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# Torah Way to Enlightenment - 011 Bonding With The Creator Through Hearing

ספר דע את נשמתך - פרק טז - חוש שמיעה

## 1. The Sense of Hearing: An Introduction

Throughout this *sefer*, we have explained ways to reveal the *neshamah* (the Divine soul of a Jew), by way of the sense of sight and the power of thought. We explained at the beginning of the *sefer* that there are four primary senses [of the soul], which are: sight, hearing, smell and speech. We have finished explaining, with *siyata d'shmaya*, the first and longest step from all of them, which was about the sense of sight. This included the eyes' sense of sight as well as the 'sight' of our mind, which is the power of thought. We will now turn to explaining the sense of hearing, and in turn, how we can reveal the *neshamah* through this sense.

As we have done until now, there will be five levels of the soul to traverse in each of the stages: *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*. We will continue this path as well with the sense of hearing. We will be learning here how to hear through the *Nefesh* level of the soul, how to hear through the *Ruach* level of the soul, to hear from the *Neshamah* level of the soul, to hear from the *Chayah* level of the soul, and to hear from the *Yechidah* level of the soul.

We will also explain, with *siyata d'shmaya*, the three stages of *hisbodedus* when it comes to the sense of hearing: revealing the self, revealing the bond of the self with the Creator, and revealing the reality of the Creator.

## 2. Revealing The Soul's Sense of Hearing - In Relation To Revealing The Self

### 2a. Hearing on the level of "Nefesh"

As explained earlier, the *Nefesh* level of the soul corresponds to the *oisiyos* (Hebrew letters) in something. With regards to the sense of hearing, the *Nefesh* hears the actual words that are being said or spoken.

Anyone who knows a little bit about life can recognize that you can have two people talking, and after they finish their conversation, you can tell that one of them heard something else entirely than what his friend was telling him. Reuven will talk about "A" to Shimon, and Shimon hears "B". Stories like this happen every day. What is the root of this phenomenon?

Usually, it is because people hear what they want to hear. Shimon imagines in his mind the kind of response he hopes to hear from Reuven, which would satisfy what he wants. Even when Reuven responds to him differently than how he hoped, Shimon is still hearing what he wants to hear, and now what Reuven is actually telling him. Of course, only in extreme situations would Shimon hear “Yes” when Reuven actually said “No.” Usually, a person will not delude himself to the point that he switches a Yes for a No. But if the response is not that clear, the listener may interpret it according to what he would like to hear, and change the intention of what was said.

There was a story with the Brisker Rov, where there was a person who didn’t have that much fear of Heaven (to say it in the least) who asked what the Rov’s opinion was about a certain topic. The Brisker Rov didn’t answer him. The questioner asked him again, and again the Rov didn’t answer him. He kept repeating the question, and the Rov remained silent, clearly not wanting to answer him. Eventually, the questioner realized that the Rov wasn’t going to talk to him, so he turned and left. After the person left, they asked the Brisker Rov why he didn’t want to answer the person. The Rov answered: “It doesn’t matter what I would tell him. He would interpret what I’m saying in the way he wants to interpret it.”

It is not only words which can be misinterpreted by the listener. Even silence can be misinterpreted. If a person is quiet, we may interpret his silence as a “Yes”, or as a “No”.

Hearing from the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul is similar with the ability of thinking in the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul. It means to grasp the reality as it is – to hear the actual words that are being said. It is to know: If you ask a question, what is the person answering you? If you are having a conversation, what was really said in this conversation?

If a person would go around with a recorder and record every conversation he has, and then he listen to the recording, he would discover that many times he heard a certain thing from another, when in reality, the person said something else. This could only mean that he heard what he wished to hear, and not what was actually being said to him.

Thus, the *avodah* of a person [with regards to hearing] in the level of “*Nefesh*” is to hear what is actually being said. Sometimes we are told something that is unclear, and we need to clarify what was said. But at other times, it is very clear what is being said to us, and even so, we may misinterpret what we are hearing, because we may wish to hear it differently. The work here is to try to hear what was actually said, exactly.

## 2b. Hearing on the level of “*Ruach*”

Every sentence a person utters contains a certain “direction” [emotion] that it is moving in. A person may be expressing love or dislike, or joy or sadness. But in any case, a person never says anything that contains no emotional content. There is always something he is trying to express. The content of a person’s words may be friendly or it may be distancing, but there is always some emotion being expressed. A person can hear someone talking and he can focus on which emotion it is leading him towards.

For example, if a person hears good news, he can be aware that he is hearing something that causes expansion to his soul, and if he hears of a tragedy or bad news which saddens him, he can hear how the words are leading towards a contraction of his soul.

Hearing from the “*Ruach*” level of the soul is for a person to know, when he hears something: “Which emotion does this evoke in me?” Of course, sometimes this will not be clear. But when you generally try to figure out what emotion you are having when you hear something, you slowly bring your soul to

the level of hearing that is of the “*Ruach*” level of the soul.

## 2c. Hearing of “Neshamah”

There is nothing you hear which doesn't contain some wisdom to it. Hashem created this entire world in His *chochmah*, in His wisdom, and therefore, all of Creation contains wisdom. Whenever a person hears something, he first needs to understand what is actually being said (*nefesh*) then he can feel which emotional direction the words are leading towards (*ruach*), and then he should reflect into the wisdom that is hidden in what he has heard. This level of hearing is called the “*Neshamah*” level of hearing.

There is an expression in the Sages, “You don't hear me, you don't reason like me.” In other words, if something doesn't make sense to me, my ears do not absorb it – I do not “hear” it. From the above statement of Chazal, we learn that hearing does not just mean to hear with your ears. Rather, even if you heard it, if you think the words don't make sense and you do not want to accept it, it means that you did not hear the words. To really hear out another person is to absorb the wisdom that is contained in the words that he has said. When you absorb the wisdom in what was said, it can then make sense to you and then you can connect to what you heard.

Shlomo HaMelech said, “*And You have given to Your servant a heart that hears, to judge Your nation, to understand between good and evil.*”<sup>[1]</sup> Thus, when there is an “understanding heart”, this is the meaning of a “heart that hears.”

Hearing through the *Neshamah* level of the soul means to hear the reasoning contained in another's words, to hear the hidden wisdom contained in a statement. For example, one person may hear a certain Chassidic saying, and he may hear it as “a nice idea”, whereas another person will deeply analyze what the saying and he will wonder: What wisdom has been said here? There is something here which I need to understand. In turn, he will also study it better, and even more so, he will be able to connect to the inner point of the statement.

Thus, hearing through the *Neshamah* means to hear the logic and wisdom in something. If one connects to the words he has heard, that means that he has “heard” it. But if he heard it and he doesn't want to accept it, this is what Chazal are referring to in the statement, “You don't hear me”.

## 2d. Hearing on the level of “Chayah”

There are four aspects [contained in Hebrew words]: *oisiyos* (letters), *tagim* (crowns), *nekudos* (pronunciation), and *taamim* (tune). The *taamim*, the tune in a word, correspond to the *Chayah* level of the soul, for *taam* (tune) gives *chiyus* (vitality). In simple words, *taam* \ tune is known as *niggun*, song.

When a person hears a plain statement, he will not derive *chiyus* (vitality) from it, unless he thinks into the depth of it, or unless it is a particularly joyous thing to hear. But as for anything else a person hears, usually it will not mean that much to him (unless he is a very internal kind of person). What do all people love to hear and find meaning in? Everyone enjoys hearing a sweet *niggun* (tune), each on his own level, and according to his own nature. People receive vitality from a sweet, melodious sound, and this vitality is apparent.

Although hearing the wisdom in something can also provide a person with vitality, it is less apparent, because a person has to reflect deeply in order to discover this vitality.

Indeed, a person with a strongly developed mind can naturally see the wisdom in each thing. This is the secret of the “*Neshamah*” and “*Chayah*” levels of the soul, which are also called “Two friends that

do not separate from each other.” Just as the *Chayah* provides *chiyus* vitality to a person’s soul, so does the *Neshamah* [in the form of wisdom] provide *chiyus* to a person. But a person can only get *chiyus* from the *Neshamah* level of the soul when he deeply reflects into something as he tries to understand it. In contrast, the *Chayah* level of the soul is vitality-giving even without deep reflection.

When a person hears something that contains wisdom, in order to get vitality from it, he needs to think into the words. But when one hears a *niggun*, he does not have to think about it in order to get vitality from it. In fact, if he thinks about the *niggun*, he loses the *niggun*, because the thinking faculties cause a person to leave *niggun*. The deeper reason for this is because the *Chayah* level of the soul is the “first thought”, and the first thought of a person does not require any deep mental reflection. The depth that can be gained from listening to a *niggun* is precisely when a person doesn’t think about it, for the deeper he thinks about it, the more the *niggun* will lose its power.

Hearing the “*taam*” (tune) of something, which is to hear from the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, is to hear the “song” contained in something. Reb Nachman of Bresslov said that everything contains a *niggun* song. However, we cannot always hear the “song” in something. Anyone can put a disc into the music player and hear a song, as long as he has is not deaf, but hearing the “*niggun*” in something means to hear the song of the entire Creation - who hears it? Creation contains an inner song to it, which is actually the *chiyus* (vitality) that energizes each thing in Creation.

The *Mishnah* in Tractate Shabbos<sup>[2]</sup> states, “All animals may go out with a *shir* (a kind of ornament).” The *Baal HaTanya* says that the *Mishnah* is hinting that “the animalism [of a person] goes out with *shirah* - song - in other words, the song of Creation causes all animalism and materialism in human beings to become elevated to a higher level of existence.

