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This is a translation from the original audio class.

The Internal Obligations of A Jew

Firstly, let us thank *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* for giving us the merit to learn and recognize the human soul, so that we can thereby recognize our own personal souls with clarity, and be able to serve Hashem in a more genuine, inner way.

Hashem has placed us on this world so that we can serve Him according to His will. Part of our task on this world is to keep the *mitzvos*, which includes keeping all of *halachah*. They are written clearly in the works of *halachah*, so that men and women can learn them and know what to do. That is one part of man's task. Another part of one's task is to serve Hashem through his/her inner, personal world. This goes beyond the external observance of the *mitzvos*. It includes serving Hashem through our mind, heart, emotions, and senses.

Just as one is obligated to do the actions of the *mitzvos*, so is a person obligated to serve Hashem in the internal sense. The root *mitzvos* of the inner world are *ahavas Hashem* (love of Hashem) and *yiras Hashem* (fear of Hashem), and there are also other such internal *mitzvos*, which involve the inner world of a person. Rabbeinu Bachya, in the introduction to *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*, writes that his sefer is called "*Chovos HaLevovos*" (Duties of the Heart) because he is explaining the *mitzvos* that are the obligations of the heart and mind, as opposed to just the *mitzvos* done with the physical body.

Just as one must learn *halachah* in order to know how to do the *mitzvos* properly in all their details, and if he doesn't learn *halachah* he will surely stumble and err in his observance of the Torah, so does the inner world of a person need to be learned about well. It spans all of a person's life, and therefore a person must learn and study about it very well. A person must know what his external observance is, by learning *halachah*, and he must also know how to serve Hashem internally - by learning about the details of the inner world.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* was the first to point out that there is difficulty in fulfilling the internal obligations. There are many *sefarim* which explain to us the laws of all the *mitzvos*, but the inner world is not explained clearly. In our times especially, there are many *sefarim* about each of the details of all the *mitzvos*, and they are written clearly. In contrast to this, the information about the

inner world is scattered throughout the writings of the Sages, in the Talmud and in the *Midrashim*, and in the works of the *Rishonim*, but it is not concentrated into any one volume. No one has ever written a clear "*Shulchan Aruch*" (Code of Jewish Law) about the inner world and what man's internal obligations are.

One Mistake Associated With Inner Work

Since there are so few clearly written *sefarim* about the inner world, it is easy for people to make mistakes about it when they learn these *sefarim*. The *Chovos HaLevovos* said that since there is nothing written about the inner world, there are many people who think that there are no internal obligations, and that there is only external observance of *mitzvos*. Therefore, the inner world is forgotten by many, and there are many who erroneously think that there is no *mitzvah* to learn about the internal obligations of man. That is one mistake that people make, when it comes to the internal world.

A Second Mistake Associated With Inner Work

Another mistake people make about the inner world is that they think of it in terms of general knowledge, without knowing that there are details. People may think that there is a *mitzvah* to love Hashem, to fear Hashem, to do kindness, etc., and it seems as if that is all there is to the inner world.

Unlike *Hilchos Shabbos*, where it is clear to everyone that general knowledge about it does not suffice, and in order to know it one must learn its many details, the inner world seems to be "known" to people. People think that they know about the inner world since they know about it in general terms, and that the only difficult part is in keeping it. But the truth is that unless one learns about the inner world and studies these matters well, he will not have any understanding about it at all.

A Third Mistake Associated With Inner Work

Another issue with the inner world is that since these matters are not concentrated into any one place where you can learn about it, people will seek knowledge about it by turning to foreign sources, and using the guidance of gentiles when it comes to these matters.

Imagine if a person wants to learn about the *mitzvos*, so he goes to learn about it from gentiles, by learning about the Seven Noachide Laws which they are commanded to keep. Would this knowledge be sufficient for a Jew to know how to keep the *mitzvos*? Even the *mitzvos* that apply to gentiles do not apply in the same way to a Jew. In the same vein, when a Jew goes to learn from the gentiles about the inner world of man, this knowledge cannot suffice for him. Anyone with a little bit of knowledge knows that the inner world of a Jew vastly differs from the inner world of gentiles.

Those are the three issues associated with the knowledge about the inner world. In order to merit, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to do Hashem's will, these three mistakes needed to be addressed, so that we can be clear that we, the souls of the Jewish people, have a need to learn about our own inner worlds.

The study of the inner world within us is a study that we must work hard at in order to understand. We cannot gain this knowledge from going to any gentile sources. Rather, we need to learn about these matters at their root, from the words of the Torah, from the words of our Sages, and from all the great leaders throughout the generations. That is how we may recognize the inner world of a Jew – and of the Jew specifically.

Now that this has been explained, we can begin what it means for a person to know and understand his inner world.

