully into it, he can reach the light of Hashem through learning the Torah since his soul enters the Torah.

If someone learns Torah in a superficial manner, maybe he will end up “knowing” a lot of Torah, but it’s purely an intellectual thing by him. But when someone lives a life of holiness,

and he learns Torah with *temimus* (earnestness) – he merits to see the light of Hashem through his learning.

When a person is at the beginning of his way, he cannot see the light of Hashem through his learning. The only way to get there is to learn Torah *lishmah*, as the Chazon Ish writes. It is difficult at first, because the person doesn't experience any spiritual light through his learning. If he perseveres, however, to learn Torah *lishmah* with extra exertion to enter the depths of Torah, then he will merit the Torah's light. A person has to fully enter the Torah, not just to "partially" enter it; as the Kotzker Rebbe said, Torah learning is like entering the *mikveh*. Either you're in it totally, or it's as if you're not in it.

A person has to enter his Torah learning, with his whole heart and mind, and then he will reach the spiritual light contained in the Torah. If a person is learning Torah and he doesn't feel like he is getting closer to Hashem, then his motivations need to be examined. [He will need to ask himself: "Why do I learn Torah?" Because it's intellectually stimulating? Because he gets honor from it? Some other reason? He has to examine what his motivations and then purify them [by seeking to learn *lishmah*].⁴

If someone learns Torah earnestly way, he will without a doubt be able to come to have a palpable sense of Hashem in his life.

However, this must be clarified. There are parts to the Torah in which a person can clearly recognize Hashem in it, and there are other parts to the Torah in which a person will have to work hard to see Hashem in it. When a person learns matters of *Agadta* (homiletics),⁵ it is easier to come to the spiritual light of Hashem contained in the *Gemara*. But when a person learns the discussions of Abaya and Rava in the *Gemara*, it is harder to arrive at the spiritual light of Hashem through these kinds of *Gemaras* – it takes exertion on our part.

If a person doesn't exert himself enough to understand the in-depth discussions of the *Gemara*, he will not be able to understand *Agadta* either. He might think he understands *Agadta* – but he doesn't. He will fool himself and think that he has come to a clear recognition of Hashem from the *Agadta* he learns. His knowledge of *Agadta* will be only superficial, because he has not worked enough to understand the words of Abaya and Rava.

There are people who love to learn *Agadta* all day. Indeed, *Chazal* say that "The words of *Agadta* pull the heart." Learning matters of *Agadta* touches our heart, but if a person learns *Agadta* all day and he never learns in-depth *Gemara*, he is very mistaken. He might think that he

⁴ See the series *Getting To Know Your Torah* and the series *48 Ways of Torah*.

⁵ The parts in the *Gemara* which relate either stories or lessons about self-improvement

is coming closer to Hashem through this kind of learning. In fact, there are even people who have written sefarim on matters of *Agadta*, but that doesn't mean they understand matters of *Agadta*, because some of these people don't learn enough in-depth Gemara. Because they haven't exerted themselves to understand the difficult tractates of *Gemara*, their knowledge about *Agadta* is superficial.

Similarly, there are people who exert themselves in the study of Mussar, but they overdo it. Often people who spend a lot of time learning Mussar are trying to acquire levels that are beyond their current reach, and they are convinced that this is how they will become close to Hashem. This is a mistake. In order to arrive at inner understandings about Hashem, we need a lot of exertion in the words of the *Gemara*, to learn the words of Abaya and Rava in-depth; to enter into it totally.

Of course, *Agadta* matters discuss spirituality, and therefore the light of Hashem is contained in them, as we have mentioned earlier. But at the beginning of a person's way in learning, a person cannot see this spiritual light through learning *Agadta*, and his understanding of *Agadta* matters is superficial, because he hasn't yet exerted himself to understand *Gemara*. In order to really recognize spiritual matters, a person needs to develop the power of *hakarrah*, which the *Chovos HaLevovos* describes as something that takes a lot of exertion to acquire. Thus, without exerting ourselves properly in in-depth *Gemara*, we can't come to have proper recognition of deep, spiritual matters.

When a person hears a *mussar shmuess* (lecture on self-improvement), the most this can do for a person is to cause him to have a hisorerus (awakening). But it can only awaken a person temporarily. What a person really needs is that his heart should become opened to the Torah, and then he will be able to really learn it and enter it fully. We *daven* in the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*, "Open my heart to Your Torah." When we merit to have our hearts opened to the Torah, we begin to revel in the intellect of Torah, as the Chazon Ish describes an endless kind of joy.

When a person begins to enter his learning, he will begin to feel a small degree of recognition towards spirituality. But it will only be superficial; he has barely begun to scratch the surface. There are levels upon levels to how much we can deepen our understanding about spiritual matters. There are *chadrei halev*, "rooms in the heart", in which we can go deeper and deeper. The deepest part of our heart contains our *daas* of the heart.

As long as these "rooms of our heart" are closed from us, a person does not really understand what spiritual matters are. The most he knows of is inspiration from a *mussar shmuess*, feelings of elation, and *tefillos*. He thinks that is there all is to spiritual matters. He is unaware that there are levels upon levels of understanding towards spiritual matters. He has no idea about what *chadrei*

halev are. He thinks he understands spiritual matters from the knowledge in his head about these matters, or from the *tefillos* he *davens*...

It is written, “*And you shall know today, and you shall place the matter on your heart.*” We have an *avodah* to internalize matters and let them settle “on” our heart, as opposed to just letting them remain as intellectual matters. The Kotzker Rebbe pointed out that there is also a *possuk*, “*And you shall love Hashem with all your heart*” – we need to let spirituality enter *into* our heart, not just to be “on” our heart.

Of course, if it’s “on” our heart and not yet “in” our heart, it’s wonderful too. It is very commendable to have feelings for spirituality, even if we don’t understand the depth of these matters. But we should not remain with just inspiration and feelings. We need to let these matters penetrate into our heart.

Chazal say that in the future, all *tzaddikim* will point to Hashem and say, “This is my G-d.” When a person reaches the depths of his soul, the innermost chamber of his heart, he can clearly recognize the One who created this world.

So when we learn Torah, we must realize that we do not learn alone. We are with Hashem, and we need to incorporate Hashem into our learning. The *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* writes that as a person is learning Torah, he should **temporarily** take his mind off Hashem, and instead just learn. However, when a person finishes learning and he gets up from his seat after closing the *Gemara*, does he return his thoughts to thinking about Hashem? That is the question. If he doesn’t, then even the *Nefesh HaChaim* would agree that such a person needs to think about Hashem even as he is learning the *Gemara*. A person who can’t return to thinking about Hashem after he’s finished learning is not only disconnected from the Torah he learns, but he’s totally disconnected from Hashem in his life.

057 | *Returning To Our Source**Teshuvah - Returning To Hashem Through Abandoning Past Sins*

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

When a person sins, (*rachmana litzlan* – May Hashem have mercy upon him), there are three aspects of *teshuvah* that he needs, as we say in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*. Besides for the fact that he has sinned against Hashem, he has also distanced himself from the Torah.

Thus, when we seek to do *teshuvah*, not only do we ask Hashem to return us to Him, but we also ask to be returned to the Torah, that we should once again keep the Torah. The final step of the *teshuvah* is when we merit a “complete *teshuvah*” – החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך.

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

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

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

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

For example, there is a concept of “a disgusting one who acts within the permission of the Torah.”⁶ When a person lives for his body and not for his soul, he indulges in physical pleasures that are not prohibited by the Torah. Although he hasn't sinned, he has indulged in his body, and he needs to abandon this situation - as well and return to his source, his soul's source, which is Hashem and the Torah.

When a person sins, the sin puts constraint on his connection with Hashem; that is very clear. But even if a person doesn't sin, and even if he has done *teshuvah* over the sin, he can still be

⁶ See Ramban to Parshas Kedoshim 19:1

heavily attached to materialism, and this will prevent a person from connecting himself to Hashem.

Living A Life of The Soul

Rabbeinu Yonah in *sefer Shaarei Teshuvah* writes that a person needs to to abandon his improper path, in order to do *teshuvah*. This can even be referring to a kind of person who lives religiously, but his soul is not revealed in his life. He does not feel his soul, and instead he lives life through his body. Although he puts on his *tallis* and *tefillin* in the morning, it's only on his body, because he lives and experiences life entirely through his body.

Teshuvah is not just about leaving our sins; it is about abandoning the very path a person is at [initially] in his life, which is heading towards materialism.

The Root of A Life of Soul: Realizing That Hashem Is Our Father

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

If a person doesn't realize this, he is saying words that aren't truthful to where he is right now; his mouth and heart are not in line with each other. Although *Chazal* established that we all say this *tefillah* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, if a person doesn't realize the truth of what he is saying, from a deeper perspective he is saying something that's not true to his life.

Getting In Touch With Your Inner Soul's Desires

So a person must ask himself how much he is in touch with his soul in his life. How can one recognize it? Our soul loves spirituality – such as Torah, mitzvos, and connecting with Hashem. By contrast, our body loves This World and its desires.

For example, let us examine the emotion of love which we are familiar with. What do we love? Is our love only being experienced through our physical desires? Desire [by itself] is not the same thing as love. On another note, if we “love” something of This World, that's not “love” – it is simply desire.

Teshuvah – Repenting and Returning

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

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

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

The deep aspect of *teshuvah* is to realize that we are children of Hashem, that we are a *neshamah* (Divine soul). And just as the body enjoys the pleasures of this world, so does our *neshamah* yearn for Hashem, for Torah, and for mitzvos.

Our Avodah: Revealing Our Neshamah

But we do not need to “acquire” an enjoyment for Hashem and for Torah; it is already there in our soul! The problem is that the soul isn't often revealed, because the body is initially dominant on a person, and it is concealing the soul.

Therefore, our *avodah* is thus not to acquire our spiritual feelings. Rather, our *avodah* is to **reveal our *neshamah***, from its potential state into its active state - and then we will naturally love Hashem and Torah, as an automatic result.

Yearning To Live A Life of Neshamah

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

Therefore, we must be aware when we do *teshuvah*, that we need to return to our original Source, the way we were originally, when we were pure. To illustrate, a child cries when he is looking for his home. Why does he cry? It is because he yearns to return to his home, to his source.

If a person lives life through his body, even if he learns Torah and does mitzvos, he lives an animalistic kind of existence. One must reveal the light of the *neshamah* in his life.

That is all part of the *teshuvah* process that one needs to do, in addition to how he needs to abandon sin. If a person doesn't have a constant yearning to return to his soul, if he doesn't feel a burning kind of desire of his soul to return to Torah and to do Hashem's will - then he has to do *teshuvah* exactly about this problem!

One needs to yearn to return to an inner kind of life in which he recognizes that his soul is his true source, wishing that he could return to his original state of purity.

The Main Kind of Teshuvah That Is Needed In Our Times

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

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

Therefore, besides for doing *teshuvah* for our past sins, an essential part of our *teshuvah* is that we need to search for an inner kind of life, in which we feel ourselves yearning to return to our original purity.

Do any of us want next year to be the same as this year? If we want next year to really be different than this past year, we must have a constant yearning every day and all the time to live a life of yearning for Hashem, for Torah, and for mitzvos.

Letting Go Of This World

To help give yourself an idea of how you can work on this, each of us should imagine what the day of death will look like, when our soul will leave our body.

If we always think about this – in a serene way of course, and not to be sad or morbid about it – we can begin to feel that our *body* is *not* who we *are*. We will then be able to feel that our real

self is our *neshamah*. One day, we will leave our body. Thinking about this will help you realize the inner world that is going on inside of you.⁷

We must realize that the kind of world we see in front of us - even though there is much Torah and mitzvos today - is a lifestyle that is centered around interests of the body. We need to uncover the perspective of our *neshamah* and experience life through it. Of course, this will involve a lot of *avodah* to get there, but this is the root that we can uncover and be in touch with.

In Conclusion

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

⁷ For more details, see *Bilvavi Part 4, Chapter 5 – Calmly Letting Go Of This World*

061 | *Remaining Pure*

Why We Ask To Be Forgiven For Sin

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

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

Why do we ask Hashem to be forgiven? What are our intentions as we say these words? Simply, it is because after committing a sin, we must recognize that there is retribution for each sin, unless we are forgiven. We have to be aware that there is Authority who rules over us.

Sin Harms Our Relationship With Hashem

But the deeper understanding is: because sin distances us from the Creator.

It is written, “*Their sins separated them.*” Our sins damage our relationship with Hashem, and that is why we need to be forgiven, so that the effects of the sin should be removed. Thus, our prayer for forgiveness should be emanating from our soul’s yearning to improve our relationship with Hashem.

When a son rebels against his father, if he is a good son, it hurts him that he has pained his father. In the same way, it should hurt us that we have sinned and rebelled against our Father.

Sin Hurts Our Very Soul

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

We say in the blessing of *Elokai Neshamah* in the morning, “*The soul You placed in me is pure.*” Our soul comes from a pure place, and it yearns not only for our Creator, but it also yearns to dwell in purity, because that is its nature. Our soul has been carved out of the Throne

of Glory. When it becomes dirtied from sin, it really recoils in disgust from this, because since it comes from a pure place, from Heaven, it is disgusted when it comes into contact with the spiritual muck created from a sin.

If a person sins, *chas v'shalom*, he should feel pained at this, no less than if his hand has been cut off. It should feel painful to the person, for the act of sin has removed him from his real place.

On a deeper level, if someone feels the light of his soul - the holiness of a Jew, the fact that his soul is pure and from Above, a piece of Hashem – the very fact that he is on this world will be painful to him! Our soul feels like it has been exiled to this world. The fact that our soul is here on this materialistic world is an exile to our soul, for our soul has been placed into our physical body, and this enough is already very painful to our soul.

If someone doesn't feel his soul, this doesn't bother him. He doesn't notice how the situation of this world is really a contradiction to the soul's nature.

But the more a person feels that he is a soul, the more it bothers him that there is this contradiction taking place: he has been placed in a body, with its desires for this materialistic world, which contradict the spiritual yearnings of the soul. When a person commits a sin, *chas v'shalom*, a spirit of impurity surrounds him⁸, and the more a person sins, the more and more the soul feels pain that it has been contradicted, again and again and again.

If someone doesn't feel his soul at all, then he isn't bothered after he commits a sin. But a person who does feel his soul feels an inner disturbance after he commits a sin. For this reason, the greatest *tzaddikim*, who are much more in touch with their souls, can feel a much more acute suffering after a sin that is committed even unintentionally, because they are very aware of what is taking place in their souls.

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

Examples Of Things That Contradict The Purity of Our Soul

Our soul can feel all kinds of contradictions on this world.

⁸ As stated in *Nefesh HaChaim*

One example is when a person indulges in permitted pleasure; this is called a “disgusting one who indulges within the permission of the Torah.” When a person indulges in desires, even desires that are permissible and not forbidden by the Torah, his soul can feel disgust inside at this.⁹ This is a simple example of materialism that makes our soul inside recoil.

But in our generation, there is a new kind of problem, in which our surroundings engage in certain actions that might be deemed as a ‘*mitzvah*’, but the person can sense that if he does such an act, it furthers him from holiness. There are things which other people do that appear to be fine, but just because others are doing it, that doesn’t mean it is fine for everyone else to do.

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

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

Staying Away From Machlokes\Arguments

We are living in a very confused generation.

Chazal say that “each day is more cursed than the day before it”; if this was true about previous generations, how much more so does it apply to our current generation.

Chazal say that when in doubt, one needs to make for himself a Rav. It was always hard to choose a Rav, but nowadays people have a much harder time finding a Rav, because people don’t know who to ask in the first place about who should be their Rav! How do you choose a Rav in the first place to tell you who should be your Rav, when there is no Rav to ask about this in the first place....?

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

In every argument that takes place, there are elements of *lishmah* (pure motives) and *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motives). (If someone never argues with any pure motives at all, his soul is from the Erev Rav¹⁰). Most people, when they engage in arguments, are doing so with both kinds of

⁹ See Tefillah #057 – Returning To Our Source

¹⁰ Editor’s Note: The Vilna Gaon in his commentary to Tikkunei HaZohar says that one of the signs of Erev are instigators of strife who enjoy strife and do not yield from it.

motivations together: there are elements in it that are for the sake of Heaven, and there are also elements involved that are not for the sake of Heaven. But a person who searches for truth should avoid any argument altogether, for all arguments contain some ulterior motivations.

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

The Danger of Entering Machlokes Today

Every *machlokes* is a mixture of both good motivations and evil motivations contained in it, since every *machlokes* has in it elements of both *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*. But when someone enters a *machlokes*, there is no telling of what will be his end! Anyone who enters into a *machlokes* and becomes involved with it, no matter which generation he is from, is entering a mixture of good and evil, and he is danger of being swept up by the evil motivations involved in it.

Even in previous generations, if a person ever entered a *machlokes* with motivations that were *l’sheim shomayim*, he still lost out from this, losing both this world and the Next World. A person who entered fiercely into a *machlokes* would be swayed by the evil motivations involved in it and lose all of his spiritual levels in the process.

And this is yet referring to a kind of *machlokes* that also had in it some elements of *lishmah*! How much more so does it apply to a modern-day *machlokes*, where there is mostly *shelo lishmah* within the *machlokes*.

Avoiding ‘Shelo Lishmah’ In Our Mitzvos

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

Even when you do a *mitzvah*, we should notice how some of our motivations are *shelo lishmah* and try to do it a little more *lishmah*. This doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t do the *mitzvah*, *chas*

v'shalom. Do the *mitzvah* regardless, but just try to become aware of how there is *shelo lishmah* involved in it, and try to increase the element of *lishmah* in it.¹¹

Avoiding The “Mixture of Good and Evil”: Staying Away From Machlokes

To give an example of how far this concept goes, *Chazal* say that Hashem was angry with Avraham *Avinu* for taking Lot with him, because Lot's shepherds caused *machlokes* with his shepherds, and therefore he was an indirect cause for the *machlokes*.

Chazal explain that Avraham *Avinu* took Lot with him because he saw that Moshiach would come from him. Here we see an example of a mixture of good and evil in one act. It was good that he took Lot with him, because Lot is the ancestor of Moshiach, but at the same time, Avraham *Avinu* is also criticized for taking Lot with him, because Lot's shepherds caused *machlokes*.

Chazal criticize Avraham *Avinu* for this! How much more so should we avoid arguments that contain ulterior motives, such as to tell *lashon hora* (gossip) “for the sake of Heaven” - even when it follows all the rules of “*toeles*” in *sefer Chofetz Chaim*).

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

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

The Sages¹² say that in the era preceding Moshiach, “the wisdom of scholars will rot.” Why? The Sages explain elsewhere that even though jealousy of scholars is a good quality, still, “jealousy makes the bones rot”. This is because if the jealousy isn't coming from a pure place in

¹¹ See *Bilvavi Part 2: Chapter 27, Bilvavi Part 4: Chapter 12: Beginning To Act Lishmah and Bilvavi Part 6: Chapters 6-7.*

¹² *Sotah 49a*

the soul, it is infected with impure motivations, and it instead becomes detrimental to one's Torah wisdom.

Immerse Yourself in Torah, and Don't Be Involved With The World!

A person who avoids arguments, even arguments that are for the sake of Heaven, lives an elevated kind of life. This is someone who searches for truth.

When someone really searches for truth, he wants peace as well, and this involves a yearning to dwell in a world of purity and pleasantness. He wants the revelation of Hashem to fill the entire Creation, and thus he yearns for pleasantness, and he recoils from what goes on outside the world of Torah.

When someone doesn't work on this point, he enters into arguments and gets caught up in the external aspects of the arguments.

A person needs to be able to run away from the superficiality of the outside world, and enter into the inner world of Torah and keep himself immersed there. Therefore, if you seek truth, don't get involved with what goes on in the world. Live instead in an inner world that is apart and sheltered from all of this; all of the strife that takes place in the world outside of our Torah learning should feel painful for you to hear about.

Whenever you have to leave the world of Torah and go out into the world for anything, it should feel painful to you. In fact, these days, going out into the world that is outside of our Torah is as dangerous to the soul as death.

Immerse yourself in Torah, in your mind and heart, and make sure you are deeply connected to it. Identify yourself as mainly living in your Torah learning – and make sure you have *Ahavas Yisrael* too – but don't involve yourself with what goes on outside the world of Torah. Otherwise, your soul is in mortal danger from what goes on in this world.¹³

In Conclusion

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

¹³ See also *Fixing Your Water_020_The Desire For Competition, and Tefillah #0170 - Peace*

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

070 | *Hashem Is Our Doctor**The Source Of A Sickness*

"רפאינו ה'". We ask Hashem in the "Refoeinu" blessing that we should be healed.

The Sages state that Hashem gave permission to doctors to heal. The Ramban says that not only should a sick person ask Hashem to be healed, but even doctors, who have permission from Hashem to heal, also need to *daven* for special help. Just because Hashem gave us permission to heal doesn't mean that we don't need to turn to Hashem for help. Rather, we are supposed to include Hashem in our healing process.