If a person connects to the “song” in each thing, he essentially lives what each thing is. If he doesn’t connect to the inner song in something, he may connect to on the level of “*Ruach*”, identifying what direction it leads him to, but he is not necessarily being led to a proper direction. In fact, sometimes it can bring him to a state of sadness, and he surely will not derive vitality from this. Additionally, he may connect to something on the level of “*Neshamah*” - to have mental reflection about something - which can be vitality-giving; but that will only happen if his power of mental reflection is deep and if he can use it connect strongly to what he thinks about. But when a person learns how to hear the “song” in each thing, he can receive true vitality from each thing he comes across.

We see that a person can receive vitality from a joyous *niggun*, or even a saddening *niggun* (which is a different kind of vitality than a joyful *niggun*). Just as a person can receive vitality from something that is bubbly and lively, so can a person receive vitality from things that are very much the opposite of this. A large amount of *niggunim*, in fact, does not sound lively and joyous, yet they still provide a certain kind of vitality to a person.

There is nothing that does not contain a “song” in it. It is just that in most cases, this “song” is hidden. We can hear a “song” in the guise of letters and words, as well as in the guise of non-word [when it is just wordless sound].

In the recent generation, there has been an increase of composers, who have composed all kinds of songs involving an endless amount of words. Sometimes they are good, and sometimes, they are not that good. But where does this come from? Of course, from a superficial perspective, we can say that it comes from a desire of the producers to make money. But there is an inner source to it. It is because the “*Chayah*” level of the soul is becoming more revealed in the world, and therefore there are much more opportunities for people to expose the song and tunes contained in each thing.

There is no letter that cannot be combined with another letter, and there is no letter which does not

contain a tune to it, as we see in a sefer Torah, where every letter contains a *taam*\tune. There is a tune\song in each thing, which is its *chiyus*\vitality. But there are some things in which the song is revealed, which a person will derive vitality from, and there are other things in which the song is not revealed, so a person will not derive vitality from them. As proof, we can see many times that a tune does not fit to the words of the song. (It is like forbidden mixtures, such as *shaatnez*, in which the properties are not meant to fuse together). A person might take saddening words and compose a joyous *niggun* to it, or vice versa.

It is known that there were great *tzaddikim* who, when certain songs were brought before them, they would sometimes use the same words but switch the tune of the song, or they would use the same tune but switch the words. The power to combine letters or words with a tune is essentially a power to reveal the *chiyus*\vitality in something. The *chiyus* in something is multi-colored. Just as a person can take certain words and attribute different meanings to them (our Sages state that there are "70 facets of understanding" to the Torah, and there are "50 gates of understanding" in both the Written Torah as well as the Oral Torah), and the intellectual meaning of something is its vitality, so is the "song" of something its vitality.

There is song in the form of word, and there is also another kind of song which we are more familiar with: wordless song. Both kinds of song – the tune in a letter or word, as well as wordless song – can reveal the soul. We cited earlier the words of the *Baal HaTanya*, that when a person wishes to divest himself of all materialism and animalism, he can do so through the power of song. One of the strongest abilities we have that can reveal the soul is the secret known as *taam* (tune) – the secret of *niggun*, song.

Why? As is well-known, the *nefesh* level of the soul resides in the liver, the *ruach* in the heart, and the *neshamah* in the brain. Since these parts of the soul are clothed within man, they are also blocked somewhat, depending on one's spiritual level. But the *Chayah* level of the soul is called "*makif*", "surrounding", and it corresponds to song – therefore, when a person awakens song, he is awakening the part of the soul that is "above" him [the *Chayah*].

The "above" part of the soul, which is outside of man, is more powerful than the parts of the soul which reside within man. That is the reason behind the concept mentioned earlier a person leaves all of his 'animalism' through *shir* - song. It is because song is a higher power, above man, which can take man out of his current state.

It is reflective of the statement of our Sages, "A captive cannot release himself from prison."<sup>[3]</sup> With regards to us, the soul levels of *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah* are found within the body, and they are like the captive who cannot release himself from prison. How, then, can a person free his *neshamah* from his body? Through the power of the *Chayah*, and even more so, through the *Yechidah*, which are the higher parts of the soul that are not within the body and who are thus not in the "prison" of the body, who can free the *neshamah* from within the prison of the body.

G-d forbid, if a person's mind is not working, like if he is ill and he is brain damaged, or if he has any other mental illness which debilitates his mind, and we wish to rectify his soul, we can do so through singing holy *niggunim* in front of him, sung by truthful people and from the depths of the heart, and we can thereby raise him to a higher level. It is brought in *sefarim hakedoshim* that there are souls who cannot learn Torah on this world, for their minds have been damaged, and their souls can achieve rectification through hearing the *niggun* of a *tzaddik*. How?

If a person can only raise his spiritual level through accessing the "*Neshamah*" level of the soul, it means that he can raise himself through the power of the intellect, for part of the *neshamah* resides in the mind, and part of it is outside the mind. Therefore, the intellectual faculties of a person are

partially outside and above a person, and partially inside him [so the *Neshamah*, or the intellectual faculties of man, is not powerful enough to completely raise the spiritual level of a person]. But the *Chayah* level of the soul is entirely outside the person, for it is *makif* (surrounding), in the form of song. That is why a person can elevate himself greatly through song, as well as others.

Thus, hearing a song, whether it is a song with words or a wordless song, can be a very strong way to reveal the soul. This is on condition, though, that the song is from a holy source.

Let's explain the difference between song with words, and wordless song. When a song has words, it is on the level of *Nefesh*, for the *Nefesh* perceives letters and words. In contrast, when a song has no words to it, and it is just the tune itself unattached to any letters or words, it is not bound to the level of *Nefesh*. Since it has no letters to it, there is no 'garment' for the song to 'clothe' itself in.

We can compare this to a person who lowers himself through a rope into a well in order to draw water, and the rope snaps, and we want to raise him out of the pit in order to rescue him. Either we can raise him alone and his pale of water will be left behind in the well, or we can find a way to get him out of the pit together with his pale of water. The lesson from this is that through the power of song, there is a way to release a person from within himself, but he will not remain with any of his external garments. That is how we can describe wordless song. In wordless song, the external garments of man do not remain with him [when there is a release of his soul from his body]. In wordless song, a person escapes his materialistic aspect, from within himself. But in a song with words, the person is pulled to a higher level even with his external and lower soul layers, because the power of a song with words is that it can raise the words and letters (*Nefesh*) to a higher level.

On the other hand, there is an advantage to wordless song over a song with words. In a song with words, a person is descending to a lower level [letters\words\Nefesh] and, usually, the spiritual elevation will be closed at a certain point. That is why the revelation of soul achieved by a song with words is less than the revelation achieved by wordless song. In wordless song, there are no letters and words, [no "garments"], to close him off and prevent him from reaching higher degrees of revelation of the soul.

Thus, both song with words and wordless song have their advantages as well as disadvantages. In wordless song, the advantage is that there are no words [garments] to block him from getting higher, but the disadvantage is that the song won't penetrate to his lower layers, because it is not becoming clothed in them. In contrast, a song with words has the advantage of elevating even a person's lower soul layers; at the same time, the disadvantage of it is that he will be somewhat prevented from getting further into the elevation, because just as garments conceal the person wearing them, so do letters and words conceal the depth of the revelation of song.

Let us think now about an additional point. The *taamim*\tune of a word generally divides into two parts. We have so far explained how *taam* is in the form of *niggun*, song. Another kind of *taam* is reasoning. There are logical reasons we can give for something; there is an expression called *taam v'daas*, "reason and understanding", and there are *taamei haTorah*, reasons for the *mitzvos* of the Torah. A basic difference between these two kinds of *taam* is that *taamei HaTorah* are clothed in the 'garments' of letters and words, whereas a *niggun* does not have to always be clothed in any 'garments', for it can be a wordless song.

There is a famous saying in Brisk, "A song with words, without the right tune, is like a body without a soul, and a song without words is like a soul without a body." Meaning, a wordless song can only be a *niggun*, but it cannot ever be *taamei HaTorah*. In Brisk, they mainly learned *taamei haTorah*, which is to understand the reasoning and to give Torah definitions, which is a kind of *taam* (not in the sense of explaining reasons, but in feeling the taste of something, through studying words). That is why in

Brisk they said that that a song without words is like a soul without a body, because the *taamei HaTorah* which are in the category of understanding needs to be clothed by the garments of letters, whereas a *niggun* does not have to be clothed by any letters.

Thus, there is a song with words, which is rooted in *taamei HaTorah*, which are clothed by the garment of letters; and there is wordless song, which is actually the highest level of song that exists, and it is like a soul without a body, and therefore, wordless song has the power to elevate the body.

Wordless song gives a person the will to go to a different place. After that, a person must go back to reality, and there the song stops. But in a song with words, a person can extend *chiyus* (vitality) into his mundane reality, for such a song is able to be 'clothed' in 'garments'.

Any person, when hearing a song, can feel calmed. But the deep way to use song is to let it penetrate into the soul and to then reveal it from within the soul. Thus, the purpose of listening to a song is not just for relaxation (through that, too, can be very constructive. We are just saying that the purpose of song is not just meant to calm us down on a physical level). Rather, the purpose of hearing a song is to reveal the depth of the *neshamah*.

For this reason, there is a holy Jewish custom to sing Shabbos *zemiros* (Sabbath hymns). Shabbos is called "day of the *neshamah*", and we can notice that on Shabbos there is a considerable amount of singing that is wordless (especially in the Chassidic courts). These *niggunim* with no words attached to them are called "march songs". The depth of this matter is based upon what we have explained here: Shabbos is the level of the *Neshamah*. On one hand, it is a preparation for the six days of the coming week, and in that sense, there are songs with words that are sung on Shabbos, for the words are "garments" and are reflective of the six days of the week. But on the other hand, Shabbos is also a "semblance of the World To Come", a day of total *menuchah* (serenity), and correspondingly, there is wordless song on Shabbos.