What Motivates Us To Learn About The Inner World?

The need to understand the inner world may stem from two different reasons. One reason, which is what interests most people in studying their inner world, is that there are various problems, issues, and negative character traits, and in order to be free from such problems and deal with them, it is therefore necessary to recognize one's inner world. The second reason to explore one's inner world, which is more fundamental, is not for the sake of dealing with issues in our personality. It is rather so that we can know how to live life correctly, from the start.

The Goal

Therefore, learning about self-knowledge is not merely for the sake of solving internal issues and problems in the personality. It is mainly about recognizing our soul's inner forces, both the positive and negative forces, and how to guide ourselves from within. This will also include uncovering our own character issues and how we can deal with those issues, but that is not the goal. The goal is rather to gain an encompassing knowledge about our internal world.

This is a very important point to know as we start to complete our task on this world. It is good to know about it even after we have started, but it's even more important to know about it from the start. The need to recognize our souls is not so that we can recognize our problems, our struggles with the evil inclinations, etc. Rather, it is so that we can know how to live an emotionally healthy life, a life that Hashem wants from us, a life in which we can know to use our souls.

If you can absorb this point well, both in your mind and then in your heart, it will cause in you a will and yearning to recognize yourself, not as a way to escape various issues that we may be having internally, but because you want to have greater clarity about yourself.

Living A More Internal Life

What is the definition of what it means for person to live more internally? It would seem that this means for a person to recognize the forces of evil that exist in him, his evil inclinations, and to fight this evil. Sometimes he will succeed in these struggles, and sometimes he will lose the battles, but many times, he can indeed succeed. Yet, this is but a superficial perspective towards the inner world. The correct way to view the inner world is of a totally different perspective.

Living internally means that for all of a person's life – all of it – a person is working to understand his soul. Accordingly, a person will also be able to use the good in his soul to fight his own evil. But that is not all there is to it. Life is not only about our struggles with evil. It is a part of life, but it is not everything. The main aspect of our life is our work in studying the soul and understanding it further. According to how well we recognize our souls, that is how we will be able to use the good in ourselves and fight with our internal evil.

The practical result from the words here is that when you begin to learn about your personal soul, the attitude should not be about how to fight the evil characteristics in yourself. Rather, the goal should be to find yourself, more and more, because you want to clearly recognize your soul. This will include finding both your negative and positive traits.

Here is an example to help us understand what we mean. For those of us who have merited children, how do we help our children? Can we only show them how to deal with their struggles and issues? Or do we want to give something besides for this – such as showing them the good and positive parts in them, as well as to give them the foods they like and the things they love, and along with this, to also show them how to deal with their struggles and negative aspects?

It is clear to us that we want to give our children more than just the ability to recognize their issues and to help them deal with their problems and the hard parts of life. We don't just want to hire therapists for them so that they solve all their issue. We want them to see themselves in a generally good light, to show them the good that is in them, to show them what they can be positive about it. Along with this, we can also show them how they can deal with their issues.

When it comes to our children, it is clear to us that it should be this way. But we also need to relate to ourselves in such a way. It is not only the ability to cope with problems which we are trying to gain. Rather, we need to be able to acquire the general view towards ourselves, to not only discover the bad and to see how to deal with it, but to discover everything, both the good and the bad, so that we can gain the bigger picture about who we are.

In summary, when we begin to learn about our souls, the attitude should be that we are trying to live life to its fullest, by knowing ourselves. The attitude should not be that we want to deal with problems and issues. Rather, we should be seeking how to live life from the start, in an inner way, according to Hashem's will.

A Lifelong Task

An additional point is that learning about the soul is not just a temporary stage in life. Rather, for all of one's life, one must keep learning about the soul, so that he can recognize himself better and better. There is no such thing as a person who has learned and studied about the soul for a part of his life, and now he recognizes his soul and he can deal with issues correctly. Rather, self-recognition is a lifetime work. As a result, the better one recognizes his soul, the better he can use his soul and the better he can fight evil and deal with issues and problems, but as we have emphasized, that is not the goal.

In Conclusion

To summarize and conclude, if we merit to continue explaining this path, with *siyata d'shmaya*, we must know that studying the details of the soul is not for the purpose of discovering our internal evil and to deal with issues in ourselves, but for a greater and more encompassing purpose: so that we can come to recognize the general picture of our souls.

These words are a general introduction towards recognizing the soul, and in the coming lessons, we hope to continue into the details of this.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH THE RAV

Q1: Why do people need to study about the soul in order to know about it? Don't we see that there are people who have an understanding about themselves and about others, even if they have never actually learned about these matters?