If a person gets sick, and he goes to the doctor – and he doesn't turn to Hashem for help – on this, it does not apply that "permission is given to go to doctors." The permission given to doctors to heal is only if a person includes Hashem in the picture; otherwise, permission is not given to the doctors to heal. This is relevant for all people: we must all know how to approach sickness. We must recognize the Source of the messenger being sent to heal us. Without recognizing that it is Hashem who heals us, that Hashem is our true Doctor,

When a person gets sick, he tends to be busy with doctors and call them all the time. But this comes from a lack of recognition of Hashem. The person forgets that it is Hashem who made him sick; if he would feel that way, he wouldn't be so busy talking to the doctors. He would get busy talking to Hashem. "*Refoeinu*, Hashem." The first thoughts a person has when he gets sick is, "I'm sick. I need a doctor; I must find the best doctor..."

Before a person gets sick, though, he should be know what the proper attitude to have is. He shouldn't wait until he gets sick in order to work on this concept. The proper attitude has to be developed already before he gets sick, so that he will be able to deal with it in the proper way when it comes. And because getting sick is such a common occurrence, we must all inevitably prepare for it, especially in today's generation, where there are so many people getting sick.

Our first thoughts should be instead, "Who made me sick? Hashem."

Sickness - A Reminder To Rectify Our Sins of Chilul Hashem

The word sickness is *choli* in Hebrew, which comes from the word *chalal*, empty space. This hints to us that sickness comes when there is a lack of connection with Hashem. *Choli* also

comes from the word *chilul*, which hints to the idea of *Chilul Hashem*. In other words, when a person gets sick, it's a reminder for him to rectify the sin of *Chilul Hashem*. A person should know this *before* he gets sick. One should reflect with himself and realize that it is Hashem who is behind everything. The more he reflects like this, the more he will be able to feel, in his heart, this knowledge. He will then realize that it is not his job to talk with doctors all the time, but instead, that he should speak with Hashem.

When a person is sick and thoughts come into his head, “What will be with me??” he should put aside these thoughts. Instead, he should think about the source of his sickness, which comes from *Chilul Hashem*. These words are meant for someone who lives with Hashem in his life. This is what a person should think if he gets sick: that it is coming because of a certain *Chilul Hashem* going on in his soul. Just like there can be a *Chilul Hashem* in public, so can there be a private *Chilul Hashem* taking place inside one's own soul. (*Chilul Hashem* is the worst sin – and by contrast, *Kiddush Hashem* is the greatest mitzvah.)

So before a person gets involved with doctors, he should build within himself the attitude that sicknesses come on a person when there is some *Chilul Hashem* going on in his soul – when there is a certain lack of connection with Hashem. He can then realize Who gave him the sickness and come to be more appreciative of everything he had until now, and he comes closer to Hashem through the sickness.

Stage One Is Emunah, Stage Two Is Tefillah

Before we *daven* to Hashem, though, we first need to make sure that we have deep *emunah* in Hashem, that we recognize that it is Hashem who sent the sickness, and that it is up to Him to take it away. Tefillah is already the second stage. Before we *daven* to Hashem, we need to have *emunah* already planted in us, and from that, we will be able to *daven* in a deeper and truer way. So before we proceed to *daven*, we must reaffirm our *emunah*, and tell ourselves that since Hashem is the source of everything – and He made me sick too – He can do anything, and He can take the sickness away as well.

Although a person gets sick due to his own negligence (like if he gets a cold, it was because he should have bundled up more, as the Gemara says), still, when a person gets sick, it is not his *avodah* to think about how it happened and what caused it, but it is rather his *avodah* now to turn to Hashem. He must first strengthen his deep *emunah* in Hashem, and then *daven* to Him to be healed.

These words are a description of an inner kind of life. When a person gets sick, he tends to focus on his body and what will be with it. But the real attitude to have is to focus on the source of the sickness. A person has to learn how to change his attitude towards sickness. We must gain a more mature perspective on how to look at it. The way we looked at things when we were 20 years old should not be the same as we look at a situation when we are 30 years old.

Sickness is a very big part of our life, especially in our generation, when there are so many people becoming sick. It is very relevant to our avodah, and thus we must have the proper perspective towards it. If we ever get sick, we must not get caught up in thinking about the physical aspects of it and what will be with our body; we should instead turn to Hashem and realize that only He can heal us, while at the same time taking care of ourselves and doing what we have to do.

Often, there is a lot more going on to the sickness that cannot be seen with the human eye of the doctor. A person might be going to doctors for 2-3 years not knowing what is wrong with him, and finally he can discover that he has some problem which is probably untreatable. There can be a lot going on under the surface which even the doctors can't figure out. From the world of doctors, we can all realize that it will do us nothing to become dependent on doctors. The doctors don't always know what to do, and by the time they find out what to do, it can already be too late from them to treat it.

Should we remain confined to the doctors' limited power to heal? We can turn to Hashem, the true Healer of us all, and He can help us. From that, we are able to accept the illness with love. The more we feel like we depend on doctors, the less we turn to Hashem, and then we are at the mercy of the doctors. This is not the way a Jew lives. We can go to doctors of course and do what we have to do, but we must not confuse our priorities. We must realize that the main doctor here is Hashem.

So if we get sick, our avodah is that first we must strengthen our *emunah*, that is it Hashem who gave us the sickness (and going to the doctor, of course). After working on that, we can turn to Hashem in our *tefillos* and ask Him to be healed. Our *tefillos* will then be coming from a place of *emunah*. After that, one will be able to accept the illness with love, for he recognizes that it comes from Hashem.

If a person works on this practically, many times he will discover that his illness will begin to go away!

May we merit the promise of Hashem, "*All of the illnesses which I placed upon Egypt, I will not place upon you, for I am Hashem, your Healer.*"

077 | “Making The Most Of Our Time”

A ‘Blessed Year’: Is This A Blessing Merely About Grain?

ברך עלינו ה' אלוקינו את השנה זאת – “Bless upon us, Hashem, our G-d, this year.” This blessing is called *Birkas HaShanim* (the blessing for a good year) by *Chazal*.

It seems in this blessing like we are just asking Hashem for grain and for rain in its time (which implies our source of livelihood), as we ask for later in the blessing, ואת כל מיני תבואתה לטובה. But in the beginning of this blessing, first we ask Hashem to give us a year of blessing. So it must be that first we are asking for a good year in general - besides for how we ask to have blessed grain and rain.

Let us try to understand what this is – why we first ask for a blessed year in general, and why we ask that our grain should be blessed and that we should have proper rain in its time.

Chazal say that there are four kinds of Rosh HaShanah – for grain, for water, for trees, and for people. Although our livelihood is decided on Rosh HaShanah, there is a separate Rosh HaShanah for grain, water, and trees. In this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we ask that the grain and water should be blessed.

Why are we asking specifically for blessed grain and water, though? Isn't this already included in asking for our livelihood, which is what we ask for in the beginning of this blessing that we should have a blessed year in general?

Time and Above Time

In order to understand this, we need to understand what time is about.

In the Jewish people, there is a concept of *Rosh Chodesh*, the new month; and there is also *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, which is called *Rosh L'Chodashim*, the head of all the months.

In Creation, there was always a concept of time. In the original state of Creation, there would have been only six days, and on Shabbos, Adam would have entered the eternal *Olam HaBa*. Each day represented a thousand years of Creation; the *sefarim hakedoshim* state that a day of Hashem equates to 1,000 years of a man's life. Thus, our entire 6000 years of this world, which represent the 6 days of the week, were all encapsulated into the original 6 days of Creation. The plan was for Adam to enter the 7th day of Shabbos.

When Adam sinned, the original concept of time disappeared, and a new kind of time began, in which there are years. Our entire mode of time became demoted from Heavenly time, which is to have 6 days, to human time, which takes up 6000 years. Before Adam's sin, there were only "days", and no years [and no months]. So whole the concept of "years" came about entirely through sin. If not for the sin, there would be no concept of "years", because in the original concept of time, there was only "days".

Thus, when we ask Hashem in this blessing for a "blessed year" – and then we ask for blessed grain and water in its time – we need to realize what a 'blessed year' implies, what 'time' is. We must have the proper perspective towards time. A Jew really lives in a whole different plane of time than a gentile. *Rosh Chodesh* is called *lachem*, "for you", and not for the gentile nations of the world. The Jewish nation's calendar goes by the moon, and the non-Jews go by the sun. This is not just a difference in the calendars. It shows that we live in a whole different plane than they do.

When we *daven* in **ברך עלינו** for a blessed year, we must know what we are asking for, or else this is an empty request. We are really asking to become connected to what the year is – in other words, to understand how to view time. We need to realize that although we live in time, we are really above the current time, because deep in our soul there is a place that lives in the state before Adam's sin, which was above all current time, where there are no 'years' at all – where we are not ruled by whatever the time brings.

In Time, But Above It

Now let us try to understand this in a way that we can draw this closer to our soul so that we can apply it to ourselves.

The Jewish nation is capable of sanctifying time. *Beis Din* each month would sanctify the moon; in the *Shemoneh Esrei* we *daven* on Yom Tov, we mention how the Jewish people has the special ability to sanctify time. The gentile nations, by contrast, are bound to time; they are below time and not above it, therefore, time rules over them. But a Jew, deep in his soul, is above time; "*Mazal* (the astrological signs of the Zodiac) do not apply to Yisrael". A Jew is really above time, but he has to get his sustenance from this lowly earth, which is within time; all the produce in the earth depends on certain times of the year for it to grow and sprout. But although a Jew is sustained and fed by the times of this earth, in essence he is still above time, and the sustenance is merely coming to him in the 'garment' of time.

There are two ways how a person can live his life: to identify himself as part of time, or as part of a place. We find in *Chazal* that there are certain auspicious times of the year, such as what month it is or what Yom Tov it is. We also find that *Chazal* attribute importance to places that people came from, for example, that different areas in Eretz Yisrael have different advantages. These are two deep points about our soul – the concept of time, and the concept of a place.

However, in the innermost depths of a Jew's soul, there is a point that is above both the current time and place. Hashem is forever, and so is the soul of a member of Yisrael forever, because Hashem and Yisrael are one and thus interconnected. Therefore, although we live in a world of time and thus we have to deal with time, time is really like a 'garment' we wear, but it is not our essence. Our essence is to be above time. The proof to this is that the Jewish people have the power "to sanctify the times".

So a person is *davening* in *Shemoneh Esrei* by **ברוך עלינו** that Hashem should give him a blessed year. What is his perspective towards these words of *Shemoneh Esrei*? One must not think that he is bound to time, to the year 5774 that he is in. Your soul is eternal! It is not bound to the year you are in! Thus, even if the year will not be blessed, that does not mean that all is lost, because Hashem can take you out of that situation too!

The *sefarim hakedoshim* state that even if a person's soul ends up in *She'ol* (the lowest abyss of Gehinnom), Hashem can take him out. A similar concept is expressed in the statement of *Chazal* that "Tisha B'Av is destined to become a *moed* (festival)", and the depth of this is that even the worst time possible will eventually transform into a good 'time' – it will be a revelation of how we are not bound to 'time'.

Experiencing Time

Therefore, if a person feels that he can only connect to Hashem through certain times of the year, that he can only have a relationship with Hashem through certain auspicious times of the year when all is good, then his connection with Hashem is sorely lacking. Such a person, when he asks Hashem for a good year, thinks that he is bound to this year, and he views time with the same perspective of a non-Jew's time. A Jew must realize that he is above regular time.

The true perspective is that indeed, we need to experience time, but in the right way - to experience the holiness of Shabbos and Yom Tov. Most people don't feel the holiness of a special time; they don't feel the holiness of Shabbos, and all they feel during Shabbos and Yom Tov are superficial pleasures of nice clothing, good food, and a pleasant atmosphere. This is

because most people think they are bound to time, therefore, time rules over them and constricts them - so they aren't able to really experience what is contained in a time.

Thus, when we ask Hashem for a blessed year, it is because we want to become connected to what the year is, to connect to time in the correct way. A person might *daven* this blessing his whole life and think that it's about *davening* for grain and rain. He never became aware of what he was really asking for in this blessing.

Dealing With Changes

We must therefore be aware that we have two parts to us.

There is a part in us that is not bound to anything on this world. “*You are children to Hashem*” – we are always connected to Hashem, no matter what situation we find ourselves in. This is the deep part of our soul.

On the outer layer of our soul, we go through various times and changes. The word *shanah*, year, is from the word *shinuy*, change. With each year that goes on, the world completes its cycle and repeats the cycle, but in addition, each year brings new changes. No matter what changes we go through, we ask Hashem that we remain connected with Him. This is the implication of what we ask for in this blessing of **ברך עלינו את השנה הזאת**.

It is written, “*A tzaddik falls seven times and rises.*” If a person loses his connection with Hashem when he goes through changes, he will keep getting disappointed and frustrated at himself for failing. But if he remains connected with Hashem in spite of changes, he will find the strength to get up no matter how many falls and turbulent changes he goes through.

When a person *davens* for a good *shanah*\year, he might feel very disconnected from this blessing, feeling like “What does this have to do with me? It must be some deep matter that *Chazal* discuss.” But the meaning is to connect to Hashem no matter what you go through in this *shanah*, whether it's summer or winter.

As for the rest of the year – having blessing in our grain and having proper rain its time – those things will be blessed **as a result** of a “good year”, of utilizing time as well as realizing that we are not bound to time. But the essence of a “good year” is when we can remain connected with Hashem no matter what we go through in this *shanah*, no matter how much *shinuy*\changes w

084 | *Preparing For The Redemption*

The Two Aspects of Exile

תקע בשופר – We ask Hashem in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* to “blow the shofar” and herald the redemption.

To give a general description, there are two parts to our exile. The first aspect of our exile is that we are subservient to the nations of the world; that the nations have jurisdiction over us. There is another aspect of exile, which is that we were exiled from Eretz Yisrael and dispersed throughout the countries of the world.

The first part of this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, in which we ask Hashem to blow the shofar, is a request to Hashem to take away the jurisdiction of the nations over us. In the second part of the blessing, we ask Hashem to gather in the exiles, and this is a request to end the second aspect of our exile, which is the fact that we have been exiled from the land of Eretz Yisrael and spread out throughout the world.

The Concept of Blowing The Shofar

Let us reflect, with the help of Hashem, into the first part of this blessing, in which we ask Hashem to take away the jurisdiction of the nations on us.

There are a few times when we blow shofar. We blow shofar on Rosh HaShanah. We would blow shofar on the year of *Yovel* (Jubilee), in which all slaves would go free. There was a blowing of the shofar in the desert when the camps would gather together; in these instances, the shofar serves to create a musical sound. But generally speaking, the shofar serves to return something to its root. The shofar is blow to awaken us to *teshuvah*, to awaken us to return to our root. Shofar is about returning something to its point of origin. Thus, the shofar in the future will return everyone to their root. We will blow with the shofar, and this will gather together all the exiles, and return us all to our root, to freedom.

Here we will not speak about the shofar of Rosh HaShanah, but rather when the shofar is blown to bring about freedom, which will be the blowing of the shofar that heralds the redemption. The word “blow” is *tekiah* in Hebrew, which can mean to “establish.” A *tekiah* is about establishing permanence. It disconnects something from where it is and returns it to the place where it belongs. The concept of *tekiah* is about creating a connection – to connect us to

good. In order for us to be connected to good, though, we have to first be disconnected completely from the previous source. When we are subservient to the nations in exile, when we are connected to things that are improper for a Jew's soul, we need to be severed from this.

The *tekiah* of the shofar in the future will disconnect us from the situation of exile, and return us to our root. First we will be disconnected from the influences of the exile on us, and then we will be moved to teshuvah, where we will return to our root.

So a *tekiah* is about disconnecting us from where we are not supposed to be, to the place that we are supposed to be. The *tekiah* of the shofar serves to totally disconnect us from an improper place and to restore us back to good. In order for the disconnection from evil to be a real disconnection, it has to be a total disconnection, and only then can we be reconnected to our source. Only a *tekiah* which causes a total disconnection from evil can be considered a true *tekiah*, because the whole point of a *tekiah* is to totally disconnect us from what is improper; if it doesn't accomplish a total disconnection from evil, the *tekiah* has not served its purpose. If a *tekiah* just inspires us but it doesn't cause us to be totally moved, the *tekiah* was pointless.

So in order for the *tekias shofar* in the future to be a true *tekiah* that will remove us from evil, we have to already disconnect ourselves from this world beforehand. Our earlier Rabbis wrote that if we want anything to work for us, we need to cause an awakening down here on this earth, in order for Hashem to channel down any Heavenly sustenance. This is the general concept of *Tefillah* (prayer) – whenever we need something from Heaven, the only way to get it is by awakening it down here on this earth, which we can accomplish when we *daven* for it.

Thus, in order for us to merit the *tekias shofar* of the future, which will disconnect us from the exile, we need to do our part already here on this earth, which is by working to disconnect ourselves as much as we can, from the current lifestyle.

The outcome of this discussion is not that you should take a shofar and blow it now so you can disconnect yourself from the lifestyle of exile. That is clearly not the intention of *tekias shofar*. Rather, *tekias shofar* is a lesson that tells us that we need to disconnect ourselves from anything improper that we are connected to on this world, and to instead connect ourselves totally with Hashem.

Do We Really Want The Redemption?

We *daven* in *Shemoneh Esrei* for the redemption. What are we *davening* for? Why do we want the redemption? So that we will all sit under the fig trees and relax? Are we hoping for things that are frivolous...?

Chazal say that the reason to await the redemption, which all the righteous people awaited for and desired, is solely because it will be a time in which we can learn Torah with no distractions. According to one opinion in the Gemara, nothing will change in the future except for the fact that we will be able to be free from the jurisdiction of the nations. Even according to this opinion, the reason why we should want the redemption is not so that we will be free from the rule of other nations. The point is that we will be able to sit and learn Torah peacefully without having to deal with the other nations.

Is a person awaiting the redemption because he's stressed out from life? Does a person really yearn to live in a world which will entirely be about doing Hashem's will? If a person doesn't yearn for the redemption for this reason, his heart inside is not matching the words being uttered in his lips when he *davens* for the redemption. He is *davening* for something he doesn't really want.

Imagine in if a person would be given the choice right now to live with no stress from life, and to instead just sit and learn Torah be entirely immersed in doing Hashem's will. What would he choose? If a person feels "Yes", then his prayer for the redemption is an earnest prayer. But if a person has no desire for such a life, and he simply wants to be free from the stresses of life, he is not directing his soul to the redemption. His soul isn't prepared to disconnect from this world, and thus he won't be able to connect with Hashem. Our prayer for the redemption needs to be coming from a truthful place in ourselves. It has to be something we wish for, something we hope for.

When we ask Hashem to blow the shofar and gather in all the exiles, we need to clarify what's going on inside of us. Of course, even if one doesn't make this inner clarification, he is still obligated to *daven* in *Shemoneh Esrei* for the redemption. But this doesn't exempt us. One needs to make sure his prayers are truthful and thus ask himself if he really wants what he *davens* for.

It's very possible that a person is always *davening* for the redemption, but deep down, he doesn't want it! It's tough to admit this. A person can *daven* and *daven* for the redemption, but his soul does not want the redemption. Is he really ready to connect to that world of the future? Does he really want it...?

This World – A World of Many Desires

There is a major difference between this world and the Next World (of the future). What is the difference between physical existence and spiritual existence of the Next World? The Jewish nation is "*a nation that is scattered and individual among the nations*" (as Haman said), and this is

true not only with regards to the general whole of the Jewish people, but it is also true within one's private soul as well, that a person's soul can be scattered inside. One's actions can be connected to many things; he speaks about many things he wants; he has many desires that he feels connected to. All of this scatters the soul inside. That is a description of This World – the constant chasing of various desires that people feel so connected to.

In the Next World, there is only one desire alone that people will have. People there realize that besides for Hashem, there is nothing else to want. In the Next World, it is revealed that we have one desire alone: to desire our Father in Heaven. “We have only one heart, directed toward our Father in Heaven.” This is the inner way to define the difference between This World and the Next World. The Next World is not just about reward; that is just the superficial understanding. The reward of the Next World is that we get to leave a viewpoint of disparity and instead attain the perspective of oneness, to leave all the many desires and instead connect to the one desire of our soul. If someone on this world is truly connected with Hashem, he lives a paradise-like kind of existence – he is called a “*ben olam haba*”. It is possible for a person already on this world to live in a world that resembles the Next World.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* warns that a person needs to avoid *pizur hanefesh*, a “scattering of the soul”. A person's soul can be scattered inside due to the many varying desires that a person is pursuing, and this can even be due to spiritual desires. As the generations go on, the *pizur hanefesh* in the world increases. In our generation, the amount of *pizur hanefesh* is astounding. There is almost no time for people to reflect about their priorities. It used to be that a person would sit calmly and reflect on his priorities. The whole lifestyle of today's generation, especially in the last couple of years, does not allow for any calmness in a person's life. The lifestyle of today is the antithesis of *yishuv hadaas*.

Cellphones and Gadgets

A cellphone in your pocket might have a *hechsher* on it, but it can still cause so many spiritual problems, besides for problems of *bittul Torah*, and a threat to your holiness and modesty. The very fact that there is a cellphone in your pocket already disconnects a person from being a *ben olam haba*. It is such a sickness. It's an issue of *bittul Torah*, and not only in regards to taking away time from your learning; it takes away a person's very connection to the Torah!