Thus, to reveal the "*Chayah*" level within us, a person needs to reveal the "song" in each thing. In letters or words, the song may be clothed in the form of intellectual perception. In wordless song, sometimes a person may attach intellectual perception to it to a certain degree and try to give it some form, but on a deeper level, hearing a wordless *niggun* is supposed to bring a person to a state in which he is **totally divested of all physicality**.

Sometimes a person hears a wordless song, a *niggun*, and tries to give it some form. If he does so, he is adding letters and words to it that come from within himself. Although *niggun* itself is wordless, a person can add letters and words to it from within himself. But the deeper level is for a person to hear a *niggun* and reach a point where he is not thinking about anything. That is the perfected level of *niggun*.

One kind of *niggun* takes on the form of words. A person may sing deeply the words of "*How I love Your Torah, all day it is my conversation*", and he can keep concentrating deeply into the words he is singing, feeling the words. In such a *niggun*, a person is receiving *chiyus* (vitality) from the song in the garment of the intellect, emotions, and words. He is connecting himself to the words he is singing, and this is one kind of *avodah*.

If a person is not paying attention at all to the words he is singing, of this it is said "*In his mouth and lips he honors Me, and his heart is far from Me.*" The true way to sing is to pay attention to the words and reflect on the words, thinking into their meaning, as well as becoming emotionally aroused from the words; this encompasses the levels of *Nefesh* (words), *Ruach* (emotion), *Neshamah* (thought), and *Chayah* (song). However, this level of singing is still within the mode of intellect, so it is not yet the complete level of being divested from the physical.

Sometimes a person, in the midst of singing, will close his mouth and shake his whole body back and forth. This awakens the body, and doesn't allow for a total divesting of the physical. It is therefore better for a person not to sing himself, but to hear a song from another person who is singing the *niggun* in a manner of holiness.

As we explained here, through hearing a *niggun*, a person can slowly calm all of the garments of the soul: he calms the soul's area of "action" by not doing anything, he calms the area of speech by not saying or singing anything, he calms the area of thought by silencing his thoughts, and he can deepen this experience until he reaches a point of total silencing. There, he can reach his very essence. The deeper a *niggun* is, and the more attuned the *niggun* is to a person's nature and current level, the deeper a person will be able to reach.

The *niggunim* which were composed by great *tzaddikim*, such as the famous *Chabad niggun* which depicts the Four Worlds which the soul ascends and descends to, are specifically designed for this purpose of reaching deeper into the soul. One needs to reach a point in hearing the *niggun* where he awakens the highest world in himself, *Atzilus*, his very inner point and essence, and to go even beyond the self.

*Niggun* (song) is like the "ladder that is footed on earth and ascends to the heavens". The power of hearing a song is (if it is possible to say this) the ability that is most revealed in most people.

The intellectual faculties are not so strongly developed in most people, each on his own level. The sense of smell, which is the holiest of the senses, is not revealed amongst anyone (as we will explain in the coming chapter, with the help of Hashem). Speech for the most part does not awaken anyone, as we can see that many people speak forbidden speech as well as extraneous speech, and even when it is words of holiness, the mouth has already become spiritually contaminated from forbidden speech and therefore a person is usually not inspired from the words that come out of his mouth. As proof, we can see that people speak words of Torah and *tefillah*, yet they don't feel a thing from it. In contrast, song can awaken even the most distanced Jew, causing him to feel something. Even a very coarse person, when he hears a sweet *niggun*, gains a small opening to something inner.

Therefore, we can possibly say that that the strongest power which we have to escape from our physicality - the power which we have the most access to, and which most people can relate to (if not all people) - is the power of song. The power of listening to a song is the great key we have and the strongest way to awaken the soul. After one reveals it, a person can extend its power to many directions. For a large amount of people who wish to enter inward into themselves, whether it is before doing *hisbodedus* or whether it is to simply relax the body, the power of song is the strongest existing power through which a person can reach inner calm.

## 2e. Hearing on the level of "Yechidah"

By Har Sinai, there was a "*great voice, that did not end*"<sup>[4]</sup>. The simple understanding of this is that there is sound which ends, and sound which does not end. The kind of sound we recognize has an end to it. A person talks, we hear him talking, and then we don't hear him talking.

But the voice of Hashem, which spoke to us at Har Sinai, never ends. Just as it is heard from one end of the world to another, so it can be heard endlessly throughout time. The voice of Hashem which we heard at Har Sinai can still be heard in the time we are in now.

There is a concept that everything exists in three planes - in the world, in time, and in the soul (*olam, shanah, nefesh*)<sup>[5]</sup>. So if the voice of Hashem can be heard in any place and in any time, so too can it be heard in our own soul. Hearing it in our soul is, in turn, a form of revealing the soul.

When we hear something, a sound rings in our ears. Is it forever, or does it go away? For example, when one is informed that a relative of his has passed away, and he is saddened upon the news, does he remain sad forever? No; the reason for this is because Chazal say that Hashem makes us forget a deceased person after 12 months. The feeling we had upon hearing of a person's death eventually goes away, and in that sense, the hearing of that news goes away with it. So what we hear does not remain forever. But sometimes, a person can hear something and he remembers forever the message of what he heard. This is called a degree of the "*great voice that did not end.*"

Let's say a person hears that he must do *chessed*, and then he acts upon this and he goes to perform a *chessed*. He heard something, he acted upon it, but he doesn't remember what he heard later on. But sometimes a person hears something and he retains it deeply, and it affects him for his whole life.

There is a well-known story about the Alter of Novhardok, who was a merchant when he was a young boy. Once he was doing business and he met Reb Yisrael Salanter, who was passing by him on a caravan. (Perhaps some details here have been distorted, but this is the general version of the story). Reb Yisrael asked him, "What will become of all your business and all of your money...?"

The words penetrated deeply into the words of the young Alter, and he immediately went and sold his business. We all know what he became of him in the end. Through the words of Reb Yisrael Salanter, the Alter went and founded ten yeshivos and he trained many young servants of Hashem who became great in Torah and in *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

This is an example of a "great voice that does not end." It is not merely a memory; a computer also has memory. It is a point which goes into one's soul and builds the soul, and it remains forever imprinted on the person, and the person cannot budge from it for the rest of his life.

This is the voice of the *Yechidah* that one can "hear" in his soul. It is to hear a certain message which stays forever in the person's conscious, never forgotten. It is a point that one remembers which becomes a part of his being. On a deeper note, not only does it become a part of the person, but it serves to reveal to a person his own essence - thus, it is forever.

Compare this to a person who hears a loud noise, so he runs to a shelter. So too, hearing the *Yechidah* causes one to run into and enter a certain point which he never leaves.

Until now, we have explained the first part of hearing, which is how we hear through the soul in order to reveal the self. Now we progress to the second stage: to hear in a way that causes one to connect himself to the Creator. We will try to continue in the way that was explained until now: through each of the five dimensions of the soul.

### **3 - Using The Sense of Hearing To Bond With The Creator**

Until now, we explained the first part of how we use the sense of hearing in *hisbodedus*, in relating to revealing the self. We will now turn to explaining the second step, with the help of Hashem, of how we use the sense of hearing: in regards to bonding with the Creator. We will try to take the same approach we have taken until now, explaining this stage through the five levels of the soul.

#### **3a. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of "Nefesh"**

The Torah writes, "*And Moshe will speak, and G-d will answer him in a voice.*" The Sages explain this matter to be a mixture of Moshe's voice with the Creator's voice, in the term, "*The Shechinah speaks from his (Moshe's) throat.*" The *sefarim* of *Chassidus* deal heavily with this concept, in emphasizing that a person must know that when he speaks, there is an entire world of speech that is coming from within him. In other words, when a person speaks, his words are not solely his own - rather, they are

really emanating from Hashem's words, the "world of speech."

Therefore, when a person hears a person speaking with him, he should stop and reflect: Who is talking to me? When Reuven and Shimon are having a conversation, and Reuven hears Shimon talking, who is really talking to him? Simply speaking, the answer is that it is Shimon who is talking to him. But the Baal Shem Tov and others taught a fundamental rule in our *Avodas Hashem*, that whatever a person sees or hears is really a teaching from the Creator. Therefore, it is not only Shimon who is talking to Reuven. It is *the Creator* speaking to Reuven - through Shimon.

Perhaps you will now ask, "If it is only the Creator Who is talking, then if so, when two people come to give testimony in *Beis Din*, their testimony should not be accepted, because it is only the Creator talking, not them, so we have no testimony!" This is not what we mean. Rather, when a person talks to you, there is a person here who is talking to you, and this must be acknowledged to some extent.

Thus, the idea is that whenever you hear something, there are really two voices taking place. You may be hearing the words of a person, or an electronic announcement or a diskette playing, but that is only the 'garment' of a more inner sound. So whenever I hear something, there are really two voices speaking to me - The physical voice which I am hearing, which is reaching me through the physical sound waves, and a more inner sound, the "G-dly light" that is clothed in it, which is also speaking to me. This is what it means to hear from the "*Nefesh*" level of the soul with regards to one's personal bond with the Creator: identifying every sound that comes to you as both a physical voice as well as an inner sound.

### 3b. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of "Ruach"

Earlier, when we explained the "*Ruach*" level of the soul and how it is revealed through the sense of hearing, we defined it as a sense of hearing the emotional path that the words are conveying. Words may be loving, spiteful, joyous, saddening, contractive, expansive, etc. But when you use the sense of hearing to reveal a bond with the Creator, it means to hear the voice of Hashem in the words that someone is saying to you.

When you identify that it is really Hashem who is speaking to you - by way of another person, or by way of any other sound that reaches you - the next step is to identify what emotion Hashem wants you to feel now: Am I hearing words of closeness, or words of distance? Am I hearing words that convey love, or dread, or any of the other emotions that exist?