A: There are some people who have been given by Hashem a nature to have a better understanding of themselves and of others, but even those who have such a nature still need to learn about their souls. A person cannot know medicine unless he has learned about it. Surely there are some people have a natural sense for it and therefore they can know of it better than others, but without studying the matter well, a person cannot have a complete understanding. A person born with natural understanding of his soul might know himself better than others do, but that doesn't mean he understands the depth of the soul. If a person has a natural sense for health, can he heal sick people, if he hasn't spent at least 7 years studying medicine and treatment? Of course not. He may

understand these things better than others do, but if he hasn't learned about it for several years, his knowledge about it is insufficient and very superficial.

Q2: The Rav has said that learning about the soul is our life's work. Is this referring to constantly using the powers of the soul in our own personal *avodah*, or does it mean that it takes an entire lifetime to keep learning and understanding these matters?

A: The second option is correct.

Q3: To clarify my question, I meant to ask: Does our lifetime study of our souls mean that we need to learn *sefarim* (about this), or does it mean to learn about ourselves?

A: It includes the integration of both aspects: To learn *sefarim* about our own inner worlds, and to learn about ourselves from within ourselves.

Q4: If we are obligated to learn about our inner world, why is this obligation not written about clearly in any *sefarim*?

A: This is exactly the question asked by the *Chovos HaLevovos* in the introduction to the *sefer*. It was mentioned in this lesson briefly, along with the answer that he gives. If you want to fully understand this matter, refer to the *hakdamah* (introduction) to *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*.

Q5: Why is it that in the previous generations, people were able to understand these matters (about the inner world of the soul), without having to learn about it?

A: In the earlier generations as well, this knowledge was not accessed by anyone unless he learned about it. It is true that our current generation is very troubled and stressed, and this distances people from knowing about their souls, but even in previous generations where they knew themselves better than we do, they could not have self-recognition unless they learned about it. They were closer to self-recognition without working hard to understand it, because their lives were not as stressed as our own and therefore this knowledge came easier to them, but unless they learned about it well, they didn't arrive at it. In every generation, there are always individuals who reached self-recognition through working hard to understand themselves.

Q6: Can taking pills to relieve anxiety help a person reach self-recognition? Or does it do the opposite?

A: In most cases where taking pills have helped, it is because these pills calm the soul [the inner state of the emotions] and once the soul is calmed, a person then has an easier time learning about his own soul. But it does not directly lead to self-recognition. In some cases, pills can calm a person down, but even then, it is not actually doing the work of self-recognition.

Q7: If a person has not yet done any work to understand the soul, will this prevent them from having *emunah*?

A: The person will still be able to have *emunah*, but he will not be able to reach the complete level of *emunah*.

Q8: If a man only learns Torah and he never learns about the soul, will he be able reach his inner world?

A: Is a man exempt from *emunah* (faith) and *tikkun hamiddos* (character improvement)? He needs *emunah*, as well as Torah learning, as well as *tikkun hamiddos*, as well as the knowledge about his

soul.

Q9: Is learning about the inner world so that we can know how to do the *mitzvos* properly, or is it for a different purpose?

A: It is also to know how to do the *mitzvos* in a more complete way, but it is not entirely for that purpose. The gain of studying about our souls is to help us on two levels – to help us do the *mitzvos* better, and to gain knowledge about our inner world.

Q10: Is this a *mitzvah*, to learn about our souls?

A: There is a difference between men and women [when it comes to learning Torah]. A man's Torah learning is a purpose unto itself, whereas when a woman learns Torah, it is only so that she can know how to do the *mitzvos*. It is the same with studying our souls so that we can get to know our inner world. Do we need to learn it? The answer is an absolute yes. But is it a *mitzvah*? It depends on what we are learning about. If one is studying about an actual internal *mitzvah* such as *yiras Hashem* (fear of Hashem) or *ahavas Hashem* (love of Hashem), a man who learns about this gets a *mitzvah* of learning Torah, whereas a woman who studies these matters is learning this part of Torah in order to know how to act properly, which leads to doing the *mitzvos* properly. So it is not so clear-cut if it is classified as a "*mitzvah*" or not, because it depends.

Q11: What will be the direction of this series of lessons?

A: I will briefly explain. This lesson was an introduction, explaining that this study is so that we can know our souls, and not for the purpose of dealing with issues. In the next few lessons, we will learn that a person is comprised of a *neshamah* (Divine soul) and *guf* body, and in between our *neshamah* and *guf* is our *nefesh habehaimis*, the "animal soul", where our *avodah* starts. Our *avodah* starts from the lower level, which is our *nefesh habehaimis* ("animal soul") and this will include the four elements [earth, water, wind, and fire]. We will not only focus on the negative aspects of our four elements, but of both the good and the bad that are found in them. From there, we will continue our self-work.

May you all have *hatzlachah* (success).

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