All the many kinds of gadgets today, whether they are in our pockets, or whether they surround us wherever we go, take us out of a life of concentration. They make our soul scattered inside. Even if a person claims that he has a cellphone in his pocket all the time so that he can

help people, is it really because he loves others so much? And how much of his spirituality is he losing in the process?

Disconnect, So You Can Reconnect

The Next World will be one thing alone – the recognition and desire for Hashem. It will be the total opposite of today’s world, which is all about so many different desires that people have. The redemption will be the situation of the Next World – the entire redemption will be a redemption from our current situation, in which people are scattered inside themselves. The redemption will take us and return us to the situation of wanting only one thing alone: Hashem.

It is impossible for anyone to change the generation and the lifestyle that the world is living. But each person, on his own, can search for truth, for closeness with Hashem, and realize how much *pizur hanefesh* surrounds us. A child born into today’s generation is being born into a world of tremendous *pizur hanefesh*. And those who have been around before the new generation have also entered a lifestyle of total *pizur hanefesh* as well.

If one’s soul doesn’t yearn for the general redemption, as well as a private redemption – in other words, if one’s soul doesn’t have a yearning to live in a pure world where there will only be Hashem and His Torah – then he needs to unify his desires into one desire alone: to desire the situation of the Next World, and to leave all the many scattered desires behind. We must desire to live in a world of oneness, and if not, we won’t be able to live in the future times, where there will only be Hashem with His Torah!

Without this desire to live in a world of oneness, maybe a person will still have a will for holiness, but he hasn’t yet programmed himself to live in a world in which there will be only one desire alone: Hashem.

In order to merit the redemption, we need to prepare ourselves and make ourselves into a container that will receive its light. This is by disconnecting from all that we are connected to on this world, and by inwardly connecting ourselves to the pure state of the future. Even if a person feels that this is too hard and that he can’t change his lifestyle, this does not exempt him from having the aspiration. He has to try his hardest.

One should therefore set aside time, an hour or two a day – each according to his ability – and during this time of solitude, *disconnect yourself* from the entire world.¹⁴ Unless there is a life-threatening situation, you must connect yourself to one thing alone, during

¹⁴ For more detailed guidance on how to do hisbodedus, see *Getting To Know Your Individuality and Bilvavi Part 4, (Chapters 1-7) and Bilvavi Part 5 (Fundamentals In Avodah)*.

this time of solitude every day that you set aside for yourself. Don't do anything during this time of solitude and just connect yourself, totally, to the Creator. For anyone who searches for Hashem in his life, this is the essential ingredient he needs: to have this time of solitude every day, totally disconnected from the world - and totally connected with the Creator.

If a person does this and sets aside time every day for this reflection, he will receive great *siyata d'shamaya* in his life and see tremendous growth. If a person doesn't have times of solitude every day with the Creator, it is almost indefinite that he will be swept up with the dismal situation of this generation.

Through doing this, by setting aside times of solitude every day in which we disconnect from the world and instead connect ourselves as much as we can with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, we are doing our part on this earth, which awakens all Heavenly blessing. That will awaken the great light of the redemption that will come to the masses, where we will all hear together the great *shofar* blow of Moshiach. *Amen v'amen.*

093 | *Media Influence*

השיבה שפטינו כבראשונה - We ask in *Shemoneh Esrei*, “Return our judges as they were at first.” As we are in exile, the power of true judgment is lost from us, and so we ask that it be returned to us.

Chazal teach us that our soul consists of a “*Nefesh*”, a “*Ruach*”, and a “*Neshamah*”, and that the *Nefesh* is found in our liver, the *Ruach* is found in our heart, and the *Neshamah* is found in one’s mind.

The *Nefesh* is in our physical body, and the *Ruach* is in our heart - but most people’s hearts are hidden from them, and therefore most people do not access their *Ruach*. When a person has bad *middos*, besides for the problem of negative character, he also is being blocked from his *Ruach*.

Every person has a *Ruach* – a certain force of spirituality – but it is hidden from most people; it is usually concealed from one’s consciousness. It is being concealed by a person’s unrefined *middos*.

This is also why “*Derech erez* precedes Torah” – without *derech erez*, without good *middos*, a person cannot have genuine Torah. Many people learn Torah with much dedication, but because most people haven’t yet refined their *middos*, they haven’t revealed yet their *Ruach*, and accordingly, they don’t reach genuine Torah understanding in their learning.

The Vilna Gaon says that “only a stubborn person is successful” – in other words, only someone who has stubbornly worked on breaking his *middos* will be successful.

The *Neshamah*, which is in one’s brain, is not either revealed by most people. People think all day about many various thoughts that go through their minds, and this actually conceals the *Neshamah*, even if they are permissible thoughts. The problem is that people don’t realize what their thinking process is supposed to be like. Our thoughts are supposed to be constantly filled with thoughts of Torah, not constant thoughts about worldly matters.

When people receive their thoughts from outer sources, they never learn how to develop their own thoughts.

A person might be someone who learns a lot of Torah, and maybe he even learns Torah “*lishmah*” (for the sake of learning alone), but he also reads the newspapers, and he reads all the opinions of all these people who are writing the articles, and he thinks that these writers must be

smarter people, that these are people who know more about what's going on in the world - while in reality, these writers are attached to worldly matters, gleaning all their opinions from an impure source.

We aren't even speaking about reading forbidden material; even permissible material is a problem. When a person reads so many newspaper\magazine articles, he absorbs thousands of pages of the opinions of this person and that person; a *mabul* (flood) of information enters his head. It's a real *mabul*! All this information comes and confuses a person and ruins his mind.

A person thinks into, let's say, what the army general is thinking. He thinks into what this secular person thinks and into what that secular person thinks (by the way, these people are people who are committing the three cardinal sins, and the reader is thinking into what's going on in their minds...!). If people read and read all these articles, can they ever hope that the Torah they learn will ever enter them?! How will their *Neshamah* ever reveal its light with all this knowledge flooding into the person's mind, where the *Neshamah* resides?

The flood of information entering people's heads today is in enormous amounts. We are asking Hashem to "*Return our judges as they were at first*" because the judges of old were able to take the words of Torah and see reality through the lens of the Torah. But when people read so much of what's going on in worldly matters, how will he ever see through the lens of the Torah, when their minds have been affected so much by all the opinions of so many people? Even if someone reads articles written by *frum* people, it still affects him negatively, because all the words are being drawn from an original secular source.

Even if a person is always learning Torah, he won't see reality through the perspective of the Torah if he's always reading newspaper articles, because the holiness of his mind has been tainted by all that he's reading. There is much Torah today, but there isn't much holy thought going on.

What we must do is cut ourselves off from any connection to the media. Sadly, only a few people today are really cut off from worldly matters and can see the truth about reality in the Torah.

The Jewish judge (*shofet*) in the past was able to see reality through the perspective of the Torah. There are very few like that today, and that is why we *daven* that Hashem return us our judges.

There is a lot of confusion going on today – so many different opinions going on all at once. People read all this and become very confused. Even to read *chareidi* newspapers, on a regular basis, is very detrimental. It doesn't let you learn Torah or *daven* properly.

For anyone who wants to read an internal kind of life – a life of holiness and purity – know that there are two worlds going on in front of you. There is the outside world (*reshus harabim*), and there is the inside world (*reshus hayachid*). In today's times, there is almost no more *reshus hayachid*, because the outside world has almost totally infiltrated the inside, sheltered world we used to live in. That is one great problem of our times: that there is almost no place today that is totally clean from the outside influence.

A second great problem of our times is that what was on our inside, private world has entered the outside! In other words, people have “gone out” to the outside world and they have left their inner world. People “go out” to the world, and they think that they have to learn how the outside, secular world thinks...

People “go out” to the world for a very good reason; either it is too hard for one to sit and learn, or because he has to go to work to support his family. Everyone has their reasons. But the problem is that people have “gone out” to the outside world and they have learned how “the world” thinks, which is the terrible situation of this exile. There are even people (in the most extreme situations) who go to learn secular law, just to see how they think.

People are learning about matters in the outside world that are rooted in the opposite of Torah, the opposite of the holiness of the Jewish soul.

If a Jew wants to gain the true perspective on things in life, he has to have a pure mind. He has to cut off from all secular media, and from those who are connected to them and their thinking.

השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה - *“Return our judges as they were at first...”*

May we merit to disconnect from all the impurity of the world, and instead merit the light of the holy Torah.

100 | *Yeish Tikvah (There Is Hope)**A Slanderer Is Hopeless*

ולמלשינים אל תהי תקוה – We ask Hashem in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* that slanderers should have no hope.

The *Gemara*¹⁵ recounts how this blessing was added to *Shemoneh Esrei* at a later time, the Jewish people were suffering from disloyal people who were slandering them to the Roman government. This blessing was not part of the original 18 blessings that was established by the Great Men of Assembly; it was a blessing that came entirely due to the spiritual descent of the generations.

The Vilna Gaon explains that we merited the exodus from Egypt due to the fact that we did not change the way we spoke. We recognized that our power of speech is more elevated than the other nations, and thus, we praise Hashem that we became “exalted above all languages” when we departed from Egypt. But someone who slanders another Jew has misuses his power of *lashon*, and in doing so, he has basically extricated himself from the Jewish people. A *malshin* (slanderer) is therefore a *moiser*. He has fallen to the state of being “given over.” By slandering another Jew he has disgraced the elevated power of speech in the Jewish people, he has really given himself over to the *sitra achra* Other Side of Evil. In his act of disloyalty, he becomes like “another” person, who is apart from the Jewish people.

The *malshin*/slanderer has reached such a low level that he is considered to be hopeless. Thus, we ask Hashem in this blessing that such a person should not have any hope, because indeed, such a person has sunk so low that he is deserving of hopelessness.

The *Gemara*¹⁶ says that most wicked people that suffer in *Gehinnom* eventually achieve their rectification, and they are purified in *Gehinnom*. But a Jew who became a *malshin* endures an eternal *Gehinnom*, and he is never rectified. Although there is a rule that the wicked will eventually be rectified in the future, this rule does not apply to slanderers. Slanderers have sunken to such a low level that they have no hope whatsoever, not even in *Gehinnom*.

The Blessing That Describes The Ultimate Death

¹⁵ *Berachos* 28a

¹⁶ *Rosh HaShanah* 17a

This blessing in *Shemoneh Esrei*, ולמשלינים, was not part of the original 18 blessings that were enacted. The 18 original blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* correspond to the word **chai** (life) in Hebrew, which has the numerical value in Hebrew of 18. In other words, the 18 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* represent life. In the 18 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* –whether it is a blessing in which we praise Hashem, or whether it is a blessing in which we make requests of Hashem - we are “standing before the King.” We are amidst life. But in the blessing of ולמלשינים we are not amidst the original 18 blessings, thus, we are really standing at a point of death. In this blessing, we do not ask to better our life - we ask Hashem to bring death upon the wicked slanderers. It is a blessing about death.

In the regular 18 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are in a state of to “stand before the King.” This is because in whatever it is that we go through in our life, we always have hope [we can always “stand before the King”, i.e. reconnect to the Creator]. Even when a Jew becomes distanced from the Creator through sins, there is always hope that he can return and once again stand in front of the King. In this blessing, though, we are describing people who have no hope – slanderers. This implies that as long as one is not a slanderer, there is still a hope in the soul to stand in front of the King.

The Power of Tikva/Hope

The power of hope is called *tikvah*, and it is described in the words *Kavei el Hashem* – “Place your hope in Hashem.” The Sages expound on this that one should keep placing his hope in Hashem, continuously – *chazor v'kavei*, keep hoping.

What does it mean to place hope in Hashem? It does not just mean that a person hopes that Hashem will provide him with *parnassah* or something else he needs. It is not a hope we have for partial aspects of our life. It is rather referring to a hope that our soul has to return to its root, its Source – a hope to stand in front of the King. This is the soul’s entire hope that it longs for.

We all have various hopes in our life, such as hope to earn a living, hope that our health will be fine, etc. But often these are hopes for partial aspects of our life; they are not hopes that use the root power of hope in the soul, *tikvah*. The real power of hope in the soul, *tikvah*, is when we continuously hope to return to our Source, to be able to stand in front of the King, Hashem.

Slanderers will never have this kind of hope. ולמלשינים אל תהי תקוה. That is what we mean when we say in this blessing that they have no hope; a slanderer is missing the root power of hope in the soul, because his act of slander shows that he has removed himself from amidst the Jewish people, and thus he is hopeless to return to Hashem.

In this blessing, the 19th blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* which got added on due to the low situation of the generation (in which we were suffering from the disloyal), we leave the 18 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei*, which represent life, and we enter the arena of death. We describe the death that awaits the slanderers, who are hopeless. The depth of this is that when hope a person completely loses hope, his entire life is really lost with it.

Only the slanderers are hopeless. In any other case when a Jew sins, there is always hope for him to return. The sefer *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that when a Jew sins, his soul leaves his body, and he becomes like a dead person, whereupon his body becomes impure. However, there is always hope. A slanderer is the only exception to this rule; he has no hope.

Using The Power of Hope

Now we will expand upon this discussion and sharpen the concept.

There is a Creator, and there is His Creation. What can connect all creations to Hashem? How can a human being have a connection to the Creator, Who is way above our perception? Even the most perfected person in the world is, after all, a mere human being; therefore, how is it possible for man to have a connection with the Creator, a Being completely beyond any human? The answer is: because we have a power called *tikvah*, hope.

Tikvah is listed as one of the 70 forces of the soul, according to the Vilna Gaon. However, it is not just another one of the forces in the soul. The *sefarim hakedoshim* write that *tikvah* is the power that can ultimately return a person to his Source, Hashem.

No matter how much a person tries, it is not possible with human effort to get to the Creator. The only way is to keep hoping that you will get there. To have *tikvah* means to continuously hope in Hashem, again and again – *Kavei el Hashem* (Place your hope in Hashem), *chazor v'kavei* (and keep hoping). If a person keeps hoping, again and again, that he *can* have a connection with the Creator - he has hope in getting there.

People have all kinds of hopes in their life for various things. But the root hope in the soul is the hope to return to the soul's source, Hashem.

Tikvah/hope is really a power that our *seichell*/intellect cannot understand. Our intellect does not understand the concept of hope, and it rationalizes with you, telling you that there is no point in trying when something doesn't seem possible. But when we use our power of *tikvah*/hope, we can connect ourselves to the point that is beyond our intellect, and then we will be able to see how it really *is* possible...

For example, one of our 13 principles of faith is that we believe in the coming of Moshiach. Not only do we believe he will come, but we must keep hoping in his arrival, “even though he tarries, I await for him.” Our intellect cannot fathom how we can possibly await Moshiach, since he has not come for all these years. But through our power of *tikvah*, we can access our hope that he will come. When a person has *tikvah*, he connects himself to the reality of spirituality – he receives the power to hope in Moshiach, because he places his hope in Hashem, continuously.

When a person doesn't reveal the power of *tikvah* in his life, he has no source from where to draw his vitality from. This is true even if he knows intellectually about the concept of *tikvah*, but he hasn't yet revealed it yet as an active ability in his life.

When a person does not reveal *tikvah*, he is placing himself in the same situation as a slanderer, who does not have hope. Without *tikvah*, a person has no source of vitality in his life; he lives a life that is like death. Similarly, *Chazal* say that the wicked are dead while being alive. It is because the wicked have separated themselves from the true source of vitality, thus, they have no life-sustaining energy, so they are considered to be dead.

Without revealing the power of *tikvah*, a person lives life in one big slumber. A person needs to actually reveal his power of *tikvah*, to draw forth vitality from it.

Revealing Hope

Each of us has two parts to our life – there are things we have, and there are things we don't have. On one hand, *Chazal* say that we need to be *someach b'chelko* – to be happy with our lot, to realize what we have. But on the other hand, we also need to reflect on what we are missing in our life. We need to reflect on the pain we have from our life and what to do about it.

Now, if a person's feelings are deadened, he simply does not reflect at all about his pain that he has in his life. But if someone has even a little bit of feeling still left in him, he feels pain from his life. What should he do about the pain? One must reveal the power of *tikvah* – to place hope in Hashem that ***Hashem can take you out of any situation.***

'Hope' does not just mean that a person simply acts 'hopeful' in his life and he begins to hope for things. Hope is not a purpose unto itself; rather, it is drawn from our hope in Hashem. When we place our hope in Hashem that He can take us out of any situation - that is where we draw forth our power of hope.

Our Rabbis wrote that once a person reveals his power of *tikvah*, he is found with the light of Hashem - “*For In the light of Your face we walk.*” Similarly, *Chazal* say that if someone properly mourns Jerusalem, he will merit to see it rebuilt. The depth of this is that when a person has *tikvah* in Hashem, when he truly has *tikvah* in Hashem, he will feel the reality of Hashem more and more, according to the amount of *tikvah* that he revealed.

Coming Out of Emptiness

When a person doesn’t access the power of *tikvah*, he remains with a deep empty void in his life, a *chalal* (emptiness). If a person never feels this inner emptiness, then all kinds of “snakes and scorpions” can enter, for when the “pit is empty and there is no water in it”, *Chazal* say that “snakes and scorpions” will enter it, a reference to evil influences that can come upon a person when he has a spiritual emptiness in his life.

But if a person is a bit of sensitive, he can feel what’s going on inside himself a little, and he feels the emptiness. From that very feeling of emptiness, though, he can awaken his power of *tikvah*. In fact, it precisely because he has discovered his inner emptiness that he can reflect on the spirituality that is lacking in his life, and he will then seek to fill the void.

What does it mean for a person to place his *tikvah* in Hashem? It means that one’s **entire** hope should be in Hashem, and not to simply ‘hope’ for other things to go well. This is the true description of an inner kind of life – that we should place our entire hope in Hashem, and to realize that we have no other source of hope.

The first step is for a person to at least feel how he is somewhat empty inside. After reflecting upon the emptiness, the next step is for a person to focus on how the source of hope is Hashem.

There are people who succeeded to become more hopeful in their life, but they don’t reveal that the source of hope is Hashem. They become more hopeful in that they feel that maybe others will be able to help them. But this is not what it means to reveal the power of *tikvah*. **Tikvah is only when a person realizes that his only source of hope can come from Hashem.** This is because hope is not just another power of the soul. It is the root of how we connect to the Creator.

The word *tikvah* comes from the word *kav*, a “straight line.” When a person puts himself on a straight line with Hashem, so to speak, he can move up towards the end of the line and see how the source of his hope is only Hashem.

When We Feel Like We Are Missing Things In Our Life

If a person ever feels that he's missing something in his life, he should know the following. Whenever we feel lacking in our life, the only thing we are really lacking is to feel Hashem as a reality in our life. Any feeling of lacking in our life can only stem from a lack of feeling Hashem. So if we ever feel like we lack something, it is a reminder that we lack one thing alone: that we need to feel Hashem as a reality in our life. **If the reality of Hashem would fill our heart, we would never feel lacking at all about anything.**

So when we feel like we are missing something in our life, we need to make a deep reflection and ask ourselves where this feeling is coming from. Why do I feel like I am missing such and such in my life? *It can only be because I am missing the feeling of the reality of Hashem in my life.* After reaching this conclusion, use your power of *tikvah* and place your hope in Hashem that it is only He who can fill the emptiness you are feeling.

The words here are really simple, but at the same time, they are very far from most people in this generation. Most people feel that they are missing things in their life and they feel somewhat empty inside, but they often do not know what the source of the emptiness is. We must be able to feel what the source of all inner emptiness is. The soul inside us is never satisfied with any of the things found on this world, for it comes from Above.

In Conclusion

This is a description of an inner life. The opposite of this are those who are deemed hopeless, the slanderers, whom we *daven* about in *Shemoneh Esrei* that they have no hope – ולמלשינים אל תהי תקוה.

The inner way to live life is to continuously place our hope in Hashem, and only in Hashem. When we continuously place our hope in Hashem, we will then feel Him more and more in our heart. When the reality of Hashem fills the entire heart, one has *d'veykus* (attachment) with Hashem, and it is then that he is truly considered to be alive, as it is written, ואתם הדבקים בה' אלוקיכם חיים כולכם היום.

101 | *Living From Our Emunah**Those Who Don't Believe*

We *daven* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, וְכַל הַמֵּינִים כְּרַגַע תֵּאבְדוּ – that those who deny Hashem should be destroyed. Someone who denies Hashem (a “*min*”) is liable to the death penalty, and in the times of the Gemara, he would be put to death. On a deeper note, though, someone who denies Hashem is already considered to be dead, because he lives a deathlike kind of existence.

Our whole life-sustaining energy, our *chiyus*, comes from having *emunah*; as it is written, “*And the righteous man shall live by his faith.*” We need *emunah* in order to live. Someone who doesn't believe in Hashem not only forfeits his *emunah* – he has basically forfeited his life. Since he has cut himself off from having *emunah*, he has cut himself off from his Source of life. So his death penalty is not a punishment – it is rather a direct result of not having *emunah*.

A person who doesn't believe in Hashem, at his worst level, is called a *min* or a *kofer*, a complete denier of Hashem. Most of us, however, who keep Torah and mitzvos, do not ever sink to such a level as to outright deny Hashem. But, deep down, even those who keep Torah and mitzvos struggle with their *emunah*.