When two close friends are talking, they will speak words of love and closeness to each other, and when two enemies talk to each other, they exchange words of hate and distance. So too, when a person identifies that it is Hashem Who is talking to him through the words he is hearing, one should try to identify if Hashem is sending him a message of love, or dread, etc. In every word you hear, you can identify what emotion it is conveying, and in turn, you can then discern what Hashem is saying to you, through the emotion.

The first step is to hear through the "*Nefesh*" level of the soul, where you simply identify the very reality that it is Hashem Who is talking to you, through another's words. The next step is to hear from the "*Ruach*" level of the soul, where you identify what emotion Hashem wants you to feel now.

The Baal Shem Tov said that every word contains each of the seven main emotions: *chessed*, *gevurah*, *tiferes*, *netzach*, *hod*, *yesod*, and *malchus*. Thus, a person needs to hear in every word the emotion that Hashem is conveying to him, in the sense of "*Like water, a face reflects one face to another face, so is the heart of man to another man.*"<sup>[6]</sup> The heart of the Creator, so to speak, is reflected towards a person in the way that the person feels towards Hashem. Therefore, one should

discern which emotion the Creator is conveying to him, through the words he is hearing.

### 3c. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of “Neshamah”

Hearing [with regards to bonding with the Creator] through the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul is to hear the G-dly wisdom that is contained in something. It is for a person to understand that the sound or words he is hearing is really the voice of Hashem speaking to him, and since “He and His wisdom are one”, one can look for the G-dly wisdom that is revealed in each word.

When we explained how to use the sense of hearing to reveal the “*Neshamah*” in relation to revealing the self, we explained that it means to look for the wisdom in something. If someone is speaking to me, I need to look for the hidden wisdom that is contained in his words. However, the Baal Shem Tov taught a fundamental rule which offers us a deeper perspective into this. The Baal Shem Tov said that any *sefer* which was written through *ruach hakodesh* can be explained in countless ways. Why? Even if its author wasn't aware of the many explanations in his own words, since he had *ruach hakodesh* at the time of its writing, the words are not his own, but the words of Hashem. Hashem is infinite, and therefore there are countless explanations to the words he has written.

True, the author of the *sefer* didn't intend for any of those explanations at the time of the writing. His thinking then was limited and he only had one intention in the words he was writing. But the inner aspect of the words themselves are the words of Hashem, so there is an infinite amount of explanation and meaning in the words he has written.

Thus, when a person hears another person talking, the superficial level of hearing is to hear what the person is simply saying, and the only issue is what the person could have meant, what he was thinking. But the inner way to listen is to hear another's words as a 'garment' of a more inner kind of speech being conveyed. It is really the G-dly light which is speaking from within the person. If so, there must be wisdom contained in what the person is saying, and this is a whole different kind of listening.

For example, if a person tells me a story that happened yesterday, either I can understand that he is referring to a certain event and I can relate to it according to the way he intended [the superficial way of hearing], or, I can hear something else entirely which is being conveyed to me - I can hear something completely different than what he intended to say!

Perhaps we can even say that this is the deep reason of why people sometimes don't hear what was actually said to them, which we discussed earlier in the stage of hearing from the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul. It may happen because, from a very inner viewpoint, the words can really mean something else entirely [even though the person talking didn't intend these other meanings], which is the “*Neshamah*” level of hearing. However, this spiritual light may descend to improper places, down to the level of “*Nefesh*”, and then a person will confuse letters and words and misinterpret the meaning.

On a deep level, there is an *avodah* to switch around the letters and words that one has heard, and to then hear different meanings in the words. Every word a person utters is combined of different Hebrew letters. A person needs to hear the actual combination of letters that was said, and then he can combine the letters together and hear a different arrangement of words. The Baal Shem Tov taught about the secret of “elevated listening”, in which a person hears words and “elevates” them with a higher meaning. For example, a person may hear of a sad or troubling event, which reads as “*tzarah*” in Hebrew (צרה), and he can switch around the letters to read “*tzohar*” (צוהר), which means “light.” Or, a person may hear the word “*nega*” (נגע), which means “affliction”, and switch around the letters to form the word “*oneg*” (ענג), which means “pleasure” - and other such examples.

If I simply hear what a person is saying, and he intended to tell me about a saddening or troubling event, I will not be able to switch around the meaning of what he is saying, because this is not what the person intended to say. But if I hear in someone else's words that there is a G-dly light contained in what he is saying, I am removing the 'garment' of the words I have heard, and I can hear the spiritual light contained in it, which is its inner essence. That is how one can change and switch around the letters and words [and thereby find a deeper, greater meaning to the words].

Thus, there is an ability of a person to identify the G-dly light that is clothed in the words that another person is saying. After one identifies it, he can then intellectually reflect into the meaning of the words. Firstly, he will discover a deeper intellectual meaning, in the actual combination of letters he has word. After that, he can find different combinations of these letters and words [and see different meanings of the words]. It is like the well-known rule that two Hebrew letters build two houses, three Hebrew letters build six houses, and so forth.

In summary, hearing from the *Neshamah* level of the soul is that after I have identified what was actually said, I can then reveal the hidden wisdom contained in the words, which are beyond the actual intention of the person who said them - to the point that I can even switch around the order of the letters and words and discover different meanings in them.

### 3d. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of "Chayah"

The first of the Ten Commandments was, "*I am Hashem your G-d*". The Sages state that the Hebrew word for "I am", "*Anochi*", is an acronym for "*Ana Nafshi Kesavis Yehavis*", "*I have given you My soul, in writing.*" [7] As it were, Hashem gave of His very 'soul', so to speak - in the writing of the Torah. Similarly, when Rachel gave birth to Binyamin, her soul left her, and in the mystical teachings, this is explained to mean that she gave her own soul to Binyamin. This concept is rooted in the verse, "*My soul leaves when I speak with Him.*" [8] The faculty of speech in the soul is called "*nefesh chayah*", the "living spirit", for the Torah states that when Hashem gave man a soul, He breathed into him a "*nefesh chayah*", and *Targum* translates this to mean as "*ruach memalelah*", a "talking spirit." [9]

Thus, whenever a person speaks, on any level, he is somewhat connected to the concept of "*My soul leaves when I speak with Him.*" With most people, however, this is rarely experienced (unless a person gets very angry, or if he is particularly joyous). But the more internal a person becomes, the more he speaks from a source of *chiyus* (vitality) within him. When such a person speaks, his *chiyus* vitality accompanies his speech, for he is realizing the true meaning of the "*nefesh chayah*" in man - the power of speech.

This level of hearing means that when a person is hearing a person speak, he doesn't just hear the words that are being said. He hears the words as a 'garment' of the *chiyus* (vitality) that is contained in the words. It means that when I hear a person talking, I can identify two kinds of speech which I am hearing: the person who is talking to me, and the G-dly light which is hidden in his words. Firstly, I will be able to feel the *chiyus* of the person who is talking to me (which will cause me to connect to him and thereby love him). But even more so, there is a deeper purpose: I can identify the "G-dly vitality" that is hidden in each thing. When a person hears in this way, he receives vitality from the Source of all life - from the Creator.

If a person hears another person and he perceives it merely as a person talking to him, even if he connects to the *chiyus* vitality of the person, he will not be able to receive *chiyus* vitality from the words, because any person cannot become a Source of vitality. You may be able to reach a high level of connection to him, and it may become a great tool of *ahavas Yisrael* and *achdus* (unity) with him, for when two live beings become connected with each other, there is resulting unity. [But you will not be able to derive vitality from the person].

However, when you identify that each word contains a G-dly vitality to it, and if you are deeply aware of this and it is just superficial knowledge to you, you will be able to receive a level of spiritual inspiration from the emotion that is being conveyed in the words [*Ruach*], then you will be able to reveal the G-dly wisdom that is contained in it [*Neshamah*], and then you can receive G-dly vitality from it [*Chayah*].

Understandably, when we say that every single word contains G-dliness to it, it is too difficult for us to actually live with this concept all the time, for we cannot live all the time with such an all-inclusive awareness. But every person on some level can reveal the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, which can receive the G-dly vitality in the words he hears.

There are many stories told of *tzaddikim* in which they would hear various words and expressions of gentiles, and they would receive inner vitality from it, using the words as a deep lesson of how to serve the Creator. This is reported about the great Chassidic leaders, as well as the Chofetz Chaim. These *tzaddikim* knew how to connect every word to the source in the soul where the words were coming from, and from this they would receive inspiration in how to serve the Creator. From a deeper understanding, it is because these *tzaddikim* connected to the Source of vitality contained in the words.

The above concept has the following deep ramification. When a person hears a person talking to him and he perceives it merely as a person saying something to him, and the talker happens to be a gentile, or, *rachmana litzlan*, a Jew who does not have that much holiness to him (to put it mildly) – in such a case, hearing the person talk will have a negative spiritual effect on the listener.

In contrast to this, it is well-known that *tzaddikim* were able to hear coarse kinds of people who would speak vulgar and negative language and yet be able to spiritually elevate them. How does this work? Whenever a person hears words, there is really a ‘double’ hearing process involved – hearing the person who is talking, and hearing the G-dly light in the words. The *tzaddik identifies* more with the G-dly light in the words, and identifies less with the person saying them. He can thereby elevate the words.

To illustrate the concept, Chazal say that whenever the *Megillah* says the word “*HaMelech*” (the king), it is really referring to the “King of the world” (Hashem).<sup>[10]</sup> When the *Megillah* says “And the king said”, it really means that Hashem was speaking. Let us reflect: When Esther heard Achashveirosh talking, what did she hear? She surely heard Achashveirosh talking, but she also heard within it the King of the world. This was an example of hearing from the “*Chayah*” level of the soul. Since that was the case, the wicked Achashveirosh’s words did not have a negative spiritual effect on her.

If Esther would have only heard Achashveirosh talking, she would have been spiritually harmed by the words of this wicked king, of whom Chazal say was more evil than Haman. But when Esther was hearing Achashveirosh talking, only a small percentage of her hearing was focused on Achashveirosh talking, for the main part of her hearing was focused on the King of the world talking. The G-dly light that was hidden in the words was far more interesting to her than the private conversation that Achashveirosh was having with her. Therefore, she was protected almost entirely from the harmful influence of Achashveirosh’s speech, and that was how she was able to attribute each word to its Source.

If one isn’t aware that all words really contain this ‘double’ hearing process, he will not be able to elevate the words to their Source, for he attributes the words solely to the person who is saying them. But when identifies that the person saying the words is but a ‘garment’, and he mainly connects to the inner point contained in the speech [the “G-dly light” in it – Hashem’s speech] as opposed to the ‘garment’ [the person talking] – he can then elevate the words to their Source, whether they are the

words of a gentile or anyone who is far from holiness.

In summary, hearing from the “*Chayah*” level of the soul [with regards to bonding with the Creator] is to hear this ‘double’ process in any words that a person hears, and to thereby connect the Source of the *chiyus* (vitality) contained in the words.

### 3e. Bonding With The Creator through the Hearing of “*Yechidah*”

When we explained how to hear through the *Yechidah* with regards to revealing the self, we described it as a message that one hears forever, which he never forgets. On a deeper note, it serves to reveal the soul. Now we will explain how this concept is applied to bonding with the Creator.

We are pulled after certain sounds. A person is walking in the street and he hears a nice song playing, and he follows the sound; he’s captured for a few moments by the sound.

There are stories of certain *tzaddikim* who said that they would bring the redemption in their lifetime. But, as we know, all of these *tzaddikim* left the world without bringing the redemption. One of these *tzaddikim* was asked in a dream, “Why didn’t it happen?” And the answer was: “When I reached Heaven, I heard a sound that was so pleasant that I was totally pulled after it, unable to concentrate on anything else. I was brought into Gan Eden, and I forgot about what I had promised.” There are other such stories like this, which contain great depth, but here we will take out the following deep point: A person can be so pulled after a certain sound and then he connects to the source of the sound, and then he totally forgets about everything else.

When a person hears through his *Yechidah*, he hears the “G-dly light” that is contained in a sound. He feels the meaning of “*Pull me after You, quickly.*”<sup>[11]</sup> He connects to the Source of the sound he is hearing and he is captured by it, like a rope is pulling him in.

Chazal say that at Har Sinai, our souls left us.<sup>[12]</sup> We heard the voice of the Creator, and we were so pulled after it that we wanted to return to it, for it is our Source. When a person hears the innermost sound there is, the reality of the Creator, he is pulled after it, and captured by it, and he bonds with the Creator.

This is what it means to hear through the *Yechidah*: to hear the reality of the Creator, which causes one to connect completely to that reality. This is a very inner sound, and when a person hears it, he feels a powerful G-dly light that envelopes him and penetrates into his innermost point of his soul.

It can be experienced sometimes when a person listens to a very holy *niggun* (tune) as a person is amidst a deep inner silence. One can then feel “*My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living Almighty.*”<sup>[13]</sup> And that thirst is filled through “*Pull me after You, quickly.*”

## **4 - Using The Sense of Hearing To Reveal The Creator Alone**

We have explained how one hears from his soul in order to reveal his self and his bond with the Creator. Now we will proceed to the third step of hearing: to hear the Creator, as it were.

We explained earlier that the purpose of using the sense of hearing is to bring oneself to a point in which he is not thinking of anything at all. But there is an even deeper level: one can use his hearing to reach the depth of his soul, and there, he forgets completely that he exists.

When a person hears something, he is usually very aware of what he is hearing. He thinks into the words. When one thinks of the letters of a word, we said that this is essentially what it means to hear through the *Nefesh*. When one is inspired by what he hears, he is hearing through his *Ruach*. When

one is inspired by this to the point of reflecting on what lays behind the words, he is hearing through the *Neshamah*. When a person can identify what the tune of a song is conveying and he realizes that it can be a source of vitality to him, this is hearing through the *Chayah*.

Hearing through the *Yechidah* is to reveal the endlessness of Hashem in what you are hearing. It is beyond the level of one's private *Yechidah*, and it is even beyond the level of *Yechidah* when one personally bonds with the Creator. It is to reveal the endlessness of Hashem within oneself.

It is accessed when a person hears something that is so deep that he forgets he even exists. This does not mean that he hears the Endlessness, of course; this is impossible. It means that one hears so deeply that he has totally abandoned any thoughts about his existence.

There is a kind of hearing which pulls a person after it, as we explained before. In that kind of hearing, a person is still aware of his existence, but he connects himself to the Creator. There is still some trace of one's "I" here. But in the absolute level of hearing, the hearing is such a deep experience that a person doesn't feel himself at all. He does not feel what he is doing. He does not feel any words he is hearing since all is silent; his feelings and thoughts have become integrated in their Root.

At this level, a person doesn't feel his "I" at all; he doesn't feel a thing. When a person is there, he doesn't feel a thing, for it is the level called "*ayin*", nothingness. When one returns from that state, he is very calmed and renewed, and he feels that he has been created anew. It is experienced when a person hears a *niggun* deeply and it touches the depths of his soul, until he feels totally nullified from his own existence. He is consciously aware after this experience that he has become renewed from this state of nothingness; he feels the meaning of how Hashem renews all of Creation.

A person can reach the absolute state of "*ayin*" within himself, and then he can return to consciousness, whereupon he feels like a renewed being. He can now feel like he has become a whole new person.

We have merited to explain, with assistance from Hashem, of how to hear from the soul: to hear one's self, to hear one's bond with the Creator, and to hear the existence of the Creator alone. May we be given from Hashem the ability to really enter within ourselves and reveal our bond with the Creator, until we merit to totally integrate with Him.

## **1. The Sense of Hearing: An Introduction**

Throughout this *sefer*, we have explained ways to reveal the *neshamah* (the Divine soul of a Jew), by way of the sense of sight and the power of thought. We explained at the beginning of the *sefer* that there are four primary senses [of the soul], which are: sight, hearing, smell and speech. We have finished explaining, with *siyata d'shmaya*, the first and longest step from all of them, which was about the sense of sight. This included the eyes' sense of sight as well as the 'sight' of our mind, which is the power of thought. We will now turn to explaining the sense of hearing, and in turn, how we can reveal the *neshamah* through this sense.

As we have done until now, there will be five levels of the soul to traverse in each of the stages: *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*. We will continue this path as well with the sense of hearing. We will be learning here how to hear through the *Nefesh* level of the soul, how to hear through the *Ruach* level of the soul, to hear from the *Neshamah* level of the soul, to hear from the *Chayah* level of the soul, and to hear from the *Yechidah* level of the soul.

We will also explain, with *siyata d'shmaya*, the three stages of *hisbodedus* when it comes to the sense of hearing: revealing the self, revealing the bond of the self with the Creator, and revealing the reality of the Creator.

## **2. Revealing The Soul's Sense of Hearing - In Relation To Revealing The Self**

### 2a. Hearing on the level of "Nefesh"

As explained earlier, the *Nefesh* level of the soul corresponds to the *oisiyos* (Hebrew letters) in something. With regards to the sense of hearing, the *Nefesh* hears the actual words that are being said or spoken.

Anyone who knows a little bit about life can recognize that you can have two people talking, and after they finish their conversation, you can tell that one of them heard something else entirely than what his friend was telling him. Reuven will talk about "A" to Shimon, and Shimon hears "B". Stories like this happen every day. What is the root of this phenomenon?

Usually, it is because people hear what they want to hear. Shimon imagines in his mind the kind of response he hopes to hear from Reuven, which would satisfy what he wants. Even when Reuven responds to him differently than how he hoped, Shimon is still hearing what he wants to hear, and now what Reuven is actually telling him. Of course, only in extreme situations would Shimon hear "Yes" when Reuven actually said "No." Usually, a person will not delude himself to the point that he switches a Yes for a No. But if the response is not that clear, the listener may interpret it according to what he would like to hear, and change the intention of what was said.

There was a story with the Brisker Rov, where there was a person who didn't have that much fear of Heaven (to say it in the least) who asked what the Rov's opinion was about a certain topic. The Brisker Rov didn't answer him. The questioner asked him again, and again the Rov didn't answer him. He kept repeating the question, and the Rov remained silent, clearly not wanting to answer him. Eventually, the questioner realized that the Rov wasn't going to talk to him, so he turned and left. After the person left, they asked the Brisker Rov why he didn't want to answer the person. The Rov answered: "It doesn't matter what I would tell him. He would interpret what I'm saying in the way he wants to interpret it."

It is not only words which can be misinterpreted by the listener. Even silence can be misinterpreted. If a person is quiet, we may interpret his silence as a "Yes", or as a "No".

Hearing from the "*Nefesh*" level of the soul is similar with the ability of thinking in the "*Nefesh*" level of the soul. It means to grasp the reality as it is - to hear the actual words that are being said. It is to know: If you ask a question, what is the person answering you? If you are having a conversation, what was really said in this conversation?

If a person would go around with a recorder and record every conversation he has, and then he listen to the recording, he would discover that many times he heard a certain thing from another, when in reality, the person said something else. This could only mean that he heard what he wished to hear, and not what was actually being said to him.

Thus, the *avodah* of a person [with regards to hearing] in the level of "*Nefesh*" is to hear what is actually being said. Sometimes we are told something that is unclear, and we need to clarify what was said. But at other times, it is very clear what is being said to us, and even so, we may misinterpret what we are hearing, because we may wish to hear it differently. The work here is to try to hear what was actually said, exactly.