Chazal say that Noach was someone who “believed, yet didn't believe.” He believed in Hashem, but he was somewhat weak in his *emunah*. This can be applied as well to most of us who keep Torah and mitzvos.

We believe in Hashem, of course; in our minds, we all believe in Him. But often, the knowledge about Hashem in our minds has not yet been internalized in our heart. “*And you shall know today, and you shall return the matter to your heart.*” The *emunah* that we know in our mind must become internalized in our heart.

The Ramban says that there are two levels of belief – *Emunah* (faith) and *Bitachon* (reliance). *Emunah* is what we know of Hashem in our minds, and *Bitachon* is when we internalize it in our heart and we actualize our *Emunah*.

If a person does not seek to constantly work on his *emunah* each day of his life, if he does not try to instill *emunah* in his heart, then his *emunah* will be weak. He will be someone who “believes, yet doesn't believe.” This is in spite of the fact that he grew up on the knees of Torah and mitzvos. He might know in his mind about Hashem, but he does not necessarily feel that way in his heart....

The Contradiction Inside Us

If a person really thinks about it deeply, he can discover that there is actually a tremendous contradiction going on between his brain and heart.

For example, a person might know, intellectually, that Hashem is the Provider of the world, yet he still worries about how he will have what to eat tomorrow. *Chazal* say that such a person is of those who are weak in their *emunah*.

A person knows, intellectually, that everything is from Hashem, yet he still can have an angry outburst. *Chazal* say that an angry person is like someone who commits idol worship; what is the connection? It is because someone who gets angry has temporarily lost his belief in Hashem, which is the same idea as idol worship, in which a person loses belief in Hashem. No one will become angry directly with Hashem, *chas v'shalom*; usually, when a person gets angry, he doesn't get angry with Hashem. But he doesn't attribute how everything comes from Hashem. In that sense, it is as if he is committing idol worship.

If a person doesn't seek to work on his *emunah* day by day, by default he will naturally encounter contradictions between his mind's knowledge with what he feels in his heart. He won't feel in his heart the *emunah* that he knows of in his mind. A person must make a self-introspection and become aware of this contradiction going on inside himself. He must realize that although he knows in his mind that Hashem runs the world, his heart doesn't feel that way yet. He does not yet feel his *emunah*; it hasn't yet been internalized.

Of course, we are all *maaminim* (believers), but often it's only in our brains, and we don't feel *emunah* in our hearts. The Steipler zt"l said that there are many levels to *emunah*; there are rooms within rooms to *emunah*.

The first commandment was, "I am Hashem your G-d." This commandment was the root of everything; Rav Saadya Gaon says that it contained the entire Torah. It is because *emunah* in Hashem is where we get our vitality in life from. If a person lives from his *emunah*, he lives the level that we were at Har Sinai. He is connected to the level of being at Har Sinai. The Torah that he learns is the kind of Torah that we received at Har Sinai, a Torah connected with *emunah*. But if a person doesn't have *emunah*, even if he always learns Torah, his Torah learning isn't connected with the level of being at Har Sinai.

If a person never reflects, then it's very possible that all of his "emunah" is only intellectual. He might even think that *emunah* is just one of the 613 mitzvos, and he doesn't realize how central *emunah* is to our life. He views "emunah" as just another fact of life, and he is unaware that *emunah* is the very root of our life-sustaining energy.

We need to work every single day on our *emunah*! *Emunah* cannot just be another random piece of information to us. It is not a side thing. It's the root of everything!

We know that the greatest mitzvah is learning Torah. But does that mean that *Emunah* is not as important? Torah is greater than all the mitzvos, but *Emunah* is the root of the Torah!! Without *Emunah* we do not really have Torah. The Torah that we learn must be connected to Har Sinai, in which we had revealed *emunah*. *Chazal* say that if someone says that Torah is not from heaven, he is a denier of Hashem, in spite of the fact that he learns Torah. Because learning Torah isn't enough. It must be preceded with *emunah*.

Working On This Practically

It must be very clear to you that *emunah* is the very root of all life-sustaining energy. We must each take notice of the contradictions between our brain and heart and see that our heart still doesn't feel the *emunah* that we know of in our brains. And we must seek to instill *emunah* in our heart.

First, clarify to yourself that *emunah* in Hashem is the reality of our life, that it is the root which sustains us.

After that, notice the contradictions going on between your brain and heart. Think into all the situations of your life in which you don't yet feel *emunah* in your heart.

For example, if you get angry, it should bother you that you haven't yet internalized *emunah* in your heart. It should bother you that although you know in your mind that you need to have *emunah*, your heart still doesn't feel *emunah*, and that is why you were able to get angry. But do this in a constructive way: now that you feel bad about it, this can spur you on to improve yourself to work on bringing *emunah* into your heart.

You need to work on how your *emunah* can be felt in your **heart**. The *emunah* which you should seek is not a brainy, “**intellectual**” thing, and it is not “**inspirational**”. It is not an “**emotional**” thing either. Rather, it is what you **internalize in your heart**. When you internalize your mind's *emunah* into your heart, your **actions** will then reflect what you have internalized.

Where We Get Our Energy From

There is another point now which we will discuss, and it a point that is even more hidden than what was discussed until now.

Ever since Hashem breathed a spirit of life into man, it has been the nature of man to seek vitality (*chiyus*). Every person has a will to feel alive. All people want to be alive and to feel alive, and in that aspect, we all share a common denominator. But the difference between one person and another is in **how** alive a person is, as well as **from where** he is getting his vitality in life from. Any person who seeks truth should become aware of this concept.

We each have to reflect on where we are getting our *chiyus* from. Understandably, we also have to reflect on how much we are keeping the mitzvos and to make a necessary *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting), but such reflection is still only addressing the outer aspects of our life, our *chitzoniyus* (external layer). The inner kind of reflection we need to make is on our *penimiyus* (inner layer): “From where am I getting my *chiyus* from?”

A person who hears about this might respond, “What kind of question is this? Of course I have *chiyus*. I learn Torah, I *daven*, and I do all the mitzvos. That is where we get our *chiyus* from.” But if a person really thinks about it, he can discover from what he **truly** derives his *chiyus* from in life...

Everyone is getting their *chiyus* from something. Some people are getting their *chiyus* from their cup of coffee in the morning! Others get their *chiyus* from a compliment they received from someone that day, or from hearing a “Good Morning”. Others get their *chiyus* from a good meal they enjoyed that day; or from a fiction novel they are reading; or from a nice picture they looked at that day which was pleasing to the eye.

People get their *chiyus* from these things! But this is not true *chiyus*! Most people do not have a real *chiyus* in their life. They get their *chiyus* from various kinds of superficial pleasures. There are others who do seek *chiyus*, but they seek it with pursuing physical gratification or with running after honor. This is also a superficial kind of *chiyus*.

If a person is a bit more spiritual, he gets *chiyus* from his *davening*. This is wonderful, but it’s not enough. If a person is even more spiritual, he gets *chiyus* from learning, and if he is even more spiritual, he gets *chiyus* from learning for many hours on end. Maybe he gets his *chiyus* from a penetrating insight that came into his head when he learned in his morning *seder*. All of these things are wonderful, but they are not yet true *chiyus*!

We must derive *chiyus* from keeping the mitzvos, because it is Hashem’s will that we do the mitzvos. And we must derive *chiyus* as well from learning Torah, because it is Hashem’s Torah. But even if we get *chiyus* from mitzvos and Torah learning, there is a more inner source of *chiyus* which we need. **We need to mainly get *chiyus* from our very *emunah* in Hashem.** “*And the righteous man shall live by his faith.*”

We can get *chiyus* from the very fact that there exists a Master of the world. It is very possible that a person lived his whole life and he had *emunah*, but he didn't get *chiyus* from his *emunah*! Even if he believed in his mind about Hashem's existence, and even if he enabled that knowledge to penetrate into his heart, it is still possible that he doesn't derive *chiyus* from his *emunah*.

A person should therefore ask himself: "What makes me feel more alive? If I feel good from eating a certain kind of food I enjoy, or from a nice compliment I receive, or from a song I enjoy listening to, why don't I feel *chiyus* just from hearing the mention of Hashem?" It is written, "*To Your Name and to Your remembrance, my soul desires.*" Knowing that Hashem exists is not just a piece of knowledge; it is the source of all our energy!

This is what it all boils down to: if someone derives *chiyus* from knowing about Hashem.

Many people seek spirituality, and there are others who take their spirituality further and they seek to derive *chiyus* from Torah and mitzvos. This is a true kind of search, but, it's very possible that a person is very "spiritual", yet he is missing the main source of *chiyus* to have in life. A person needs to get *chiyus* from his *emunah* - from just knowing that there is a Master of the world.

A person might even be getting his *chiyus* from learning Torah, but he doesn't necessarily get *chiyus* from knowing that there is a Master of the World. This is the meaning of the prophecy, "[Even] those who hold onto Torah do not know Me."

The real way that our life is supposed to look like is, that when a person gets up in the morning, he gets *chiyus* from saying *Modeh Ani*; not just to "know" that there is a Master of the world, but as a knowledge that he can feel and sense. It is a knowledge that gives us pleasure. It is not just an abstract kind of knowledge that a person knows about from learning *sefer Daas Tevunos* of the Ramchal; it is a kind of knowledge that can be very pleasurable to us, and it must become the source of where we get our *chiyus* from.

107 | Your True Identity*The Difference Between A Tzaddik and a Chassid*

”על הצדיקים ועל החסידים” - We *daven* here for the protection of the *tzaddikim* (the righteous) and the *chassidim* (the pious).

What is the difference between a *tzaddik* (righteous person) and a *chassid* (pious person)? This is an age-old question, and our earlier *sefarim* give different answers.

The general answer to the question is, that a *tzaddik* does what is required of him according to the *Halacha*, while the *chassid* is person who goes beyond the letter of the law.

The Maharal has a different answer. He answers that a *tzaddik* serves Hashem out of fear, which is *shelo lishmah* (not for the sake of Heaven) while a *chassid* serves Hashem out of love, which is *lishmah* (for the sake of Heaven).

Rav Chaim Vital offers a different approach. He writes that a *tzaddik* still contains some degree of evil in himself, while a *chassid* is someone who has totally purified himself from any traces of evil, by cleansing himself out from any vestige of bad *middos*.

A similar concept is written about in *Sefer Tanya*, but with slightly different terminology: a perfectly righteous person does not even have to fight his *yetzer hora*, while a more average person still has fights with his *yetzer hora*. The first kind of person is called a *tzaddik* (righteous person) while the second kind of person is called a *beinoni* (average person).

We will focus here on the third approach, the approach of Rav Chaim Vital, which is that a perfectly righteous person is someone who has removed himself from all bad *middos*, and thus he is completely purified of evil, while a person who is not as righteous is someone who still struggles with his bad *middos* and thus still has some traces of evil going on inside himself.

Free Will, Above Free Will, and Below Free Will

This approach of Rav Chaim Vital is explained extensively by Rav Dessler zt”l, in *sefer Michtav M'Eliyahu*, who writes as follows: Every person contains within himself a “*chassid*”, a point of total purity, as well as a point of “*tzaddik*”, a point which still struggles with evil, and a point in which he usually succumbs to evil.

Rav Dessler further writes that we have a point of free will in ourselves – the power to choose between good and evil – which is the lower part of our self; and we also contain a higher power in ourselves, the point that is “beyond free will”, a point in which we see clearly what the right thing to do is, where we don’t have to struggle with evil. Our lower point, our point of free will, is called the “*beinoni*” within us, and our higher point, which is above our point of free will, is called the “*tzaddik*” within.

Rav Dessler continues there that we all have situations in life in which we struggle with making the right choices, and this is where we exercise our point of free will. We also have situations in life in which we never have to “choose” what the right thing is, because we see clearly what the right thing to do is, and it comes to us naturally. Each person has a different situation in life, and therefore, something which is a difficult test to Reuven might not be a test at all to Shimon, while the areas which test Shimon are not a test to Reuven. In addition, we all have a third part of our life, in which evil is mainly dominant, and this is “below” our point of free will, because there are parts in our life which we are naturally drawn towards the evil [and it is almost impossible for us to overcome these areas of evil].

In summary, these are the three parts to our self – our point of free will (in which we have an even struggle between good and evil), our point of above free will (in which we always do the right thing), and our point of below free will (in which we are powerfully drawn towards doing the wrong thing).

Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah

In similar terms, man has three layers of his soul – *Nefesh* (the lower part of our soul) *Ruach* (the middle point of our soul) and *Neshamah* (highest part of our soul).¹⁷

The *Nefesh* is the part in us in which we experience a pull towards evil, specifically the areas in which we usually succumb to the evil. Our *Ruach* is our point of free will, areas in which we are faced with an equal challenge to either choose good or evil. Our *Neshamah* is our point of total good, the areas in our life in which we never choose evil and we always choose good.

The Viewpoint From The Nefesh

If a person views himself as a ***Nefesh***, then he experiences life through the prism of *Nefesh*. He focuses on the areas in which he always succumbs to evil, and thus he comes to despair, because

¹⁷ There are also two parts that are “above” the soul, and these are called the *Chayah* and the *Yechidah*.

all he sees are his spiritual failings. The despair that he feels in his life can either be taking place in his conscious state, or it can be taking place only subconsciously, but either way, he is in a state of total despair towards his spiritual situation, because all he sees are the areas in which he always succumbs to evil.

He identifies himself as a *Nefesh*, and the *Nefesh* cannot free itself from evil temptations that come its way, so what will happen? He gives up on ever overcoming his *yetzer hora*, and he becomes lethargic; he doesn't care anymore, because he knows that he fails so many times anyway. He becomes broken inside and gives up on ever attaining spiritual progress.

This is what happens when a person doesn't know how to identify beyond the level of *Nefesh*. He feels that evil dominates his life, so he becomes hopeless and gives up. He feels like a slave to his temptations, and as *Chazal* say, "A slave does as he pleases." He feels helpless when it comes to trying to fight the various temptations of his *yetzer hora*.

He identifies evil as being his main place in life which he can't get past. Of course, he might be aware, intellectually, that there are higher parts to his soul, such as his *Ruach* and his *Neshamah*, but that doesn't necessarily mean that he **identifies himself** with those higher parts of himself. In the actual way that he **identifies** himself, he perceives himself as a "*Nefesh*" – a helpless human being who always succumbs to the evil temptations of the *yetzer hora*.

The Viewpoint From The Ruach

There are also people who identify themselves mainly through the prism of their *Ruach*, meaning, they are always in touch with their power of free will and they are aware that there is a lifelong battle with the *Yetzer Hora*.

However, the problem with this kind of person is that he cannot go beyond his point of free will. This is a kind of person who is constantly battling his *yetzer hora*; although it is commendable that he fights with his *yetzer hora*, the problem here is that his life is like one long war that never ends. It is wonderful that he keeps accessing his free will to choose good and not listen to his *yetzer hora*, but a person should know that life is not just about fighting the *yetzer hora*. Our life cannot be one long war; we need rest sometimes.

For example, we have the six days of the week, and then we have Shabbos, which is the time for *menuchah*, to be serene. When it comes to time, we understand that there is a time for *menuchah*, which is Shabbos. But what is not so known is that our soul as well needs *menuchah* as well. This is the depth of the statement of *Chazal*, "A Torah scholar is called Shabbos." A true Torah scholar is someone who has an inner peace, a point in his soul in which he can find

serenity from all the troubles of life. It is the inner point in the soul that is called *menuchah* (serenity).

Attaining Menuchah\Inner Peace

How indeed do we get *menuchah* (serenity)? Do we get it through going to sleep on a bed...?

We need real *menuchah* on this world. The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that our life consists of a lifelong battle with our *yetzer hora*. But that doesn't mean that we can never have *menuchah*! We need to find *menuchah* sometimes, so we can rest from our struggles.

Menuchah is the power we can receive on Shabbos. But we have a *yetzer hora* too on Shabbos; so how can we get *menuchah* through Shabbos? If someone has never thought about this, then any “*menuchah*” he has from Shabbos is not real *menuchah*; it is just laziness, which is not real *menuchah*.

Let us reflect on this. What, indeed, is the difference between the weekday and Shabbos? How does Shabbos give us *menuchah*?

The truth is that *menuchah* does not come automatically to us just from Shabbos. It is accessed through a deep place in our soul. It is when a person identifies himself with the point above his free will. This is the meaning of the “*Neshamah Yesairah*” (extra soul) we have on Shabbos – it is referring to the secret of *Menuchah*. (Understandably, there are levels to how much one can reach it).

The purpose of Shabbos is to give us *Menuchah*, for a person to identify himself as the pure point in the soul that is above free will. But during the six days of the week, one should not live completely in his point of *Menuchah*; if he does, he is just acting sleeplike, and his *Menuchah* is imaginary. During the week, we must deal with our various struggles. Only on Shabbos are we meant to access the point of *Menuchah*, in which we identify our point of above free will.

What is the *Menuchah* we have on Shabbos? It is not simply so we can sleep in order to have more energy for the rest of the week. That is the superficial outlook, and it is a very, very superficial kind of *Menuchah*. Shabbos is rather the time in which we can connect ourselves and identify ourselves with the point in our soul that is above our free will, the inner point in the soul which is totally pure and always chooses good. On Shabbos, we are able to feel that there is an inner point in our soul which rests from all the spiritual wars that we go through doing the week; we can feel that point in us in which no evil can penetrate, because it is totally good.

However, in order to reach such an inner place in our soul, we need to reflect and identify the three layers of our soul – our *Nefesh*, *Ruach* and *Neshamah*. Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l said that our entire *Avodas Hashem* is based on recognizing the forces in our soul. We must be very clear in the areas of our life in which evil is mainly manifest, the areas in which choose between good and evil, and the areas in which we naturally act good because we don’t have to choose.

For example, let’s say a person is aware that he has a problem with *gaavah* (haughtiness). If a person identifies himself simply as a *Nefesh*, then he thinks, “I am a *baal gaavah*”, and if he comes to feel lowly towards himself about it, he will develop an unhealthy feeling of low self-worth, which is called *shiflus*. Instead, what he should do is become aware of his shortcomings, but he can work on nullifying his ego more and more, and then he will be able to identify himself with the point that is beyond his pull towards *gaavah*.

When To Access The Point of ‘Menuchah’

However, we must only access this pure point in our soul of above-free will only at certain times. We must not live in it all day. The general idea is that we need to develop in ourselves a place of *menuchah* in our soul, which we can keep returning to after we encounter any spiritual struggle.

We must realize that although we have a lifelong battle with the *yetzer hora* – as the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes – and each person has his own particular struggles in life with his *yetzer hora* – we must at the same time be able to get in touch with our inner point of *menuchah*, so that we will have a place to “rest” from our battles sometimes.

Shabbos is the main time where we can feel this *menuchah*, but even during the week, we need to access it as well, though not as much. Even during the week, we need to uncover some degree of *menuchah*. This is hinted to when we say each day the *Tefillah* of the “*Yom*”: “Today is the first day of the Shabbos.” There is some degree of Shabbos which can be found even during the days of the week. It is the point of *menuchah*. The main time to access *menuchah* is Shabbos, but even during the week as well, we need to access it at times.

Feel Your Inner Point of Serenity, Every Day

Practically speaking, every day, we need to have some time aside to feel our inner point of *menuchah* - in which we feel the purity of our *neshamah*, which contains nothing but “*splendor and joy in His palace.*”

Every day, we must be able to connect ourselves somewhat to this inner place in our soul; but as we said, this should not be practiced for the entire day, because there is a concept that the weekday should not be made into Shabbos.

Shabbos – The Time of “Rest”

On Shabbos, we have *menuchah*. People simply understand that *menuchah* on Shabbos means to rest from work, and indeed, this seems to be the implication of *Chazal*, that on Shabbos we have to look at all your work as if it is done. But there is a lot more to the *menuchah* of Shabbos than just physical rest from working.

It is the time in which we can connect to the inner place in our soul, the point in our soul which is completely good – our *Neshamah*, which is above our *Nefesh* and *Ruach*. We must connect, inwardly, to this point in our soul. We can then use that point to nurse from it a deep attachment with Hashem, for all our life.

In Conclusion

If a person never reflects about these concepts, he lives an animalistic kind of life. We must realize the source of our vitality, mainly on Shabbos, and at times during the week as well. But the point is that we have to realize that life is not just about struggles with the *yetzer hora*. We need some *menuchah* as well from our struggles and wars, and for this we have Shabbos. Our life cannot be one long war that never ceases.

Those who are involved deeply with their *Avodas Hashem* must understand this point very well. Although it is true that “A stubborn person is successful”, as the Vilna Gaon says, still, being stubborn in *Avodas Hashem* is not all there is to *Avodas Hashem*. We must all recognize the point in us which is completely good, the point in us which never struggles when it comes to certain areas of spirituality. This point is deep down within each and every one of us.

118 | *Yerushalayim In Place, Time and Soul*

Yerushalayim In Place, Time and Soul

ולירושלים עירך ברחמים תשוב – We ask Hashem in this blessing to rebuild *Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem).

Mentioning Yerushalayim is one of the pillars that uphold the Jewish people. The Gemara says that when a person *davens*, he should direct his heart to Eretz Yisrael, and when *davening* in Eretz Yisrael, one should face Jerusalem (and to the Beis HaMikdash, and within that, to the Kodesh Kodashim).

The Root of Jerusalem is Pesach

There were three times a year when we would trek to Jerusalem – by the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos. Pesach is the root of all festivals, for it was when we first left Egypt. *Targum* says that the first time we sacrificed the *korbon pesach* was in Jerusalem, so our connection to Yerushalayim in time began on Pesach.

Today we have no Beis HaMikdash, but we have the spiritual light of the *Yomim Tovim* (festivals) in its stead. On Pesach, we left Egypt, and that spiritual light is still here, for each year we must imagine that we left Egypt.

We did not just leave Egypt to go to Eretz Yisrael - it was the time when we brought the *korbon pesach* (paschal sacrifice); it was the first time that we connected to the Beis HaMikdash. This is the essence of *Chodesh Nissan*, and specifically the festival of Pesach.

Holiness In Place, Time, and Soul

There is a concept of our Sages called “World, Time and Soul,¹⁸ that everything exists on three planes – in place, in time, and in our own soul. With regards to reaching holiness, there is holiness in a certain place in the world, as well as in a certain time of the year, and in our own soul.

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The holiest place in the world is the *Kodesh Kodashim* (Holy of Holies) that was in the *Beis HaMikdash*. The time of holiness is found in the festivals. Holiness in our soul is reached when we are in Eretz Yisrael.

Our Sages state that Hashem first created Jerusalem, then Eretz Yisrael, and the rest of the world spread out from there. Jerusalem was the first place that was created. We find this with regards to our own soul as well. The Gemara¹⁹ says that Adam's head was created from Eretz Yisrael, and to be more specific, from Jerusalem (and the rest of his body was taken from Bavel).

We ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei* to rebuild the *Beis HaMikdash*. Just as there can be war on the place that is Yerushalayim - so can there be a 'war' on the Yerushalayim in our soul.

Yerushalayim In Disgrace

The nations of Edom and Yishmael are dominating Yerushalayim today. The city of Hashem lies in disgrace. The nations dominate here and contaminate its holiness!

The place of the *Kodesh Kodashim* itself is taken over by Arabs. And now, in our soul as well, 'Edom\Esav' and 'Yishmael', which are two root forces of evil in Creation, are also dominating our *Kodesh Kodashim* within: the evil is attacking our own souls.

The Sages revealed that there are three openings to Gehinnom. One place is in the desert; another place is in the ocean, which Yonah HaNavi saw. Another opening to Gehinnom is Yerushalayim itself. Yerushalayim is the place that unifies the tribes of Yisrael together, but when it is disgraced through impurity, it becomes the opening to Gehinnom!

This is true in the physical Yerushalayim as well as in the 'Yerushalayim' in time and in soul. Esav and Yishmael are dominating Yerushalayim, and now the 'Erev Rav' is dominating the Yerushalayim in the time, by controlling it and all that surrounds it. And in our soul as well – just as the place of Yerushalayim has become disgraced – so has it become lowered in our soul.

Vacations On Pesach – A Disgrace To The Holy Time of the Year

The three festivals, and especially Pesach, is the 'Yerushalayim' of time. The 'Yerushalayim' of today's times has been lowered and disgraced from the true Yerushalayim that it is supposed to be.

1919 Sanhedrin 38a

It's hard to believe this, but this is the painful reality we are in, when we are in the era preceding Moshiach: people who consider themselves to fear Hashem are using advertisements to sway the world of Torah, *bnei Torah*, to take vacations on Pesach to – to where? To **Austria!** And it says there is a *hecsher* there with *mehadrin*. They aren't advertising this to wayward people. They are advertising it to thousands of *bnei Torah*.

This is a total disgrace to our holiness. It is the time of Pesach, when we are supposed to mainly connect to the holiness of Yerushalayim, but now, the holiness of this time has been lowered and disgraced. Only the Angel of Death could devise this! Where is the holiness of the special times going?

Remembering 'Yerushalayim'...

We ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei* to return Yerushalayim to us and rebuild it. One part of this request, which is the simple meaning of it, is to remember the destruction that took place here hundreds of years ago. The other part of this, which is deeper, is to remember the time of the three festivals - which are now being disgraced.

The holiness of this time, even in Eretz Yisrael, is being dominated by the forces of Esav, Yishmael, and Erev Rav. Instead of the rebuilding of Yerushalayim, a *ruach shtus* (spirit of folly) has come here. Anyone with a little *daas* is bothered by how such a thing can happen here.

Our head was created from Yerushalayim. People are basically falling from the head they were created from! The holiness of this place, this place which is the 'beginning' of all holiness, is being totally and utterly disgraced, and in the very month that is called the 'beginning' all the months.

The very place in which holiness manifests has become disgraced. We are being severed from our own heads [on a spiritual level]. The holiness of the three festivals is being concealed, and now we face an opening to *Gehinnom*, right here in Yerushalayim. When Yerushalayim is contaminated from its holiness, it goes from being the holiest place in the world, to become an opening to *Gehinnom*.

The air of Eretz Yisrael makes you grew wise; the wise scholars of Jerusalem were regarded to be the wisest, according to our Sages. But the holiness of Jerusalem, when it is damaged, causes the greatest confusion to our minds - whether it is being destroyed in place, time, or soul.

We ask Hashem to return Jerusalem to us. This does not mean that we simply want this physical Jerusalem to be rebuilt; there are some people, *rachmana litzlan*, who erroneously think that they have already merited to see the rebuilding of Jerusalem just because they see it.

Yerushalayim: A Perfect Place – Or An Opening To Gehinnom

Yerushalayim is from the word “*yarei shaleim*”, one who “fears perfection.” The *Ramchal* describes this as *yiras hashheleimus* – the soul’s demand for perfection.

This is what is behind our prayer to rebuild Jerusalem: that perfection be restored. The “Yerushalayim” in our soul is when a person strives to become an *adam hashaleim* (spiritually perfected). By mentioning Yerushalayim all the time – not just superficially, but to think about its real concept – that is how we can truly seek *shleimus*.

But when the holiness of Yerushalayim is being lowered, disgraced, and concealed from us, instead, the opposite of *shleimus* comes. It is not just an absence of *shleimus*. Rather, the antithesis to *shleimus* comes here. The holiness of Jerusalem is opposed by the opening to *Gehinnom*, and then all the qualities of Jerusalem fall to the Other Side of Evil and are concealed.

Our Ultimate Choice To Make

Here we come to the true choice we must make. The main thing we must choose is *yiras shomayim*, for this is our whole *bechirah* (free will); for “everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven.” Our Rabbis wrote that in the era preceding Moshiach, the true power of *bechirah* will be revealed.

In previous generations, they didn’t have to use *bechirah* as much as we have to today. They didn’t face such evil like we are facing today. But now, when Yerushalayim is being disgraced and *shleimus* is concealed, the truth is very covered over from us. Things which were never done here, things which people used to be embarrassed of doing here, nowadays, it has all entered Yerushalayim.

Now comes the true test of *bechirah*. People are swaying *bnei Torah* to disgrace the holy times of the year by going to these foreign places in the world, and now we are being tested with the ultimate choice: what will we choose? Will we really choose Hashem’s Will and we seek *shleimus* - or the opposite of this, *rachmana litzlan*?

The previous generations never had to use *bechirah* like we have today. Today, we are being faced with choosing between good vs. the very *worst* kinds of evil. The depth of our power of free will is if we will choose to use our free will to become a *yarei shaleim* – to seek spiritual perfection; to *long* for it.

This is our inner and real meaning of our request to rebuild “Yerushalayim”. May we merit that rebuilding of “Yerushalayim” – speedily in our days. Amen.

126 | *The Sprouting of The Redemption*

Mashiach's Name is Tzemach ('Sprouting Forth')

את צמח דוד עבדך מהרה תצמיח – We ask Hashem to herald the coming of Moshiach, who is called “Tzemach” - one of the names of Moshiach.

We will reflect into why Moshiach's name is *Tzemach*. First, we will reflect on the following.

Sprouting and Growing Into Greatness

In Creation, there are four organisms – the non-living, the plants, the animals, and humans. Hashem created everything on the first day of Creation, and He split it up over the course of six days. Everything was initially in a state of *he'elam* (concealment) and then it was brought to its *giluy* (revelation). Hashem told the earth to sprout forth living things, but it was all created on the first day. It is just that on each day of Creation, different creations were revealed from their potential state into their revealed state.

Until Adam, no one was able to *daven* for rain, so nothing was able to sprout from the ground. Although Hashem told the earth on the third day to produce plants, it couldn't actually sprout forth until it received rain, which only came when Adam *davened* for it. Everything was already there, in its potential state, but it couldn't all be revealed. That was what the world was like in the original six days of Creation.

But when Adam sinned, he was cursed that he will return to earth. In other words, man fell from the level of the living (*tzomeiach*\living, sprouting organisms) into a lower level of existence – to the level of non-living things (*doimem*).

The lowest level of mankind began as soon as Adam sinned, and once again we returned to it after the sin with the Golden Calf. It appears to us that the lofty levels we used to exist on are unreachable, and that we have to come up with something new in ourselves in order to get those levels. We think that if we exert ourselves in Torah and prayer, perhaps we will be able to acquire new levels. Initially, we think we have to “acquire” greatness, and to work hard at developing new level of existence.

But this is the perspective of the non-living. The higher perspective, which is the perspective of the living, is to reveal our already existing potential.

The lower perspective is “I don’t have humility, purity, holiness, or Torah, so I need to acquire it.” This is the perspective of the post-sin state, and it comes from our element of earth which man sunk to after the sin, which causes sadness, which results laziness, and even worse, it causes despair. When a person feels far from the higher levels he knows he is supposed to reach, he becomes sad, and then he becomes lethargic and lazy to try to develop those higher levels, and this causes him to despair from any growth at all.

But the higher perspective to have is to focus on how we are really creatures that grow and sprout (and we used to be that way before the sin, so deep down, we are really like that). Therefore, the perspective is, when we need to reach higher levels, it’s not that those levels are far from us and we need to develop them. Rather, they are already in us, and we need to simply reveal our potential.

We are like a coal that already contains some fiery embers, and all we have to do is blow on the flames, where we our inner flame will blaze and then we can reveal all the potential inside us. The Ramchal writes that our Torah learning is like a fiery coal which we need to blow on and allow the fire that’s already in us to become bigger.

This doesn’t mean, for example, that need to finish more *masechtos* (tractates of Gemara). It is to realize that inside you, there is a fire *already* burning for achievement: to recognize the truth, that all the qualities you can reach are *already* contained in you. They are all there in their potential state - and it is our *avodah* to active them to their full potential.

Let Yourself Sprout

So at first, we look at ourselves as “earth”, and we feel that we need to fill our emptiness with Torah, mitzvos, and spiritual growth. This is the lower perspective we start out with. But we can access the higher perspective, which is to view ourselves as living, sprouting beings, which already contain the potential for growth, and all we have to do is to reveal our already existing potential.

To illustrate, when you plant a seed in the ground, it slowly grows more and more, until it becomes a ripe plant. So too, we need to identify ourselves as being closer to a sprouting plant than being a rock. A plant grows slowly, but the entire potential for growth exists in it, and it can slowly become more revealed.

Really, everything is already here. It appears to us that there is much that is missing, but we can compare this to the phases of the moon. At the middle of the month, we only see half the

moon, and it seems deficient. But it slowly becomes more and more revealed, and then we see it in full. The moon was never missing at all – it was just that we couldn't see it in full.

When the third *Beis HaMikdash* will come down from Heaven, its light will reveal that all is perfect, and that all deficiencies we see is rather like the missing side of the moon, which is not really missing, rather, it is unrevealed.

At first, we can only see what we have and what we are missing. When we see what we're missing, we simply feel that we are missing it. For example, if one hasn't learned Tractate *Zevachim* yet, he feels simply that he is missing *Zevachim*, and if he hasn't learned *Taharos* yet, he feels that he is missing *Taharos*. But the higher perspective a person can have is, all that you want to reach is already in you, in its potential, and you just have to reveal it. There is also an even higher perspective to have, which is that all perfection is really inside you, but it is covered over and you can't see it.

We all identify with the first level of understanding. The higher view, when accessed, is a revelation that Moshiach will reveal.

The Redemption – It's Slowly Sprouting

This is the meaning of **את צמח דוד** - Moshiach's revelation keeps "sprouting" – that is the meaning of why Moshiach is called *Tzemach Dovid*, because the redemption is constantly in the growth process, sprouting more and more. We ask that it come quickly, but even if it doesn't come quickly, *chas v'shalom*, it is still sprouting.

How To View Yourself

The Sages state that the current world lasts for 6000 years, and the final 2000 years of the world are called "The Era of Moshiach", which we are in. We are very close to the end of the 2000 years of this era. What does it mean that we are in the era of Moshiach during the last 2000 years of this world? It means that everything is already here, in its potential. It is all here, and our *avodah* is to reveal it from its potential state.

But a person is apt to have the lower perspective on himself, which is that "*you are earth*" – the level of the non-living organisms - and he doesn't realize that he is can really be like a plant that keeps sprouting.

All potential is inside us, some more and some less. Anyone who realizes this concept will discover a great inner happiness. Everything is in you! The entire Torah is in you!!

To illustrate the concept, a Torah scholar is someone who has revealed the Torah from his dormant state and he has revealed it outward from within himself. Someone who is not a Torah scholar is not missing the Torah – he is just not utilizing his potential, and that is why the Torah isn't being revealed from within himself.

The Sages state, “Who is wealthy? The one who is happy with his lot.” There is a great source of inner wealth inside you, and when you recognize it, it changes your entire perspective. Instead of looking at yourself like a poor person who has nothing, you can realize that all perfection is really inside you, waiting to be accessed.

When a person realizes this concept he is connected to perfection. Of course, you will still have to work hard at revealing your potential. But once you realize that everything is potentially inside of you, it will fill you with awesome inner happiness, and it will change your entire perspective towards your avodah, and to how you view the potential that exists in all Jewish souls.

This is the “sprouting of Moshiach” that takes place during this 2000 year era we are in. It keeps sprouting, and the more it sprouts, the more we can reveal our potential. This is actually the reason why there is so much revelation of Torah in the final generations.

The Higher Perspective

All of what was said so far here applies from the perspective of “before Moshiach”. But after Moshiach comes, a third, higher perspective will be revealed [which was mentioned briefly before]: that not only is the redemption slowly sprouting, but it's already here [and you can access this perspective already now].

The revelation of Moshiach will be *pisom*, “sudden” – the depth of this is that at first we thought our potential was slowly sprouting more and more, but when Moshiach comes, our perspective will instantly change. We will then be able to realize that all perfection is really inside us.

It is a much deeper and more truthful perspective than the one mentioned before. Moshiach will “suddenly” reveal that all the sefarim you needed to learn are in you all along! This change of perspective will come very suddenly to us.

“A person is considered to be blind until Hashem opens his eyes.” Our Rabbis wrote that even though we did not yet merit the general redemption, a person can still experience a personal redemption in his own soul – and this is unique to souls of the final era, for as the

redemption draws closer, its light begins to shine more, which means that we can access the light of the redemption in our soul.

If someone doesn't merit a redemption in his soul, he feels far away from Hashem. Hashem is but a '*Keil Mistater*' to him....

But when a person merits the personal redemption in his soul, he feels the meaning of *Es Tzemach Dovid*, that he has the potential for anything. He can feel how Hashem is not just outside of himself or in Heaven, but next to Him, in his heart – even though he hasn't actually gotten there yet fully.

From this perspective, though, when a person learns a *sugya*, he realizes that there are parts he can't understand no matter how much he exerts himself, and he still feels the concealment of Creation.

But when a person reveals the third, highest perspective in his soul, which is the revelation of Moshiach in his soul (it will be revealed fully to the masses in the general redemption, but it can be experienced on a private level as well), one can “suddenly” realize that although we live in a world of *he'elam*, the truth is: Hashem's existence still fills the entire universe. One will then “suddenly” realize that Hashem's existence fills everything - just, it is currently hidden from Creation.

So the inner perspective on redemption is not just to believe that Moshiach will come; he will definitely come, and we believe he will come even though he tarries; the inner perspective is rather that even now he can come, in our own private soul, once we access the perspective of the redemption, because perfection is already here; it is just hidden. It exists, and it is really here.

When Moshiach comes – may he come speedily in our days – he will open up everyone's eyes to see the higher perspective, the perspective we all had before the sin of Adam, and all we will see is *Shechinah*. Not only in death can we see Hashem. Even as we live, we can see the light of Moshiach's revelation, when we feel that everything is already here.

To clarify what this means, this is not to believe that “Moshiach” is really here – it means to believe and feel in the *revelation* that Moshiach will reveal, which is that everything is already here, and it is just hidden from plain sight.

In Conclusion

The words here might seem distant to someone who hears them. But if a person merits to understand the truth of these words, his entire perspective will change, from beginning until

end. He will feel like a new being, a personal resurrection from the “earth” he feels entrenched in and instead rise to the level of what it means to be a *tzomeach*, a living and sprouting being.

Even more so, it is not about realizing how the redemption keeps sprouting as we live. It is to realize that all deficiencies we see are like the missing half of the moon, which is not really missing. In the future we will be able to see how nothing is missing, but even now we can realize that nothing is missing at all, for everything is really all her. We cannot see how, but we can definitely conceptualize it.

This is the true way to await Moshiach – a whole different perspective. It is a clearer, truer view, and it is a more accurate way to await the redemption. The most perfected realization our soul can have is to realize how Hashem fills everything, and even though we can't see it, that's only because His revelation is currently hidden from view.

When our soul feels this, it will be filled with endless joy, and then, the soul will bask in the pleasure of Hashem's existence.

131 | *The Cure To Loneliness**Hashem Always Hears*

אלוקינו (אב הרחמן) שמע קולינו ה' אלו קינו – “Hear our voice, Hashem our G-d.” We ask Hashem in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* that our voice “be heard” by Hashem when we pray.

It is understandable that we ask Hashem to have mercy on us, as we describe later in this blessing. But why do we *daven* that our prayers should be heard? Hashem knows everything – nothing is hidden from Him. So He is obviously hearing us as we pray. Why then must we *daven* that our voice be heard? Does He not hear us?

Our Sages state that if a person doesn't have merits, his prayers aren't heard. For example, the wicked king Menashe, when he realized he was about to die, began to scream out to Hashem in prayer to be saved. The angels in Heaven argued with Hashem that because he has no merits, he does not deserve to be answered.²⁰ So it seems that Hashem doesn't always “hear” a prayer, because it depends on the accrual of merits.

However, the issue is not whether Hashem ‘hears’ the prayer or not. He hears every person praying. The entire issue is: Is a person talking to Hashem as if he would talk to a friend? The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that when a person prays to Hashem, he should talk to Him as when he talks to a friend.

Sensing The Existence of Hashem

Our original state, before the sin, was to talk to Hashem directly with no other calculations, and it was only after the sin that man become deviating and he lost the direct connection with Hashem. Man was created *yoshor*, upright, and after the sin, mankind fell into *cheshbonos rabim*, “many calculations” – we deviated from our original pure state. Our avodah is to return to *seichel hayoshor* (our original straight-mindedness) and leave the *cheshbonos rabim* (“many calculations”) we are in.

A person might know, intellectually, that Hashem is everywhere and that He can be reached anywhere through prayer, but it might be entirely intellectual knowledge, and it is not yet a feeling by him that can be sensed.

²⁰ Editor's Note: There is a dispute amongst the Sages if Menasheh's teshuvah was accepted or not.

To illustrate, when two friends are near each other, they can whisper; when they are far away, they have to call out to each other. When there is closeness, they talk together in a soft tone, even in a whisper, because they can hear each other.

When a person is *davening* to Hashem, he doesn't always realize that he's in front of Hashem. He might know that he's *davening* to Hashem and be aware of it, but he doesn't know that Hashem is right in front of him. Therefore, he doesn't think that Hashem is hearing him very clearly. He might *daven* louder because he thinks that *davening* louder will get Hashem to hear him...

The Kotzker Rebbe zt"l pointed out that the people of Ninveh, who were non-Jews, screamed out to Hashem in order to be saved - whereas a Jew *davens* silently to Hashem. A Jew is close to Hashem, therefore, he can whisper to Hashem and be heard, whereas a non-Jew, who is not close to Hashem, has to scream out to Hashem in order to be heard. Only a Jew possesses the ability of a silent cry in his prayers to Hashem.

Therefore, a Jew who needs to *daven* loudly to Hashem and doesn't understand that Hashem can always hear him is missing a basic understanding about the essence of a Jew.

Thus, when we ask Hashem that He should hear our prayers, it is not because He doesn't hear and we want to get Him to hear. It is so that we should realize that we are in front of Hashem and feel that Hashem is listening to us. The prayer of "Hear our voice" in *Shemoneh Esrei* is thus meant for *us* to realize that indeed, Hashem is hearing us.

When the light of our soul shines, we can feel Hashem's existence, and we can feel it all the time with more we reveal the light of our soul. This helps us feel that Hashem is hearing our voice.