### 2b. Hearing on the level of "Ruach"

Every sentence a person utters contains a certain "direction" [emotion] that it is moving in. A person may be expressing love or dislike, or joy or sadness. But in any case, a person never says anything

that contains no emotional content. There is always something he is trying to express. The content of a person's words may be friendly or it may be distancing, but there is always some emotion being expressed. A person can hear someone talking and he can focus on which emotion it is leading him towards.

For example, if a person hears good news, he can be aware that he is hearing something that causes expansion to his soul, and if he hears of a tragedy or bad news which saddens him, he can hear how the words are leading towards a contraction of his soul.

Hearing from the "*Ruach*" level of the soul is for a person to know, when he hears something: "Which emotion does this evoke in me?" Of course, sometimes this will not be clear. But when you generally try to figure out what emotion you are having when you hear something, you slowly bring your soul to the level of hearing that is of the "*Ruach*" level of the soul.

## 2c. Hearing of "Neshamah"

There is nothing you hear which doesn't contain some wisdom to it. Hashem created this entire world in His *chochmah*, in His wisdom, and therefore, all of Creation contains wisdom. Whenever a person hears something, he first needs to understand what is actually being said (*nefesh*) then he can feel which emotional direction the words are leading towards (*ruach*), and then he should reflect into the wisdom that is hidden in what he has heard. This level of hearing is called the "*Neshamah*" level of hearing.

There is an expression in the Sages, "You don't hear me, you don't reason like me." In other words, if something doesn't make sense to me, my ears do not absorb it - I do not "hear" it. From the above statement of Chazal, we learn that hearing does not just mean to hear with your ears. Rather, even if you heard it, if you think the words don't make sense and you do not want to accept it, it means that you did not hear the words. To really hear out another person is to absorb the wisdom that is contained in the words that he has said. When you absorb the wisdom in what was said, it can then make sense to you and then you can connect to what you heard.

Shlomo HaMelech said, "*And You have given to Your servant a heart that hears, to judge Your nation, to understand between good and evil.*"<sup>[1]</sup> Thus, when there is an "understanding heart", this is the meaning of a "heart that hears."

Hearing through the *Neshamah* level of the soul means to hear the reasoning contained in another's words, to hear the hidden wisdom contained in a statement. For example, one person may hear a certain Chassidic saying, and he may hear it as "a nice idea", whereas another person will deeply analyze what the saying and he will wonder: What wisdom has been said here? There is something here which I need to understand. In turn, he will also study it better, and even more so, he will be able to connect to the inner point of the statement.

Thus, hearing through the *Neshamah* means to hear the logic and wisdom in something. If one connects to the words he has heard, that means that he has "heard" it. But if he heard it and he doesn't want to accept it, this is what Chazal are referring to in the statement, "You don't hear me".

## 2d. Hearing on the level of "Chayah"

There are four aspects [contained in Hebrew words]: *oisiyos* (letters), *tagim* (crowns), *nekudos* (pronunciation), and *taamim* (tune). The *taamim*, the tune in a word, correspond to the *Chayah* level of the soul, for *taam* (tune) gives *chiyus* (vitality). In simple words, *taam*\tune is known as *niggun*, song.

When a person hears a plain statement, he will not derive *chiyus* (vitality) from it, unless he thinks into the depth of it, or unless it is a particularly joyous thing to hear. But as for anything else a person hears, usually it will not mean that much to him (unless he is a very internal kind of person). What do all people love to hear and find meaning in? Everyone enjoys hearing a sweet *niggun* (tune), each on his own level, and according to his own nature. People receive vitality from a sweet, melodious sound, and this vitality is apparent.

Although hearing the wisdom in something can also provide a person with vitality, it is less apparent, because a person has to reflect deeply in order to discover this vitality.

Indeed, a person with a strongly developed mind can naturally see the wisdom in each thing. This is the secret of the "*Neshamah*" and "*Chayah*" levels of the soul, which are also called "Two friends that do not separate from each other." Just as the *Chayah* provides *chiyus*\vitality to a person's soul, so does the *Neshamah* [in the form of wisdom] provide *chiyus* to a person. But a person can only get *chiyus* from the *Neshamah* level of the soul when he deeply reflects into something as he tries to understand it. In contrast, the *Chayah* level of the soul is vitality-giving even without deep reflection.

When a person hears something that contains wisdom, in order to get vitality from it, he needs to think into the words. But when one hears a *niggun*, he does not have to think about it in order to get vitality from it. In fact, if he thinks about the *niggun*, he loses the *niggun*, because the thinking faculties cause a person to leave *niggun*. The deeper reason for this is because the *Chayah* level of the soul is the "first thought", and the first thought of a person does not require any deep mental reflection. The depth that can be gained from listening to a *niggun* is precisely when a person doesn't think about it, for the deeper he thinks about it, the more the *niggun* will lose its power.

Hearing the "*taam*" (tune) of something, which is to hear from the "*Chayah*" level of the soul, is to hear the "song" contained in something. Reb Nachman of Bresslov said that everything contains a *niggun*\song. However, we cannot always hear the "song" in something. Anyone can put a disc into the music player and hear a song, as long as he has is not deaf, but hearing the "*niggun*" in something means to hear the song of the entire Creation - who hears it? Creation contains an inner song to it, which is actually the *chiyus* (vitality) that energizes each thing in Creation.

The *Mishnah* in Tractate Shabbos<sup>[2]</sup> states, "All animals may go out with a *shir* (a kind of ornament)." The *Baal HaTanya* says that the *Mishnah* is hinting that "the animalism [of a person] goes out with *shirah* - song - in other words, the song of Creation causes all animalism and materialism in human beings to become elevated to a higher level of existence.

If a person connects to the "song" in each thing, he essentially lives what each thing is. If he doesn't connect to the inner song in something, he may connect to on the level of "*Ruach*", identifying what direction it leads him to, but he is not necessarily being led to a proper direction. In fact, sometimes it can bring him to a state of sadness, and he surely will not derive vitality from this. Additionally, he may connect to something on the level of "*Neshamah*" - to have mental reflection about something - which can be vitality-giving; but that will only happen if his power of mental reflection is deep and if he can use it connect strongly to what he thinks about. But when a person learns how to hear the "song" in each thing, he can receive true vitality from each thing he comes across.

We see that a person can receive vitality from a joyous *niggun*, or even a saddening *niggun* (which is a different kind of vitality than a joyful *niggun*). Just as a person can receive vitality from something that is bubbly and lively, so can a person receive vitality from things that are very much the opposite of this. A large amount of *niggunim*, in fact, does not sound lively and joyous, yet they still provide a certain kind of vitality to a person.

There is nothing that does not contain a “song” in it. It is just that in most cases, this “song” is hidden. We can hear a “song” in the guise of letters and words, as well as in the guise of non-word [when it is just wordless sound].

In the recent generation, there has been an increase of composers, who have composed all kinds of songs involving an endless amount of words. Sometimes they are good, and sometimes, they are not that good. But where does this come from? Of course, from a superficial perspective, we can say that it comes from a desire of the producers to make money. But there is an inner source to it. It is because the “*Chayah*” level of the soul is becoming more revealed in the world, and therefore there are much more opportunities for people to expose the song and tunes contained in each thing.

There is no letter that cannot be combined with another letter, and there is no letter which does not contain a tune to it, as we see in a sefer Torah, where every letter contains a *taam*\tune. There is a tune\song in each thing, which is its *chiyus*\vitality. But there are some things in which the song is revealed, which a person will derive vitality from, and there are other things in which the song is not revealed, so a person will not derive vitality from them. As proof, we can see many times that a tune does not fit to the words of the song. (It is like forbidden mixtures, such as *shaatnez*, in which the properties are not meant to fuse together). A person might take saddening words and compose a joyous *niggun* to it, or vice versa.

It is known that there were great *tzaddikim* who, when certain songs were brought before them, they would sometimes use the same words but switch the tune of the song, or they would use the same tune but switch the words. The power to combine letters or words with a tune is essentially a power to reveal the *chiyus*\vitality in something. The *chiyus* in something is multi-colored. Just as a person can take certain words and attribute different meanings to them (our Sages state that there are “70 facets of understanding” to the Torah, and there are “50 gates of understanding” in both the Written Torah as well as the Oral Torah), and the intellectual meaning of something is its vitality, so is the “song” of something its vitality.

There is song in the form of word, and there is also another kind of song which we are more familiar with: wordless song. Both kinds of song – the tune in a letter or word, as well as wordless song – can reveal the soul. We cited earlier the words of the *Baal HaTanya*, that when a person wishes to divest himself of all materialism and animalism, he can do so through the power of song. One of the strongest abilities we have that can reveal the soul is the secret known as *taam* (tune) – the secret of *niggun*, song.

Why? As is well-known, the *nefesh* level of the soul resides in the liver, the *ruach* in the heart, and the *neshamah* in the brain. Since these parts of the soul are clothed within man, they are also blocked somewhat, depending on one’s spiritual level. But the *Chayah* level of the soul is called “*makif*”, “surrounding”, and it corresponds to song – therefore, when a person awakens song, he is awakening the part of the soul that is “above” him [the *Chayah*].

The “above” part of the soul, which is outside of man, is more powerful than the parts of the soul which reside within man. That is the reason behind the concept mentioned earlier a person leaves all of his ‘animalism’ through *shir* - song. It is because song is a higher power, above man, which can take man out of his current state.

It is reflective of the statement of our Sages, “A captive cannot release himself from prison.”<sup>[3]</sup> With regards to us, the soul levels of *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah* are found within the body, and they are like the captive who cannot release himself from prison. How, then, can a person free his *neshamah* from his body? Through the power of the *Chayah*, and even more so, through the *Yechidah*, which are the higher parts of the soul that are not within the body and who are thus not in

the “prison” of the body, who can free the *neshamah* from within the prison of the body.