This understanding is not achieved through intellectually reflecting about it; it is something you can palpably sense. You can reflect about *emunah* with your intellect and you can know what it is conceptually, but you can't feel a sense of Hashem just through your intellect. Rather, only when you feel and sense Hashem can you know what this experience is.

In order to achieve this, we should know that although *tefillah* is called *avodah*, first, we have an *avodah* to begin to recognize Hashem, and upon that our *tefillos* gain greater meaning. Generally, if we purify our existence through Torah and mitzvos, we reveal the light of our soul upon ourselves, and then we can recognize Hashem as a reality. This is true in the general sense. But besides for this, we must know the following.

Talking To Hashem More Often

One of the Sages said, “If only a person would pray the entire day.”²¹ What does this mean? It doesn’t mean to *daven* 24|7. Even the entire day wouldn’t be enough to sing all of Hashem’s praise. Rather, it means that although we *daven* three times a day through the three payers that our Sages established, that’s not enough to recognize Hashem as a reality - even though we talk to Hashem for three times a day. If a person only talks to Hashem when he *davens* three times a day, what happens? The rest of the day takes away from that state of closeness, and he loses all his gains, just as a person who keeps interrupting his Torah learning, which causes him to lose his Torah learning.

Besides for the three times a day we *daven*, our life is supposed to be filled with talking to Hashem throughout the day. That is the inner kind of life. This is how the entire day becomes filled with *tefillah* – to keep talking to Hashem throughout the day.

When you live with people in the house, you talk to them. So too, we live with Hashem in our life. The more we realize that, the more we can realize that we need to talk to Him all the time, and not just when we *daven* three times a day. Living with Hashem will result in talking to Him all the time. If one gets used to talking to Hashem, in turn, he can feel Hashem’s existence more and more. This inner way to live life is hidden from most people. Talking to Hashem doesn’t mean to only thank Him or ask Him for things. It means that because we live with Him in our life, that is why we talk to Him. That is how we include Him in all aspects of our life.

Rashi says that the Torah is called *aishes chayil* (woman of valor) because when one exerts himself in Torah, the Torah reveals its secrets, just like a wife tells her secrets to her husband. When a person lives a life of “*Ani L’Dodi V’Dodi Li*” (I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me), he talks to Hashem all the time, because he realizes that he lives with Him in his life.

This entire idea might sound strange to people when they first hear it. But when a person understands the truth of these words, when he absorbs them and internalizes them, he transforms - entirely.

Old Age and Loneliness

How painful it is to see the lonely people on this world. Many people on this world feel terribly lonely; even people who have family and friends still feel lonely inside. People seek more and more friends in the hope of trying to fill their loneliness, and it doesn’t help.

²¹ *Berachos 31a*

In the younger years, most people are very busy in whatever they are involved in – whether it is family or livelihood or health. People are bogged down from all their various responsibilities. But when people get older and the responsibilities of life lessen, and the body grows weak, then people begin to take their minds off the physical troubles of life, and instead, they begin to become more internal, and naturally, they feel lonely.

Older people will often get renewed vitality from their grandchildren who come to visit their house sometimes, or from kind people who come to visit them to cheer them up, but for the most part, they feel lonely all the time. Why is it that so many old people feel lonely all the time? It is because they never lived life correctly until now.

Old age is the greatest testimony to what happens to a person who never developed a relationship with Hashem when he was younger and never regarded Hashem as the main companion to have in life. When they were younger they were busy, so they didn't feel lonely, but when they get older and they have a lot less to do, the loneliness hits them.

Life is not mainly about having friends. It is about making Hashem into your companion – and He is our only true companion. He is the companion who was with us all along, from beginning until end, and He is the companion that we take with us to the grave.

If a person would only realize this, he won't need friends so much. Of course, he will still need to 'schmooze' a little, because the lower part of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*\animalistic layer of the soul) has some need to socialize. But a person who spent his time talking to Hashem a lot will *mainly* feel fulfilled from his relationship with Hashem, and he won't suffer from loneliness that much.

When old age comes, his mind will become more settled, as *Chazal* say, that “the minds of Torah scholars become more settled as they get older”. His body will weaken of course, but his soul will feel serene inside, because he doesn't suffer from the natural loneliness of old age. He has evaded it.

It is very painful to watch all the old people in this world, generation after generation, who get lonely. The old people get lonely, and their children have to come visit them so that they won't be lonely.

Of course, it's a *mitzvah* for the children to visit them; it is the *mitzvah* of honoring parents, and it is a kindness for them. But we must not think that this is an ideal kind of life for us to want to follow. We need to develop our life in a way that we don't get lonely when we get older.

Beginning To Talk To Hashem More Often

If a person gets used to talking to Hashem all the time, every day, every hour, at first it will be superficial lip service, but a person can keep doing it and he will find that he is more sincere each time. It is impossible to give exact guidance on how to talk to Hashem.²² But the general lifestyle should be that a person keeps talking to Hashem throughout the day. When you finish *davening*, talk to Hashem - simply! You can do it mentally or verbally.

Throughout the day, keep talking to Hashem about your problems and your joys. Just like a person includes his closest friend in all his issues, happy or sad, so can a person include Hashem in all aspects of his life, all the time. This chips away at one's loneliness.

Most people in the world are really lonely! Even people who have tons of friends can still be very lonely – deep down, they are lonely. Only someone who forms a deep connection with Hashem and realizes that Hashem is his true companion will be saved from the pain of loneliness.

There are many things a person will gain from talking to Hashem more often throughout the day. It will help a person come out of himself, more and more, and it will help him sense more and more of the existence of Hashem.

Thus, when we *daven* in *Shemoneh Esrei* that Hashem should hear our voice, it is to send ourselves a message, that we must realize that Hashem is our companion - who hears our voice. It is something we must deeply realize.

In Conclusion

Elul until Yom Kippur is 40 days of *tefillah*; Moshe *davened* for these 40 days consecutively. How can a person *daven* so much? It means to live a kind of life in which a person includes Hashem in all aspects of life, that he always talks to Him throughout the course of the day. That is how a person can reach forgiveness by the time it comes Yom Kippur, to be purified again and return to his original state, to leave the *cheshonos rabim* and return to the original, purified state of mankind: *yoshor*.

This is the true and inner kind of life – one who deeply connects to Torah, and to Hashem Himself, every day, all the time, in a true and inner way, forming a true bond with the Almighty G-d.²³

²² It may be helpful to see *Bilvavi Part 5 – “Fundamentals In Avodah”*.

²³ Refer also to the translation of the Rov's commentary on *Mesillas Yesharim* – “Your True Companion.”

138 | Hashem's Love For Us

Hashem Loves Us, Unconditionally

רצה ה' אלוקינו בעמך ישראל – “Desire, Hashem our G-d, Your nation, Yisrael.” We ask Hashem that we be desirable to Him.

This needs understanding. [In the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Shalosh Regalim we say:] “You chose us from among the nations, You loved us and desired us.” If we are already desired by Hashem, why do we ask in the blessing of רצה that Hashem should desire us?

It is understandable that we ask Hashem that our *avodah* and *tefillos* be desirable to Him, as we request later in this blessing. But our very essence as a people is clearly desirable to Hashem. If so, why we do ask Hashem here that He should desire His nation?

The simple understanding is that although Hashem desires us, we still pray for the future, that we always be desired by Hashem.

A more subtle answer, though, is as follows.

The Gemara brings a difference of opinion of when we are called “children of Hashem”. According to one opinion, when we do the will of Hashem, we are called children of Hashem, but when we don’t do the will of Hashem, we are not called children of Hashem. According to the other opinion of our Sages, we are always called children of Hashem, even when we sin.

The rule is that both opinions of our Sages are always correct; how can we reconcile the two opinions? It is as follows. The first opinion of the Sages is referring to the **outer** aspect of our relationship. When we sin, we are not called children of Hashem – with regards to the outer aspect of our relationship with Hashem. But in the **inner** essence of our relationship, we are always called children of Hashem, even if we sin.

Hashem loves us and desires us, but when we sin, the desire that Hashem has for us becomes covered over. It does not go away, *chas v’shalom*; it is just covered over and hidden. For this reason, when a person sins, his soul can feel that he is not called a child of Hashem, because the soul feels the concealment of Hashem’s desire for him. Still, Hashem always desires a person, but a person doesn’t feel the hidden love.

So in the depths of our relationship with Hashem, we are always called His “children”; He always desires us. It is just that we don’t always feel it.

When a person sins, when he doesn't do the will of Hashem, he feels the will of Hashem for him has become concealed. This does not mean that Hashem loses His *ratzon* for us; He always has a *ratzon* for us, but it can be covered over and hidden from us.

Thus, we ask Hashem, **רצה ה' אלוקינו בעמך ישראל** – we are asking Hashem that we should always feel His desire for us. We know that He always desires us, but we want to feel it openly, and we don't want to feel that His desire for us has become concealed. Therefore, we ask Hashem to “desire” us in the sense that it not ever be concealed and hidden from us; we want to feel it openly.

To Always Feel Desired By Hashem

But there is a deeper understanding as well.

There is no Jew who is perfect. Each person contains some area of imperfection; it is written, “*There is no righteous person in the earth who only does good and does not sin.*” There is always one area in which a person is never perfect in, and with most people, there are several areas in which we have our shortcomings in. But the point is that there is no person who perfectly does the will of Hashem; this includes our sins, as well as a general lack of perfection to how we do the mitzvos.

When a person realizes that he did not do the will of Hashem, what indeed should he think? What should be going through his mind?

Now, if we are talking about a person who has no *Yiras Shomayim* (fear of Heaven), then he doesn't care if he sins. He doesn't feel bad at all after he speaks *lashon hora* or when he neglects any of the mitzvos, and even when he commits worse sins than this, it doesn't bother him afterwards. This kind of person's feelings towards spirituality are very deadened.

But if someone is a feeling person, if he is sensitive to his spirituality, after he realizes that he did not do the will of Hashem, his natural reaction is that he will fear the punishment of sin.

A deeper kind of person, though, is someone who has a bond with Hashem, and it really pains him after he commits a sin, not because he is worried about the punishment – but because he is upset that he has been disloyal to Hashem, Whom he has a constant bond with.

Of course, fear of punishment is necessary, and it is the very first key to entering Avodas Hashem. But a person who treasures his bond with Hashem, after he realizes that he didn't do the will of Hashem, is much more bothered about the fact that he has been disloyal to Hashem. His life is based on his relationship with Hashem; when he realizes that he did not do the will of

Hashem, he feels no rest at this. Surely when he commits an actual sin does he feel that his bond with Hashem has become damaged.

How Should A Person React To His Spiritual Failures?

How, indeed, should a person react after he realizes that he did not do the will of Hashem? What is the proper perspective he needs to have towards this when he realizes it?

(It is true of course that sin creates a spirit of impurity to come upon the person; this is called *timtum halev*, “blockage of the heart”. This is especially applicable to a person who eats forbidden foods).

When a person cares about his relationship with Hashem, there are different kinds of reactions he has after he doesn’t do the will of Hashem.

One kind of person, after he sins, will feel, “Hashem doesn’t want me anymore.” This kind of reaction usually does not come to a person who commits a sin he considers to be small. But when a person feels he has done a major sin – especially if it’s already 2 or 3 times – he might feel, “Hashem does not want me.” This is the deep source of all of a person’s downfalls!

If a person feels that “Hashem doesn’t like the **action** that I did”, that would be a wonderful reaction. But when a person feels “Hashem doesn’t want **“me”** anymore, now that I’ve sinned” - this kind of thinking will make a person become disconnected from his relationship with Hashem.

Woe to a person who doesn’t do Hashem’s will and he doesn’t feel bad – but woe to the person as well who thinks Hashem doesn’t want him anymore after he sins.

After a person sins, *chas v’shalom*, he must feel two things at once. First of all, he must realize that he has gone against Hashem’s will, and that Hashem did not desire at all this evil action that he has done. But at the same time, he must also feel, no less and perhaps even more so, that although Hashem didn’t want this action he has committed, Hashem still wants him as a person.

These words are irrelevant to a person who doesn’t live a life of connection with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. But if a person is sensitive to spirituality – either because he was born that way or because he has begun to serve Hashem – he must deeply realize that we are always children of Hashem, even when we don’t do the will of Hashem. If a person doesn’t realize that Hashem always loves him, he is forfeiting his father-son relationship with Hashem, and then his lifestyle will not be a true Jewish one.

Misconceptions About Sin

How disturbing is it to hear from people who express (out of immaturity) words like: “Hashem doesn’t love me! Want proof? Because my life is so hard! I don’t have parnassah!”, or, “Because I don’t have a shidduch yet!” or, because “I’m a failure!” A person will come to the conclusion that “Hashem doesn’t love me”, *rachmana litzlan*.

One must get rid of this notion totally!

Of course, there is a healthy part in a Jew’s soul which feels distanced from Hashem after he sins. But this is the lower part of the soul. The higher part of our soul recognizes the essence of life, which is that our bond with Hashem is inseparable. Surely we must fear sin, and we need to fear it very much. But we must also realize at the same time that our bond with Hashem is not dependent on if we sin or not. We must know that even if a Jew would commit every sin, *chas v’shalom*, Hashem still loves him and desires him.

However, if a person doesn’t understand this concept well, then he will go in the other extreme, and he will always feel that Hashem desires him, and it won’t bother him when he doesn’t do the will of Hashem. So fear of sin is necessary in order for one to avoid sin.

But fear of sin is not all there is to our life. We need to reach the depths of our soul, that we are always children of Hashem. So we need fear of Hashem. We need to fear sin, as well as feel embarrassed from sin.

In Summary

If *chas v’shalom* a person falls to a sin, he must think two things. Firstly, he should feel ashamed at what he has done. But he also has to feel that Hashem still desires him, no less than before he sinned.

Hashem Is Always With Us

The truth is that there is no person who does not have failures in his spirituality. Most people are living “either or.” Either people don’t feel bad after they sin, which means they don’t have a bond with Hashem; or they fear sin and feel upset after a sin, but they have no bond with Hashem.

The proper way to live is for a person to build his connection with Hashem all the time. And when a person falls to a sin, even to the worst levels of sin, he must know that Hashem can take

him out of there! It is written, “*Hashem dwells among them even amidst their impurity.*” A person can feel the reality of Hashem even in the lowest and most depraved levels he falls to.

So on one hand, a person has to strengthen his fear of Hashem and avoid sin, but if he does fall, he must immediately summon forth his bond with Hashem and feel desired by Hashem in spite of what he has done. The more a person feels how Hashem is with him even after he has sinned, his feeling of this reality will deepen, until he begins to feel ashamed to sin when he’s tempted, because he feels Hashem’s Presence with him.

In the final generation which we live in, we are amongst the lowest levels of impurity possible. We are influenced by our surroundings. We are surrounded by *She’ol*, the lowest levels of spiritual impurity. But even if a person has fallen into the depths of *Sheol*, he must know that he is never disconnected from Hashem! Many people have fallen into sin and believe that they can’t come out. But one must know that his bond with Hashem is not conditional.

We must internalize that Hashem always desires us and connect to Him in any situation. This will help us realize that He is everywhere, even when we are in this generation, in which we are surrounded with so much evil. This helps a person gain a bond with Hashem that is unconditional.

One needs to feel how Hashem is always with him, and then he will feel the deep bond with Hashem which is unconditional.

Thus, when we ask Hashem that we always be desired – רצה ה' אלוקינו בעמך ישראל - it means that we want to instill in ourselves that we are always called children of Hashem, even when we are in a low spiritual level.

Why Do We Do The Mitzvos?

When these words are understood, a person’s approach towards Torah and mitzvos changes completely, for the good. It is to understand that since we are always called children of Hashem, the reason why we must do His will is not so that we should become close to Him, but because we simply have to do His will.

If we are only close to Hashem when we do the will of Hashem and fulfill the mitzvos, that would mean that we should only do the mitzvos on condition that we become close to Hashem. But the depth of life is to understand that we are always found with Hashem, even when we are in the depraved depths of *sheol*! We must do Hashem’s will even if we wouldn’t be close to Him! Because it should be our will to do His will.

Without this perspective, a person does mitzvos only to get close to Hashem, and if not, he wouldn't do the will of Hashem.

True, much exertion in Torah and mitzvos is needed in order to get to this high understanding, but once a person reaches there, the avodah of *lishmah* begins. It is when a person realizes that he must do the will of Hashem - even if he wouldn't be close to Hashem!

Whether one understands or not why he must do the will of Hashem, he can do the will of Hashem, because he feels connected to Hashem no matter what. He does the mitzvos simply because Hashem said to do them - not because he's doing them to get close to Hashem, rather because he is a child of Hashem, no matter what. "It is our will to do Your will."

These are two deep root abilities in our soul: when one sins he can know that he is still a child of Hashem, and when one does the mitzvos, he can do them not in order to get close to Hashem, but because he wants to do them *lishmah*, to do it because Hashem said so.

Of course, when this is done without any thought, a person simply does the will of Hashem because he knows "that's what Hashem commanded", but it can still be coming from his motivations of *shelo lishmah*, and perhaps he's doing it to get reward or for the spiritual bliss of feeling close to Hashem, which is also a kind of *shelo lishmah* (albeit deeper). But when a person is doing the mitzvos *lishmah* – when he knows that we are always children of Hashem, and that is why he does all the *mitzvos* - this is the true way to perform the will of Hashem. It connects a person to Hashem in every situation.

Advice For Overcoming Evil Temptation

This is all the meaning of the verse, "*Yiras Hashem tehorah, omedes lo'ad*" - "Fear of Hashem that is pure lasts forever." This deep perspective towards our life will be the kind of *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven) that can save a person from sin when he is tempted: when he remembers Hashem's Presence in front of him even as he's facing evil, for he knows that he is forever bound with Hashem, no matter when and where.²⁴

²⁴ In relation to this shiur, see *Tefillah #051- Healthy Self-Improvement*

146 | *Hodaah – Being Thankful**Hodaah: The Power To Admit\Thank*

מִוֹדִים אֲנַחְנוּ לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ – “We are thankful to You, Hashem our G-d.”

Three aspects are contained in this blessing: (1) The power in our soul to give *hodaah*/thanks, (2) To Whom we are giving thanks to (Hashem), and (3) What we are thanking Him for.

In this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we give *hodaah* to Hashem, and it is primarily about the very fact that He is our Hashem our G-d. There are also other things we thank Him for in this blessing. Since our soul is able to express gratitude, we are able to give thanks to another and describe what we are thankful for. But it all starts with the very power to have gratitude (*hodaah*) in the first place.

Two Kinds of Hodaah

There are two kinds of *hodaah*, as described in the works of our Sages.

1) One kind of *hodaah* is when one is “*modeh al ha'emes*”, to admit to the truth, which we find by Yehudah, who admitted to the truth by the episode with Tamar, in spite of the shame he endured.

2) Another kind of *hodaah* is when one expresses gratitude over something he has received. We learn *hodaah* from Leah, who the Gemara says was the first one to thank Hashem, when she thanked Hashem over the birth of her son Yehudah.

In the blessing of *Modim*, we mainly give *hodaah* to Hashem on what He gives us [which is the second kind of *hodaah*].

Obstacles That Prevent Gratitude

The power of *hodaah* in our soul is opposed by two other forces in our soul. A person doesn't want to admit to truth or be thankful due to *gaavah* (conceit), or due to *bushah* (shame).

A person's *gaavah* (conceit) causes him to avoid admitting to the truth. The Gemara says that it is not the way of the king to give and not receive. So too, when a person has *gaavah*, he considers himself like a sort of “king” who can't take from others.

Although there is also a holy power in the Jew's soul to feel like a royal king (*malchus*\royalty) - for we are all called "a nation of kings", still, this power can become distorted for evil, whereupon it becomes the evil trait of *gaavah*.

Another reason why a person can't admit or be thankful that he got something is due to his sense of shame. The Talmud Yerushalmi says one is ashamed to look at one whom he has received good from. Either he will avoid the person whom he received from, or, he will deny the good that he has received and be ungrateful.

To summarize thus far: A person doesn't admit to the fact that he received good because he doesn't like to receive, which can come from being conceited, which is the evil trait of *gaavah*. (It may also be, however, because he is spiritually refined, which is the holy trait of *adinus*\refinement in the soul). A completely different reason why one doesn't admit to the good he received because one might feel ashamed to receive good from others, and that is why he doesn't thank the person he received from.

Some people have the opposite problem: they keep taking from others²⁵, and they are not bothered with this at all. Most people, however, do not like to receive from others on a continual basis, and usually this is because one is too conceited to accept the fact that he sometimes needs to receive from others.

Being A "Mekabel": Recognizing Our Nature To Receive

It has been implanted into our nature to be a *mekabel*, a receiver. One must acknowledge this fact, for it is the way Hashem made us. All the people in the world need each other in order to survive. As long as we understand how to use our nature of being a *mekabel* and we use it in its proper limits, there is nothing wrong with being a *mekabel*. To the contrary, it is a holy part of our nature which we need to know how to use.

From the time we are born, we are complete takers. A child keeps taking from those who nourish him, especially from his mother, whom he depends on. A child also does not give to others. Perhaps there's somewhat of an aspect of giving, because he makes others happy when they see him. But for the most part, a child does not give, and it is an entirely a receiver, from its mother.