G-d forbid, if a person’s mind is not working, like if he is ill and he is brain damaged, or if he has any other mental illness which debilitates his mind, and we wish to rectify his soul, we can do so through singing holy *niggunim* in front of him, sung by truthful people and from the depths of the heart, and we can thereby raise him to a higher level. It is brought in *sefarim hakedoshim* that there are souls who cannot learn Torah on this world, for their minds have been damaged, and their souls can achieve rectification through hearing the niggun of a *tzaddik*. How?

If a person can only raise his spiritual level through accessing the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul, it means that he can raise himself through the power of the intellect, for part of the *neshamah* resides in the mind, and part of it is outside the mind. Therefore, the intellectual faculties of a person are partially outside and above a person, and partially inside him [so the *Neshamah*, or the intellectual faculties of man, is not powerful enough to completely raise the spiritual level of a person]. But the *Chayah* level of the soul is entirely outside the person, for it is *makif* (surrounding), in the form of song. That is why a person can elevate himself greatly through song, as well as others.

Thus, hearing a song, whether it is a song with words or a wordless song, can be a very strong way to reveal the soul. This is on condition, though, that the song is from a holy source.

Let’s explain the difference between song with words, and wordless song. When a song has words, it is on the level of *Nefesh*, for the *Nefesh* perceives letters and words. In contrast, when a song has no words to it, and it is just the tune itself unattached to any letters or words, it is not bound to the level of *Nefesh*. Since it has no letters to it, there is no ‘garment’ for the song to ‘clothe’ itself in.

We can compare this to a person who lowers himself through a rope into a well in order to draw water, and the rope snaps, and we want to raise him out of the pit in order to rescue him. Either we can raise him alone and his pale of water will be left behind in the well, or we can find a way to get him out of the pit together with his pale of water. The lesson from this is that through the power of song, there is a way to release a person from within himself, but he will not remain with any of his external garments. That is how we can describe wordless song. In wordless song, the external garments of man do not remain with him [when there is a release of his soul from his body]. In wordless song, a person escapes his materialistic aspect, from within himself. But in a song with words, the person is pulled to a higher level even with his external and lower soul layers, because the power of a song with words is that it can raise the words and letters (*Nefesh*) to a higher level.

On the other hand, there is an advantage to wordless song over a song with words. In a song with words, a person is descending to a lower level [letters\words\*Nefesh*] and, usually, the spiritual elevation will be closed at a certain point. That is why the revelation of soul achieved by a song with words is less than the revelation achieved by wordless song. In wordless song, there are no letters and words, [no “garments”], to close him off and prevent him from reaching higher degrees of revelation of the soul.

Thus, both song with words and wordless song have their advantages as well as disadvantages. In wordless song, the advantage is that there are no words [garments] to block him from getting higher, but the disadvantage is that the song won’t penetrate to his lower layers, because it is not becoming clothed in them. In contrast, a song with words has the advantage of elevating even a person’s lower soul layers; at the same time, the disadvantage of it is that he will be somewhat prevented from getting further into the elevation, because just as garments conceal the person wearing them, so do letters and words conceal the depth of the revelation of song.

Let us think now about an additional point. The *taamim*\tune of a word generally divides into two

parts. We have so far explained how *taam* is in the form of *niggun*, song. Another kind of *taam* is reasoning. There are logical reasons we can give for something; there is an expression called *taam v'daas*, "reason and understanding", and there are *taamei haTorah*, reasons for the *mitzvos* of the Torah. A basic difference between these two kinds of *taam* is that *taamei HaTorah* are clothed in the 'garments' of letters and words, whereas a *niggun* does not have to always be clothed in any 'garments', for it can be a wordless song.

There is a famous saying in Brisk, "A song with words, without the right tune, is like a body without a soul, and a song without words is like a soul without a body." Meaning, a wordless song can only be a *niggun*, but it cannot ever be *taamei HaTorah*. In Brisk, they mainly learned *taamei haTorah*, which is to understand the reasoning and to give Torah definitions, which is a kind of *taam* (not in the sense of explaining reasons, but in feeling the taste of something, through studying words). That is why in Brisk they said that that a song without words is like a soul without a body, because the *taamei haTorah* which are in the category of understanding needs to be clothed by the garments of letters, whereas a *niggun* does not have to be clothed by any letters.

Thus, there is a song with words, which is rooted in *taamei HaTorah*, which are clothed by the garment of letters; and there is wordless song, which is actually the highest level of song that exists, and it is like a soul without a body, and therefore, wordless song has the power to elevate the body.

Wordless song gives a person the will to go to a different place. After that, a person must go back to reality, and there the song stops. But in a song with words, a person can extend *chiyus* (vitality) into his mundane reality, for such a song is able to be 'clothed' in 'garments'.

Any person, when hearing a song, can feel calmed. But the deep way to use song is to let it penetrate into the soul and to then reveal it from within the soul. Thus, the purpose of listening to a song is not just for relaxation (through that, too, can be very constructive. We are just saying that the purpose of song is not just meant to calm us down on a physical level). Rather, the purpose of hearing a song is to reveal the depth of the *neshamah*.

For this reason, there is a holy Jewish custom to sing Shabbos *zemiros* (Sabbath hymns). Shabbos is called "day of the *neshamah*", and we can notice that on Shabbos there is a considerable amount of singing that is wordless (especially in the Chassidic courts). These *niggunim* with no words attached to them are called "march songs". The depth of this matter is based upon what we have explained here: Shabbos is the level of the *Neshamah*. On one hand, it is a preparation for the six days of the coming week, and in that sense, there are songs with words that are sung on Shabbos, for the words are "garments" and are reflective of the six days of the week. But on the other hand, Shabbos is also a "semblance of the World To Come", a day of total *menuchah* (serenity), and correspondingly, there is wordless song on Shabbos.

Thus, to reveal the "*Chayah*" level within us, a person needs to reveal the "song" in each thing. In letters or words, the song may be clothed in the form of intellectual perception. In wordless song, sometimes a person may attach intellectual perception to it to a certain degree and try to give it some form, but on a deeper level, hearing a wordless *niggun* is supposed to bring a person to a state in which he is **totally divested of all physicality**.

Sometimes a person hears a wordless song, a *niggun*, and tries to give it some form. If he does so, he is adding letters and words to it that come from within himself. Although *niggun* itself is wordless, a person can add letters and words to it from within himself. But the deeper level is for a person to hear a *niggun* and reach a point where he is not thinking about anything. That is the perfected level of *niggun*.

One kind of niggun takes on the form of words. A person may sing deeply the words of *"How I love Your Torah, all day it is my conversation"*, and he can keep concentrating deeply into the words he is singing, feeling the words. In such a *niggun*, a person is receiving *chiyus* (vitality) from the song in the garment of the intellect, emotions, and words. He is connecting himself to the words he is singing, and this is one kind of *avodah*.

If a person is not paying attention at all to the words he is singing, of this it is said *"In his mouth and lips he honors Me, and his heart is far from Me."* The true way to sing is to pay attention to the words and reflect on the words, thinking into their meaning, as well as becoming emotionally aroused from the words; this encompasses the levels of *Nefesh* (words), *Ruach* (emotion), *Neshamah* (thought), and *Chayah* (song). However, this level of singing is still within the mode of intellect, so it is not yet the complete level of being divested from the physical.

Sometimes a person, in the midst of singing, will close his mouth and shake his whole body back and forth. This awakens the body, and doesn't allow for a total divesting of the physical. It is therefore better for a person not to sing himself, but to hear a song from another person who is singing the *niggun* in a manner of holiness.

As we explained here, through hearing a *niggun*, a person can slowly calm all of the garments of the soul: he calms the soul's area of "action" by not doing anything, he calms the area of speech by not saying or singing anything, he calms the area of thought by silencing his thoughts, and he can deepen this experience until he reaches a point of total silencing. There, he can reach his very essence. The deeper a *niggun* is, and the more attuned the *niggun* is to a person's nature and current level, the deeper a person will be able to reach.

The *niggunim* which were composed by great *tzaddikim*, such as the famous *Chabad niggun* which depicts the Four Worlds which the soul ascends and descends to, are specifically designed for this purpose of reaching deeper into the soul. One needs to reach a point in hearing the *niggun* where he awakens the highest world in himself, *Atzilus*, his very inner point and essence, and to go even beyond the self.

*Niggun* (song) is like the "ladder that is footed on earth and ascends to the heavens". The power of hearing a song is (if it is possible to say this) the ability that is most revealed in most people.

The intellectual faculties are not so strongly developed in most people, each on his own level. The sense of smell, which is the holiest of the senses, is not revealed amongst anyone (as we will explain in the coming chapter, with the help of Hashem). Speech for the most part does not awaken anyone, as we can see that many people speak forbidden speech as well as extraneous speech, and even when it is words of holiness, the mouth has already become spiritually contaminated from forbidden speech and therefore a person is usually not inspired from the words that come out of his mouth. As proof, we can see that people speak words of Torah and *tefillah*, yet they don't feel a thing from it. In contrast, song can awaken even the most distanced Jew, causing him to feel something. Even a very coarse person, when he hears a sweet *niggun*, gains a small opening to something inner.

Therefore, we can possibly say that that the strongest power which we have to escape from our physicality - the power which we have the most access to, and which most people can relate to (if not all people) - is the power of song. The power of listening to a song is the great key we have and the strongest way to awaken the soul. After one reveals it, a person can extend its power to many directions. For a large amount of people who wish to enter inward into themselves, whether it is before doing *hisbodedus* or whether it is to simply relax the body, the power of song is the strongest existing power through which a person can reach inner calm.