As a child gets older, he still continues to receive from his parents, but as he gets older and more mature, he learns how to become more of a giver. However, a person starts out life as a

²⁵ See *Fixing Your Water #004 – Solving The Desire To Take Pleasure*

complete taker. It is not for naught that Hashem made us that way. It is to teach us that we need to understand our nature of being a *mekabel*, a receiver.

On one hand, the nature of taking is the epitome of immaturity. Indeed, a person who uses his receiving aspect to only take from people, and never giving to others, is one who is living at a very immature level. But the holy side to this nature of taking is that Hashem implanted in us a nature to be a receiver, so that we will understand that we do have a need to receive from others [and thus be grateful for what we have received].

Although we need to learn the art of giving as we get older²⁶, we also need to know how to receive in the right way: we always receive from Hashem many kindnesses. It is not only from Hashem that we always receive. We also receive from all people. That is the way Hashem made the world: we all need each other. Thus, all of us inevitably receive from others. So it is just that we need to understand how to use our “receiving” aspect in the right way.

How Gaavah\Conceit Prevents Gratitude Towards People

When a person has too much *gaavah* (conceit), he won't want to receive from others, and he is not prepared to admit to the good that that he receives from others. He wants to feel “independent.” But if a person is aware that the design of Creation is that we must receive from others, he will have the proper perspective towards the nature of receiving: instead of viewing himself as a ‘king’ who does not like to receive from people, he will view another as a ‘king’ whom he must give royalty to.

In fact, when a person gets to Heaven, one of the questions he is asked is: “*Himchlachta es chaveircha*?”, “Did you treat your friend with royalty?” The way we make others ‘royal’ is by acknowledging that we have received from them. It is hard for a person to admit to this, because then he has acknowledged that the other is elevated over him, for he is acknowledging that friend was the giver, while he was the receiver. But that is exactly what it means to make others ‘royal’: to admit it when you receive from them, even though you feel lowlier about yourself in the process. One needs to come to terms with this, feeling humbled and lowered in the process, accepting that his benefactor has the more prominent status than he.

Of course, as we mentioned earlier, there are people who have the opposite problem, of constantly taking from others. They will not identify with the concept here. But when a person has the problem we are describing here, which is *gaavah*, the result is that he will not be

²⁶ The concept of “giving” is a famous concept developed by Rav Dessler in *Michtav M'Eliyahu (Vol I.): Kuntres HaChessed*

prepared to receive from others. He wants to feel independent from others. As for the things he needs to receive, he will deny the fact that he has received good from others, and even if he doesn't deny it, he will not really feel thankful to the other person, because it feels lowering for him to do so - and his *gaavah* won't allow him to lower himself.

If he doesn't want to receive from others because he is refined, that is fine. But if he's refusing to be thankful to others because he has *gaavah*, his *gaavah* won't allow him to accept that he has received from others, because if he will admit it, then he will feel lowered than another, and this will be too hard for him. He can't be thankful, and even if he does manage to mutter a "Thank You" to one who did a favor for him, it will only be said superficially. Deep down, he doesn't want to accept that he has received from another.

Even if he doesn't verbally deny the good he has received from another, and he'll even thank the other in person, deep down in his soul he recoils at the fact of having to receive from another; and as a result, he cannot feel truly thankful to another.

The Reason For Lack of Gratitude To Hashem

So far, we have explained why a person wouldn't want to express gratitude to another person. It is a large part of our task on this world to perfect our interpersonal relationships, as is apparent from the fact that a person will be asked in Heaven if he succeed in giving 'royalty' to his friends. But it is also a problem that can exist between man and Hashem.

A person might have too much *gaavah* in himself and therefore he will feel like he doesn't need Hashem in his life! He wants to feel independent - even from Hashem.

Why is it that people are not used to asking Hashem for their needs? One answer is because many people are simply not used to it. There are also more reasons why. But the inner reason is: Although we all believe in our minds, at least intellectually, that we need Hashem's help, yet, surprisingly, just because a person knows this, that doesn't mean he will actually beseech Hashem for his needs. Why? The answer is because when a person has a lot of *gaavah*, he will want to feel independent, thus he believes that he can manage without Hashem.

Of course, when he gets desperate and he's really suffering, he'll cry out to Hashem, just like any drowning person would. It is written, "*In your suffering, you find Him.*"²⁷ But as long as a person isn't desperate for help, his *gaavah* might be so strong that he doesn't turn to Hashem for

²⁷ *Devarim 4:30*

help. He might give 150 reasons why he doesn't ask Hashem for help. But the main reason is because he's not aware that it's because of his *gaavah*.

The Prerequisite To "Modim"

The middle 12 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* are all requests, in which we acknowledge that we receive from Hashem our many needs. In the blessing of *Modim*, a person begins to thank Hashem. But in order to thank Hashem, one first has to realize that he receives things from Hashem in the first place.

If a person is willing to accept the fact that he receives things from Hashem, then upon that, he will be able to thank Hashem. But if a person is not prepared to accept this fact, he doesn't have the basis of thanking Hashem. Except for when he's desperate, he doesn't want to admit that he needs to receive things from Hashem.

Of course, the other extreme is bad too: those who take from others on a continual basis, because they are so used to taking that they take from others even when they don't need, such as people who take all the time from *gemachim* when it comes Yom Tov time, taking from all of these *chessed* organizations, whether they need it or not. That's a different problem which we are not addressing here.²⁸

But when a person has the opposite problem, of not being able to admit that he receives from Hashem, he has a problem of *gaavah*, and he won't be able to thank Hashem either. He doesn't ask Hashem for help, and he has many reasons why not, but it's really because he has *gaavah* towards Hashem.

It's astounding that a person can feel independent even of Hashem! It is because he simply does not want to accept the fact that he needs to receive things.

We are born as receivers, where we keep taking from those around us. The root behind the *mitzvah* of honoring parents is due to the fact that we receive so much good from them, thus we must be grateful to them and honor them greatly in return. Even as we get older, we still need to receive from others; there's no way out of it. Hashem made us like to show us a *mashal* (parable): that we need to recognize how much we receive from Him, in order to be able to thank Him upon that recognition.

In *Borei Nefashos*, we say, "*Borei Nefashos Rabbos V'chesronan*" – "The Creator of many creations and all their deficiencies" - the fact that we are lacking is part of our essence, so that we

²⁸ See *Fixing Your Water #004 – Solving The Desire To Take Pleasure*

can realize how much we need Hashem, for we lack so many things. If we have the proper understanding towards our nature to receive, then we will realize that we need to receive from Hashem, and then we can be able to thank Him. If we realize that we entirely take from Hashem, we can then realize that we must entirely be thankful to Him, for He gives us everything.

So when we take from other people to get what we need, it's a lesson for us to realize how much we need Hashem. In order to really feel thankful to Hashem, we first need to realize that we entirely receive from Him – and then we can thank Him, from that recognition.

The Root of the Shame of Receiving

The second obstacle which prevents us from feeling gratitude which we mentioned is not because of *gaavah* \conceit, but rather, due to *bushah*, shame. Now we will analyze this more deeply.

A person might not want to be thankful to one whom he has received good from, not because he is haughty, but because he is embarrassed to look in the other's eye after receiving from him. *Chazal* say it's more praiseworthy to give private charity than to give it him directly, because when it's given directly, the receiver is ashamed.

Why is one ashamed to receive from others? It is rooted in man's deep nature to give to others. When one receives from another, inwardly he will feel ashamed, because it goes against his own nature to give. As a person matures, he gives more. Thus, he is ashamed when he has to receive, because it goes against his deep nature to give. For this reason, a person might also feel ashamed that he needs to receive from Hashem. The Ramchal writes that our power of free will was given to us so that we won't feel ashamed when we get reward.

What will a person do about the shame he feels when he has to receive good from others? He might avoid the one whom he has received from, because he is ashamed. Or, he will give back good to the other person and express *hakaras hatov* (gratitude). A third, deeper reaction is for him to recognize that good was given to him. This is really the meaning of *hodaah* - to recognize that good was given to you. Upon that recognition, you can feel grateful.

The Depth of Straightening Up After Bowing By Modim

By *Modim* we bow, but we also straighten up after we thank Hashem, because after we recognize the good that Hashem does for us, we can then recognize Hashem. In a deeper sense,

this reflects the reward of the future, when after we realize how much Hashem has done for us, we will then be able to truly recognize Hashem - the purpose that will be fully realized in the future.

This is the deeper implication of the concept of *hakaras hatov* (expressing gratitude). It is not just about giving back something to the one whom you received a favor from. It is about recognizing what you have received.

How To Be Grateful

Making this practical, when you receive good from another, you should thank him because you recognize that you have received something from him. From that place in yourself, you can thank someone properly.

So the very first step in gratitude is to first recognize that good was given to you - as opposed to quickly giving something back to the other. This is because in order to thank another, first you need to realize what you have received from another, and to come to terms with this acceptance.

Chazal state that Hashem as a treasury of “*matnas chinam*” in His Heavenly storehouses. The deeper meaning behind this is that when we recognize that we need to receive from Hashem, we can then receive all that He can give us.

A true friend is not just someone who gives to his friend; he is ready to accept the fact that he receives good from his friend. When you do receive from another, you should recognize that you have received from him, and then thank him. This trains you to become more sensitive to the concepts of taking and giving. Realize that you have received, but instead of feeling ashamed at this, accept the fact that your friend is now elevated above you, for he has given to you. In that you way, you truly make your friend “royal” and you are honoring him as you should.

Herein lays the key to thanking Hashem. In order to feel grateful to Hashem, we first need to be able to accept that we receive from Him.

The Depth of Bowing By Modim

In *Modim*, the first thing we thank Hashem for is that He is our G-d. What we see from this is that when we recognize that Hashem is our G-d - while we are human beings who receive from Him - that is the basis of how we can be lead to thank Him. So we are not just thanking

Hashem simply that He is our G-d. It is because the basis of thanking Hashem is to first realize that we receive from Him, for He is G-d, whereas we are human and we need Him to survive.

This gives us new depth of understanding in why we bow by *Modim*. One reason is to lower ourselves in humility before Him. We feel ashamed that we have to receive. But according to the deeper understanding that we are explaining here, we bow by *Modim* because in order to thank Hashem, we first need to realize that we are humans who need to receive from Him, the King of all kings, and thus we bow to Him.

The Balance Between Giving and Receiving

One needs to know the balance of how much he should give to others versus how much he should take from others. One has to acknowledge both abilities and validate that each of these is part of our human nature. If a person doesn't want to accept that we are designed this way – the fact that we need to both give as well as to receive – then he is in error about a major part of our human design.

But when one knows the balance between giving and receiving, he understands that each of these is an *avodah*. He needs to give for the sake of giving, and he needs to also realize that he has to receive sometimes. The point we have emphasized here is that one needs to accept the fact that he needs to receive sometimes from others, in order to be able to thank other people and to thank Hashem.

So on one hand, one needs to learn how be more of a giver to others and lessen his amount of taking, but along with this, when one does have to take from others, he should acknowledge that he has received from the other. In this way, he elevates the other and makes the other 'royal', for now he has accepted the fact that his friend is above him, while he is at the lower, receiving end.

In Conclusion

This is the depth the concept of behind the obligation of making another "royal". When you acknowledge that you are on the lower end, and that the other has been elevated above you (for you have received from him, and he has been the giver to you), you acknowledge that you have received from him, and you acknowledge that he is now more elevated than you. You come to terms with it and you accept it, and in that you, you chip away at your conceitedness, and also at your sense of shame of having to receive from others.

All of that pertains to our relationship with others, but the greater lesson we take out of this is the lesson behind the parable, which is to show us how we must relate to Hashem: we receive from Hashem, and we need to acknowledge that.

Besides for the fact that we “give” to Hashem (as it is written “*Give strength to G-d*”), we need to realize and accept that we also receive from Hashem. It is an *avodah* upon a person to accept that we receive from Hashem, and this is what lays behind the words, **מוֹדִים אֲנַחְנוּ לָךְ**.

164 | *Truth Before Peace**A Prayer For Peace Upon The World*

'שים שלום וכו' – In the final blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we pray for *shalom*: peace.

This includes [praying for] peace between man and his friend, and peace between husband and wife. *Chazal* state, “Hashem did not find a vessel that can contain blessing, except for *shalom* (peace).” Thus, Hashem wants there to be *shalom* in all of *Klal Yisrael*, not just between man and another and between husband and wife.

Even more so, we find that there must be a concept of *shalom* between the Jewish people and the rest of the world. The Talmud says that there we must do certain things out of “*darkei shalom*” (ways of peace), in order to be at peace with the gentile nations. This is because it is written of the Torah’s ways, “*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all of her paths are peaceful*”, thus the Sages established certain rules out of “*darkei shalom*”. The Torah’s way is called “*shalom*”.

On a more esoteric level, the power of *shalom* (peace) is the spiritual light that is contained in the Torah, which Hashem looked into when He created the world. The light of peace that is found in the Torah was drawn onto our own world, for the world has been created from the Torah itself, which contains *shalom*.

In the future, there will there be total peace in Creation; it is written of the future that “*the wolf will reside with the lamb*”. Nowadays, however, there cannot be total peace with the rest of the world. If we try to make total peace with the nations, it is only dangerous to us.

Emes\Truth Vs. Shalom\Peace

We had two great leaders who led the Jewish nation: Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen (who was in Moshe’s stead when he ascended to Har Sinai to receive the Torah). The strong points of Moshe and Aharon were very different. Moshe mainly emphasized *emes* (truth) – as opposed to *shalom* (peace) – whereas Aharon emphasized *shalom* (peace) over *emes* (truth).

Aharon HaKohen is called by our Sages as the one who “pursues peace and loves peace”. [Moshe, however, did not relent from the *emes*. When he came down from the mountain and he

saw the people sinning with Golden Calf, he immediately shattered the *Luchos*, for he knew that this is what the *emes* demanded right now.]

Shalom (peace) and *emes* (truth) are contradicting forces within our soul. When a person has too much *emes*, he cannot have *shalom*. When one has too much *shalom*, he cannot reach total *emes*.²⁹

Emes Is More Important Than Shalom

We must know that in the world we live in today, our main *avodah* is to emphasize *emes* over *shalom*. If a person today emphasizes *shalom* over *emes*, by trying to be at peace with every person in the world, he is trying to attain the level of the future where there will be peace with the entire world, and this is currently impossible. He will end up connecting himself with those who are far from *emes*, as he tries to “make *shalom*” with all those who behave wickedly.

Making *shalom* with the wicked causes the wicked to negatively influence us. Although the spiritual light of the Torah can influence the wicked and cause them to return – for the power of good can influence evil - so can evil overpower good. Therefore, there is a great danger in trying to make *shalom* with wicked people.

In the times we live in, which are called *ikvesa d'meshicha*, (“the heel of Mashiach”), the Sages said that *emes* will be very concealed.³⁰ In other words, if one does not connect himself with *emes*, he will not survive the *ikvesa d'meshicha*. (On a deeper note, when *emes* is concealed from us, so is *shalom* concealed from us, because there cannot be true *shalom* unless there is *emes*.)

Examining The Sin With The Golden Calf

We see a time in our history where *shalom* overrode *emes*, and we can see how much destruction it caused; it caused total destruction to the fabric of Creation. This took place by the sin with the *Eigel* (the Golden Calf). When the people saw that Moshe wasn't returning from Heaven, they grew afraid, and they demanded from Aharon that a new god be made. The depth of this is that because Moshe was temporarily gone from the world, the trait of *emes* which he so personified had gone with him, thus the people could not see the *emes*.

It wasn't just Moshe's body who had gone; the *emes* had gone with him. So the *emes* was concealed from them at that time. But Aharon was present with them, and Aharon's trait was

²⁹ See also Tefillah #089 – Truth and Peace Together.

³⁰ Sotah 49b

shalom. They listened to Aharon – meaning, they followed the path of *shalom* rather than follow the *emes*.

Had there been *emes* present there, Aharon could have never have helped with the idea of the Golden Calf. But since Moshe\emes was not present, the people ended up being influenced by the “*Eirev Rav*” (the Mixed Multitude) who thought of the idea to make the Calf. Once the people connected with the “*Eirev Rav*”, the sin with the Calf was allowed, which brought so much destruction to Creation for all generations to come.³¹

The most sanctified time in our history was when we stood at Har Sinai. There, *emes* presided over *shalom*. It was clear to all that Moshe was the leader and that Aharon was second in greatness to him; it was clear that *emes* overrides *shalom*. This represents the ideal state of Creation, where *shalom* is connected with *emes*, where Moshe is the leader and Aharon is the mouth who speaks for him; where *shalom* is connected with *emes* and represents it.

But with the sin of the Golden Calf, the people fell from the level of Har Sinai; they fell from the perspective of *emes*, of Moshe, and instead they were led by *shalom*, the trait of Aharon. But this led to a total destruction to the fabric of Creation.

Priorities: Placing Emes Before Shalom

This idea is apparent from our history, but it is also applicable to each personal soul. We are supposed to put *emes* before *shalom*.

The Torah is called *Toras Emes*, a “Torah of truth”; the main trait revealed through Torah is *emes*. The trait of *shalom* is a secondary aspect of Torah, for the Torah’s ways are called “ways of pleasantness” and peace”. When a person instead gives more importance to *shalom* over *emes*, it is always a catalyst for spiritual destruction. The *emes* becomes concealed, and then people become connected with the dangerous mixture of good and evil that fills Creation.

If we reflect into this deeply, we must understand, that the trait of *shalom*, by itself, must certainly be unlimited. In Heaven, there is total peace, for fire and water are allowed to co-exist there; as we see from the word “*Shomayim*” (Heaven), which is from the words *aish* (fire) and *mayim* (water). So too, we must have a trait of *shalom* in which we have boundless peace toward others. There must be *shalom* with the entire world; that is the very concept of *shalom*.

³¹ For an in-depth explanation of this matter, refer to the shiur of 0129 פרקי אבות

When one feels the need for *shalom* from the depths of his soul, he can realize the deep contradiction between *emes* and *shalom* which we are faced with on This World, and how we must decide and choose between *emes* and *shalom*.

But what usually happens with most people is that they are “either, or.” Some people do not care much about either *emes* or *shalom*; we won’t address this here. But there are people in the world who are very strong when it comes to either *emes* or *shalom* – and usually, this kind of person will act extreme, either when it comes to *emes*, or when it comes to *shalom*.

One kind of person is very passionate when it comes to pursuing *emes*, and because he is so much for the truth, he is far removed from the trait of *shalom*. Instead of “choosing” between *emes* vs. *shalom*, this kind of person won’t even consider *shalom* to be an option. His belief is that there must only be *emes*, and that there is no place at all for *shalom*. A person with the opposite kind of personality will have a powerful feeling for *shalom*, but he does not strive for *emes*.

We must clearly understand that we are capable of revealing unlimited *shalom*, and we are also capable of following absolute truth. But only when a person is clear about what the truth is (when it comes to matters of “*hilchos de’os*” – matters of *hashkafah*³²) can he know how to have *shalom*. The slightest divergence from the truth is already a breach in the way of the Torah. The trait of *shalom* should not be allowed to cause any laxity in the *emes*.

Soon we will explain how we actualize this idea, but the first thing we must know is that we have to first be very strong about what the *emes* is, before we pursue *shalom*.

Living In A World of Falsity: Sticking To The Truth

In the more recent generations, and in especially in this generation, there is a great amount of falsity in the world. Most people do not know what the *emes* is, due to all the confusion that the falsity of the world has caused, a result of this deep exile we are in. But no matter how much falsity fills the world, one must strive to have the proper and truthful perspective towards this world; to know what the *yoisher* (straight and truthful path) is.

Although we are faced with so many things on this world that are not *emes*, we must not allow this to make us think that perhaps we can distort the *emes*. The trait of *emes* doesn’t allow for any divergences from truth. Therefore, no matter how much falsity and misconception we see on this world, we must still remain clear about what the truthful perspectives are.

³² *The proper Torah outlook towards life*

Not only are we surrounded by falsity on this world from all sides. There is another misconception we are surrounded with, which is what we are mainly discussing here: there are people who want *shalom* with the world, and they pursue *shalom* so much that *emes* is ignored.

We can see this problem manifest both in the communal sense as well as in the individual sense. Certain communities emphasize ‘*shalom*’ to the point that they are all-embracing, with no bounds. On the individual level, it can manifest as a nature in a person to be leaning towards being all-embracing rather than being truthful.

Nothing should be ever be allowed to make us even slightly diverge from the *emes*, whether it is the falsity that comes from the surroundings, or whether it is a certain good personality trait (including the trait of peace, which is a most praiseworthy trait).

The Balance Between Emes and Shalom

At the same time, one must be able to feel a demand in his soul for *shalom* with all people, to the point that a lack of *shalom* feels painful to him. Although *emes* demands that we not follow *shalom*, we must still feel a demand for more *shalom* in the world. It must bother us whenever *shalom* is sorely lacking, such as when we encounter arguments that are not for the sake of Heaven. Even when *emes* demands that we not give in to *shalom*, we must still wish deep down that there could be *shalom*.

Usually when there is a demand for *shalom*, the *emes* is ignored, and when *emes* is emphasized, *shalom* is ignored. This is because the power of *emes* must be firmly developed before we exercise *shalom*, and then these two abilities will function properly and be in balance with each other. There will still be issues of *emes* vs. *shalom* even after this, but first we must make sure that our *emes* is developed, before we pursue *shalom*. When desiring that there be *shalom* in the world, we should wish for a kind of *shalom* that fills the whole world; a boundless and unlimited kind of peace.

When one feels a demand for *emes* as well as for *shalom* – when he feels a desire for absolute truth and he also wishes there could be peace throughout the world – it is then that a person arrives at a very great contradiction of the soul: *emes* vs. *shalom*.

Emes must dominate over *shalom*, as we said. That is the first step. But we must be aware that in the future, *shalom* will rule over *emes*. Why? Because in the future, the falsity of the world will vanish, thus there will be no problem with a dominance of *shalom*.

In the world we live in today, if *shalom* would rule over *emes*, the falsity of the world would be total. There would be absolutely no kernel of truth, and then Creation would not survive, for Creation depends on the existence of *emes*, the trait of Moshe Rabbeinu, who was the emissary that gave to us his “*Toras Emes*”.

But in the World To Come, where the spirit of impurity will be removed from the world and falsity will vanish, we will be left with just *emes* and *shalom*. The *emes* will demand that there be division in the world, and the *shalom* will demand that there be *achdus* (unity) in the world. This is the depth of “*On that day, Hashem will be One and His Name will be one.*” The power of *echad* (oneness) will be fully revealed upon Creation and it will overpower all disparity. It is another angle of understanding how *shalom* will preside over *emes*.

This is the general difference between our current world and the future, the World To Come.

Emes and Shalom In The World Today

In the world we live in today, where *emes* must come before *shalom*, the issue we face is: How far should *emes* go and how far should *shalom* go? What are the limitations of *emes* and *shalom*?

Again, as we said, we first need to develop a strong *emes* before we wonder about how to use the power of *shalom*. But after we have developed a strong sense for *emes*, the question is: In the actual sense, when should we let *emes* dominate, and when should we let *shalom* dominate?

It is a matter which depends on one's personal *shoresh haneshamah* (soul root). Some souls are closer in their soul root to *emes*, and others are closer in their soul root to *shalom*. This is a general answer. But what is the clear answer to this issue? As long as following *shalom* will cause a person to diverge from *emes*, it is forbidden to engage in trying to make *shalom*. If we can pursue *shalom* in a way that won't take away from the *emes*, from the mitzvos of the Torah, then *shalom* can be pursued. But if pursuing *shalom* will cause even one iota of divergence from the *emes*, such *shalom* should not be pursued.

When *emes* and *shalom* are balanced together properly, this is a proper way of life which many of the great leaders of our past lived. Other leaders of our past were rooted more in *emes*, and they emphasized the *emes* over *shalom*. But in any case, there was never a place to allow *shalom* where it will take away from the *emes*. Today there are misconceptions when it comes to the concept of *shalom*. Those who are of the Torah world must not try to make *shalom* with the outside, secular world. The proper and inner way to approach life is to make sure that we never budge from the Torah as we pursue *shalom*.

Strife and Falsity In The End of Days

If pursuing *shalom* will result in a breach of the *emes*, perhaps this can be allowed temporarily, such as in a situation of making marital peace or in making peace with others, where there is some room for *shalom* over *emes*. But even then, it is spiritually dangerous, because once the *emes* is pushed aside in favor of *shalom*, the *shalom* will overpower the *emes*, and then we are left with no *emes*, and eventually with no *shalom*.

The results will be nothing but *machlokes* (strife) and *sheker* (falsity) on this world, two evil forces of mankind which will band together in the End of Days. It all starts from a breach in *emes*, all in the name of “*shalom*”. The pursuit of *emes* becomes weakened as time goes on, getting weaker and weaker, and instead strife overpowers peace. Then peace and truth become concealed totally, and then we find ourselves in the prophecy of our Sages mentioned in the end of *Tractate Sotah* in the Talmud³³: the truth becomes concealed.

Along with this concealment of truth comes strife and wars in the world. The Sages state that in the generation where the son of David will come, there will be wars in the world; strife between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law; and strife between son and father. This is a complete opposite of the situation of *shalom*: a situation of total *machlokes* (strife), and *lashon hora* (gossip), which “still dances among us”³⁴ - which caused the destruction of the second *Beis HaMikdash*.

Praying For Peace: Heraldng The Future, and Surviving In The Now

Thus, now we can understand the request of **שִׁמְשִׁימוּ**.

There are two requests contained in this. It is the final blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, and it represents the finale of our history which we are amidst: the End of Days. It is also a request about the level of the future.

We are praying for peace, for the peace of the future, where “*the wolf shall reside with the lamb.*” This will be accomplished through *Mashiach*, who will come to reveal *shalom* upon the world; he will connect the kingdoms of Yosef and Yehuda together, and he will connect all the sides together who argue and who have differences with each other; and on the larger scale of things, he will connect the Jewish people together with the nations of the world.

³³ *Sotah 49a*

³⁴ *Yoma 9b*; see also the *hakdamah* to *sefer Chofetz Chaim*

The prayer of **שִׁים שְׁלוֹם** is specifically at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*, for it is describing the End of Days, in which we are in great need of peace upon the world. We are praying in this blessing for the time in the future where *shalom* shall prevail over *emes*, for that will be the time where falsity is removed from the world. The depth of this is because the power of *achdus* (unity) will ultimately prevail over all the *pirud* (disparity).

All of that concerns the future, however. But in the current time we live in, where we have not yet merited the coming of *Mashiach*, we pray for peace within this world. What kind of peace do we want in our current times? We cannot have total peace in the world, for this is not yet possible. We are asking here for more “good”, and for more “blessing”; we are not asking here for total peace with Creation, for this is currently impossible, being that impurity fills the world. For as long as there is evil in the world, there cannot be total *shalom* on this world.

Anyone who tries to have total *shalom* on this world right now will not succeed, for it will only cause him to bond with the wicked, and the Sages state that this is not a real bond. Trying to bond with evil does not stem from pursuing *shalom*; it stems from the trait of *chanufah* (flattery). Only when a person feels a burning desire for truth can he reveal real *shalom*; a kind of *shalom* which does not compromise on the *emes*. This is the trait of the trait of *shalom* which the righteous possess, and it is also the depth of how “Torah scholars increase peace on the world.”³⁵ Why specifically Torah scholars? It is because only a Torah scholar, who learns the Torah on a regular basis, in the “Torah of truth”, is one who can reveal *shalom* on the world, for genuine *shalom* can only come from this pure and truthful place.

By contrast, when *shalom* is not stemming from a place of *emes* in oneself, it will not be genuine. It will become a disguise for seeking flattery with the wicked.

In Conclusion

Thus, the request of *Sim Shalom* is not only a request to herald the future, where there will be total peace in the world; it is also a request for this current dimension we are in, that we should be a proper balance between truth and peace together.

For the time being, though - until the coming of *Mashiach*, may he come speedily in our days - we must strive to make *emes* at the forefront, so that when the *shalom* of the future does come, we will be able to experience it as a kind of *shalom* that is of ‘good’ and ‘blessing’; **שִׁים שְׁלוֹם טוֹבָה וּבְרָכָה**.

170 | *Peace**The End of Shemoneh Esrei: Praying For Peace*

וטוב יהי' לברכנו ולברך את כל עמך ישראל בכל עת ובכל שעה בשלומיך, ברוב עוז ושלום, ברוך אתה ה', המברך את עמו
 וישראל בשלום – The conclusion of the *Sim Shalom* blessing, and the end of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, concludes with the words, “*And may be it good to bless us, and to bless all of Your nation Yisrael, at every time and every moment, with Your peace, with much abundance of splendor and peace; Blessed are You, Hashem, Who blesses His nation Yisrael in peace.*”

The beginning of the blessing was about *shalom* (peace), and the end of the blessing is also about *shalom*\peace. The blessing of the *Kohanim*, which immediately precedes *Sim Shalom*, is also a blessing for peace. The very last words of *Shemoneh Esrei* are also about peace: “*He Who makes peace in His high abode, will make peace upon us.*”

Peace and The Beis HaMikdash

Concerning the days we are in - the Nine Days, where we mourn the destruction of both the first and second *Beis HaMikdash* - the Gemara³⁶ states that at a time when there is peace, there is joy in Yisrael, and the fast of the “fourth and fifth month” (the fasts of the 17th of Tamuz and *Tisha B’Av*) will be turned into joy and festivity. The mourning and sadness of the Nine Days is only an expression of its external layer. The inner essence of these days is the *avodah* upon us to transform them into days of joy. *Rashi*³⁷ says that when there will be a time of peace, when the nations of the world are not attacking the Jewish people, these days will be transformed from days of mourning and sadness to days of *simcha*.

“*Yerushalayim*” is rooted in the words “*yarei shalem*” (awe of perfection\completion), which is also rooted in the word “*shalom*”. The Jewish people are called “*Shulamis*”, which is also from the word “*shalom*”. The first *Beis HaMikdash* was built by Shlomo, whose name is also from the word “*shalom*”. The Sages state that Shlomo is called so because he was like “the King whom peace belongs to.” The Sages also state that in the time that King Chizkiyahu lived, the *Beis HaMikdash* could not be destroyed, because it was a time of *shalom*.

Thus, it is *shalom* that upkeeps the *Beis HaMikdash*. The root of the *Beis HaMikdash* began with *shalom* (“Shlomo*shalom*”), and it was kept existent through *shalom*. Chazal say that *sinas*

³⁶ Rosh HaShanah 18b

³⁷ *ibid*

chinam (baseless hatred) destroyed the second *Beis HaMikdash*,³⁸ and this is all stemming from a lack of *shalom*. The sin of *lashon hora*, which is very rampant in our times, is entirely an offshoot of *sinas chinam*³⁹, and *sinas chinam* is rooted in the absence of *shalom* in our times.

The Two Roots of Strife

There is a *Midrash* that says that before Hashem create the world, *shalom* (peace) requested of Hashem, “Do not create the world, for the world is entirely a place of *machlokes* (strife) and dissension.

Why, indeed, is there so much *machlokes* (strife) in the world? There are two main obstacles that prevent *shalom* in the world.

One obstacle to *shalom* is when there are “*chilukei de’os*”, difference of opinions. Two people think differently and they can get into an argument about something. This kind of argument is rooted in the “*de’os*”, the opinions and beliefs, which are located in our brain. They are more intellectual arguments in their nature.

Another root of arguing and strife stems from the various unfixed *middos* (character traits) that are present in our heart.

Mental Bribery

Most of the strife rampant in today’s times are stemming from the second reason: a lack of refined *middos*. The Sages state that in Heaven, there is no strife, for there is no jealousy or any other negative character traits amongst the angels. This implies that it is negative *middos* which are the source of strife; therefore, we, who live on this world, are affected by strife, for we do have a struggle with negative *middos*.

Many people get into arguments simply because they have a degree of low self-worth about themselves. But there are also many arguments which break out due to various *middos* that lay dormant in the heart, which end up bribing the brain’s thoughts and thereby form various beliefs, which eventually lead to entering into arguments and dissension with others.

There is a concept of bribery in our own psyche (*shochad*). The Torah forbids giving any form of *shochad* (bribery) to a judge; once a judge takes the bribe, even if he is very wise, his brain

³⁸ *Yoma 9b*

³⁹ (Editor’s Note: See *Sefer Chofetz Chaim – Hakdamah*)

becomes a bit warped, and it sways him from thinking honestly. Just like there can be monetary bribery, so can there be ‘mental’ bribery. One might have jealousy or hatred in his heart towards someone, and this can sway his mind, causing him to adapt certain beliefs and to allow himself to fight with others.

So the justification for entering into an argument with another is usually stemming from something unrefined in one’s heart, which passes into his brain, where the brain’s thoughts develop new thought patterns that follow these newly formed “*de’os*” (beliefs). One then comes up with all kinds of seemingly “logical” arguments against others as his many “*de’os*” are formed. All of these “*de’os*” are not actual “*de’os*”; rather, they are stemming from a bribed psyche, from unrefined *middos* that lurk in the heart.

Most of the strife and fights that go on today (both in the outside world as well as within our own sheltered society) are not stemming from a difference in *de’os*; rather, they stem from unrefined *middos*.

There is a big difference, however, between the kinds of arguments that break out within the Jewish people, with the arguments that take place amongst members of other nations of the world. Those who are not of the souls of the Jewish people don’t care at all about having good *middos*, so they see no problem in getting into strife with others. The souls of the Jewish people (all except for the ‘*Erev Rav*’), by contrast, are in essence pure, and therefore we have the Divine gift implanted in us from Hashem to be able to fix and purify our *middos*. This applies to every single Jewish soul.

It is just that sometimes, there is a little bit of jealousy or some other bad *middah* that remains unfixed in the external layer of a Jew’s soul, and this can cause inner bribery to his psyche, which leads him to form various erroneous beliefs and thereby justify getting into fights with others.

Difference of Opinion

A second root of strife stems from a problem in the very *de’os*. This is less common than the above-mentioned reason discussed until now, and it is almost always never the reason that motivates people to enter into *machlokes*, because as we explained, it is usually unrefined *middos* that cause a person to enter into *machlokes*. But we will discuss it here anyway, so that we can have a fuller picture of this topic.

If one gets into an argument due to a difference in *de’os*, the argument can only be conducted properly if it stays at the level of *de’os* and doesn’t become personal. Such an argument is the

kind of argument which the Sages describe as an “argument for the sake of Heaven”, which can be effective. However, even when this is the case, it often ends up becoming personal.

The Gemara⁴⁰ says that normally, the mitzvah to help another unload his donkey takes precedence to the mitzvah of helping another load the donkey, because unloading the donkey alleviates the donkey from *tzaar baalei chaim*. However, the Gemara says that if one sees his friend about to unload his donkey, and he also sees his enemy about to load his donkey, he should go help the enemy first, so that he can overcome his natural will.

Tosafos asks: What kind of enemy are we talking about? We aren’t talking about a person whom a person simply hates, because this is prohibited. *Tosafos* answers that we are speaking about an “enemy” that one is permitted to hate, such as a person who sins deliberately in public and he doesn’t accept rebuke. But *Tosafos* asks, if this is an enemy whom we have a mitzvah to hate, why must a person overcome his hatred towards him? *Tosafos* answers because although the person hated him originally because there was a *mitzvah* to hate him, by now it has become personal hatred. Therefore, there is a *mitzvah* upon the person to overcome this natural hatred that has developed, and deliberately help the enemy.

In other words, the hatred has spread past his *de’os* and it has by now entered the realm of his *middos*. In this case it was a *mitzvah* to hate the person, yet even a motivation that stems from a *mitzvah* can turn into a bad *middah*.

This shows us the depth that is behind strife, fighting, and war. Most of the arguments in the world are due to a problem in the *middos*, not in the *de’os*. Very few arguments are due to a difference of *de’os*. Even when the argument originally stems from a difference in *de’os*, it usually bribes the mind’s thinking patterns, and then it simply becomes bad *middos*.

Thus, we can now understand the depth of the *Midrash* that peace requested of Hashem that the world not be created, for the world is entirely strife.

Checking Your Motivations

Anyone who finds himself getting involved in a fight or argument with others needs to clarify: Is this an argument stemming from my *de’os* (beliefs), or is it perhaps an issue of *middos*? Usually, upon some reflection, a person can discover that it was a lack of refined *middos* which prompted him to get into a heated argument with others, and not simply his *de’os*. After all, who

⁴⁰ *Pesachim 113a*

can say he is so pure that all of his arguments with others are entirely due to *de'os* and not to his *middos*....?

When a person allows himself to stay in a *machlokes* and keep passionately to his beliefs as he argues his points with others, this usually gets out of hand, causing him to lose both this world and the next - like what happened with Korach and his assembly, who lost everything, because they couldn't let go and leave the *machlokes*.

Only a very great and purified person can enter a *machlokes* and retain his good *middos*. Ordinary people are not strong enough in their souls to be unaffected by *machlokes*. Even when a *Gadol* has to be involved in a *machlokes*, he keeps checking himself to see if it's affecting his *middos*; he doesn't stop suspecting himself of ulterior motives.

A truthful person keeps suspecting himself of his motives. Even if he knows that his opinion was right, he suspects that perhaps by now it is becoming more personal.

Hashem knows what's going on in each person's heart when he argues with others. There is almost no one in the generation who is fitting to enter a *machlokes* without getting affected by bad *middos* along the way, therefore, it is forbidden for anyone to enter a *machlokes*!

The deeper and more truthful a person is, he is aware of the subconscious motives, and surely his conscious motives. If one discovers that his bad *middos* are fueling his desire for *machlokes*, he must step back from the *machlokes*. When one realizes what we are saying here, he runs from *machlokes* as if it's a fire. This is no exaggeration; it is reality to anyone who realizes this.

There is almost no one in the generation who can fight purely for the sake of Heaven. Although we see a lot of misguided hotheads who don't listen to these rules, that doesn't make it right. One must realize that *machlokes* is a total contradiction to our pure essence. Since most of us do not know if the desire to enter the *machlokes* is stemming from *de'os* or *middos*, we must assume that it stems from bad *middos*, and thus stay away totally from the *machlokes*.

Even if we have to choose sides in a *machlokes*, that should only be in the actions we do. We have no choice when it comes to this part; we have to act like one of the sides. But even when this is the case, in our own heart, we need to feel separate from the entire *machlokes* and that we have absolutely no connection to it.

And even if a person enters a *machlokes* due to a difference of *de'os* (which it is almost never the case, as we explained), he must suspect himself that it has festered and that it has become bad *middos*; unless he is on the level of Dovid HaMelech who said "My heart is emptied from within me." Even if it is a *machlokes* towards a wicked person whom it is a *mitzvah* to hate (which is not such a simple matter in our times), if the *machlokes* is allowed to simmer and

fester, it eventually becomes bad *middos*. What started out as a difference of opinion becomes strife and hatred.

If one who is totally clear that his differences with another comes from *de'os* and he is very afraid that it will lead to bad *middos* and he makes sure to keep checking his motivations, he is one who fears Heaven, and he is the kind of person who can maybe survive a *machlokes* and remain unscathed. Anyone who is not like this should stay away from *machlokes*, and that is the case with most people in the world.

Increasing Our Love For The Jewish People

It doesn't matter what kind of Jew we are dealing with and which type of community he comes from and what his background is: we must make sure we don't allow ourselves to enter strife.

Don't enter a communal *machlokes*, and stay away from even private *machlokes*. Always suspect yourself of bad *middos* motivating you. It takes much wisdom and prayer to enter a *machlokes* and come out unaffected. Even if staying away from *machlokes* will make you lose money or your status or your honor, be prepared to lose it, rather than enter a *machlokes* and lose both worlds.

Instead, awaken your *ahavas Yisrael* (love of the Jewish people) towards every Jewish soul. Don't only love Jews in your community, who represent your beliefs and whom you see eye-to-eye with. Rather, you must love every single Jew, without exception, whether it is a truthful Jew or a misguided Jew, whether it is an observant Jew or whether he is off the *derech*, or whether he's half-*frum* or three-quarters *frum* or a quarter-*frum* or whether he's totally far from our *derech*. Whether you agree with him or whether you don't agree with him, love him in your heart.

If one can do that, he can survive this generation, and if not, he will almost definitely lose both this world and the next. In today's times, strife is filling every place in the world; it affects every community and every corner, *rachmana litzlan* (may G-d have mercy). Therefore, one must keep awakening *ahavas Yisrael* towards all other Jews, even towards those who are on a totally different side.

Make sure that you never fall into the pit of bad *middos*. Keep remembering the words of our Sages that peace didn't want the world to be created due to all its strife. The world we live in is an "*alma d'piruda*", a "world of disparity", and in the End of Days which we are in, where we at

the end of the end, the *pirud* (disparity) grows more and more⁴¹. We are very dispersed amongst our own people; and there is disparity amongst us, in every sect of Judaism and in every corner (may G-d have mercy on us).⁴²

When one lives like this – when he makes sure to keep awakening *Ahavas Yisrael* towards all Jews and he is making sure to stay away from all traces of strife - he is one who can ask Hashem to bless us with peace at all times, as we say here in the end of the blessing of *Sim Shalom*, **בכל עת** ובכל שעה בשלומיך.

In summary, there is strife in our world every moment, everywhere, from in front and from behind us, and that is why we pray to Hashem specially that there be peace at all times and at all moments. Thus we need to keep running away from strife more than ever, and to instead keep awakening our love for all Jews.⁴³

In Conclusion

When all of the Jewish people will touch upon this point, this will be the peace that comes to the world, and it will be fully realized how “Torah scholars increase peace in the world”.⁴⁴ Then we will see, speedily in our days, the time where Hashem will bring peace upon us. There will be peace at last in Yerushalayim, and then we will merit the rebuilding of the final and complete *Beis HaMikdash*.

Amen, Amen, and Amen.

⁴¹ See *Fixing Your Wind_020_The Desire For Competition*

⁴² Refer to *Purim_067_Achashveirosh and Haman*

⁴³ See *Getting To Know Your People_05_How To Hate Evil and Aspire For Unity*

⁴⁴ *Berachos 64a*