## 2e. Hearing on the level of “Yechidah”

By Har Sinai, there was a “*great voice, that did not end*”<sup>[4]</sup>. The simple understanding of this is that there is sound which ends, and sound which does not end. The kind of sound we recognize has an end to it. A person talks, we hear him talking, and then we don’t hear him talking.

But the voice of Hashem, which spoke to us at Har Sinai, never ends. Just as it is heard from one end of the world to another, so it can be heard endlessly throughout time. The voice of Hashem which we heard at Har Sinai can still be heard in the time we are in now.

There is a concept that everything exists in three planes – in the world, in time, and in the soul (*olam, shanah, nefesh*)<sup>[5]</sup>. So if the voice of Hashem can be heard in any place and in any time, so too can it be heard in our own soul. Hearing it in our soul is, in turn, a form of revealing the soul.

When we hear something, a sound rings in our ears. Is it forever, or does it go away? For example, when one is informed that a relative of his has passed away, and he is saddened upon the news, does he remain sad forever? No; the reason for this is because Chazal say that Hashem makes us forget a deceased person after 12 months. The feeling we had upon hearing of a person’s death eventually goes away, and in that sense, the hearing of that news goes away with it. So what we hear does not remain forever. But sometimes, a person can hear something and he remembers forever the message of what he heard. This is called a degree of the “*great voice that did not end.*”

Let’s say a person hears that he must do *chessed*, and then he acts upon this and he goes to perform a *chessed*. He heard something, he acted upon it, but he doesn’t remember what he heard later on. But sometimes a person hears something and he retains it deeply, and it affects him for his whole life.

There is a well-known story about the Alter of Novhardok, who was a merchant when he was a young boy. Once he was doing business and he met Reb Yisrael Salanter, who was passing by him on a caravan. (Perhaps some details here have been distorted, but this is the general version of the story). Reb Yisrael asked him, “What will become of all your business and all of your money...?”

The words penetrated deeply into the words of the young Alter, and he immediately went and sold his business. We all know what he became of him in the end. Through the words of Reb Yisrael Salanter, the Alter went and founded ten yeshivos and he trained many young servants of Hashem who became great in Torah and in *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

This is an example of a “great voice that does not end.” It is not merely a memory; a computer also has memory. It is a point which goes into one’s soul and builds the soul, and it remains forever imprinted on the person, and the person cannot budge from it for the rest of his life.

This is the voice of the *Yechidah* that one can “hear” in his soul. It is to hear a certain message which stays forever in the person’s conscious, never forgotten. It is a point that one remembers which becomes a part of his being. On a deeper note, not only does it become a part of the person, but it serves to reveal to a person his own essence – thus, it is forever.

Compare this to a person who hears a loud noise, so he runs to a shelter. So too, hearing the *Yechidah* causes one to run into and enter a certain point which he never leaves.

Until now, we have explained the first part of hearing, which is how we hear through the soul in order to reveal the self. Now we progress to the second stage: to hear in a way that causes one to connect himself to the Creator. We will try to continue in the way that was explained until now: through each of the five dimensions of the soul.

### **3 - Using The Sense of Hearing To Bond With The Creator**

Until now, we explained the first part of how we use the sense of hearing in *hisbodedus*, in relating to revealing the self. We will now turn to explaining the second step, with the help of Hashem, of how we use the sense of hearing: in regards to bonding with the Creator. We will try to take the same approach we have taken until now, explaining this stage through the give levels of the soul.

#### **3a. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of "Nefesh"**

The Torah writes, "And Moshe will speak, and G-d will answer him in a voice." The Sages explain this matter to be a mixture of Moshe's voice with the Creator's voice, in the term, "The *Shechinah* speaks from his (Moshe's) throat." The *sefarim* of *Chassidus* deal heavily with this concept, in emphasizing that a person must know that when he speaks, there is an entire world of speech that is coming from within him. In other words, when a person speaks, his words are not solely his own – rather, they are really emanating from Hashem's words, the "world of speech."

Therefore, when a person hears a person speaking with him, he should stop and reflect: Who is talking to me? When Reuven and Shimon are having a conversation, and Reuven hears Shimon talking, who is really talking to him? Simply speaking, the answer is that it is Shimon who is talking to him. But the Baal Shem Tov and others taught a fundamental rule in our *Avodas Hashem*, that whatever a person sees or hears is really a teaching from the Creator. Therefore, it is not only Shimon who is talking to Reuven. It is *the Creator* speaking to Reuven – through Shimon.

Perhaps you will now ask, "If it is only the Creator Who is talking, then if so, when two people come to give testimony in *Beis Din*, their testimony should not be accepted, because it is only the Creator talking, not them, so we have no testimony!" This is not what we mean. Rather, when a person talks to you, there is a person here who is talking to you, and this must be acknowledged to some extent.

Thus, the idea is that whenever you hear something, there are really two voices taking place. You may be hearing the words of a person, or an electronic announcement or a diskette playing, but that is only the 'garment' of a more inner sound. So whenever I hear something, there are really two voices speaking to me – The physical voice which I am hearing, which is reaching me through the physical sound waves, and a more inner sound, the "G-dly light" that is clothed in it, which is also speaking to me. This is what it means to hear from the "*Nefesh*" level of the soul with regards to one's personal bond with the Creator: identifying every sound that comes to you as both a physical voice as well as an inner sound.

#### **3b. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of "Ruach"**

Earlier, when we explained the "*Ruach*" level of the soul and how it is revealed through the sense of hearing, we defined it as a sense of hearing the emotional path that the words are conveying. Words may be loving, spiteful, joyous, saddening, contractive, expansive, etc. But when you use the sense of hearing to reveal a bond with the Creator, it means to hear the voice of Hashem in the words that someone is saying to you.

When you identify that it is really Hashem who is speaking to you – by way of another person, or by way of any other sound that reaches you – the next step is to identify what emotion Hashem wants you to feel now: Am I hearing words of closeness, or words of distance? Am I hearing words that convey love, or dread, or any of the other emotions that exist?

When two close friends are talking, they will speak words of love and closeness to each other, and when two enemies talk to each other, they exchange words of hate and distance. So too, when a person identifies that it is Hashem Who is talking to him through the words he is hearing, one should

try to identify if Hashem is sending him a message of love, or dread, etc. In every word you hear, you can identify what emotion it is conveying, and in turn, you can then discern what Hashem is saying to you, through the emotion.

The first step is to hear through the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul, where you simply identify the very reality that it is Hashem Who is talking to you, through another’s words. The next step is to hear from the “*Ruach*” level of the soul, where you identify what emotion Hashem wants you to feel now.

The Baal Shem Tov said that every word contains each of the seven main emotions: *chessed*, *gevurah*, *tiferes*, *netzach*, *hod*, *yesod*, and *malchus*. Thus, a person needs to hear in every word the emotion that Hashem is conveying to him, in the sense of “*Like water, a face reflects one face to another face, so is the heart of man to another man.*”<sup>[6]</sup> The heart of the Creator, so to speak, is reflected towards a person in the way that the person feels towards Hashem. Therefore, one should discern which emotion the Creator is conveying to him, through the words he is hearing.

### 3c. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of “Neshamah”

Hearing [with regards to bonding with the Creator] through the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul is to hear the G-dly wisdom that is contained in something. It is for a person to understand that the sound or words he is hearing is really the voice of Hashem speaking to him, and since “He and His wisdom are one”, one can look for the G-dly wisdom that is revealed in each word.

When we explained how to use the sense of hearing to reveal the “*Neshamah*” in relation to revealing the self, we explained that it means to look for the wisdom in something. If someone is speaking to me, I need to look for the hidden wisdom that is contained in his words. However, the Baal Shem Tov taught a fundamental rule which offers us a deeper perspective into this. The Baal Shem Tov said that any *sefer* which was written through *ruach hakodesh* can be explained in countless ways. Why? Even if its author wasn’t aware of the many explanations in his own words, since he had *ruach hakodesh* at the time of its writing, the words are not his own, but the words of Hashem. Hashem is infinite, and therefore there are countless explanations to the words he has written.

True, the author of the *sefer* didn’t intend for any of those explanations at the time of the writing. His thinking then was limited and he only had one intention in the words he was writing. But the inner aspect of the words themselves are the words of Hashem, so there is an infinite amount of explanation and meaning in the words he has written.

Thus, when a person hears another person talking, the superficial level of hearing is to hear what the person is simply saying, and the only issue is what the person could have meant, what he was thinking. But the inner way to listen is to hear another’s words as a ‘garment’ of a more inner kind of speech being conveyed. It is really the G-dly light which is speaking from within the person. If so, there must be wisdom contained in what the person is saying, and this is a whole different kind of listening.

For example, if a person tells me a story that happened yesterday, either I can understand that he is referring to a certain event and I can relate to it according to the way he intended [the superficial way of hearing], or, I can hear something else entirely which is being conveyed to me – I can hear something completely different than what he intended to say!

Perhaps we can even say that this is the deep reason of why people sometimes don’t hear what was actually said to them, which we discussed earlier in the stage of hearing from the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul. It may happen because, from a very inner viewpoint, the words can really mean something else entirely [even though the person talking didn’t intend these other meanings], which is the

"Neshamah" level of hearing. However, this spiritual light may descend to improper places, down to the level of "Nefesh", and then a person will confuse letters and words and misinterpret the meaning.

On a deep level, there is an *avodah* to switch around the letters and words that one has heard, and to then hear different meanings in the words. Every word a person utters is combined of different Hebrew letters. A person needs to hear the actual combination of letters that was said, and then he can combine the letters together and hear a different arrangement of words. The Baal Shem Tov taught about the secret of "elevated listening", in which a person hears words and "elevates" them with a higher meaning. For example, a person may hear of a sad or troubling event, which reads as "tzarah" in Hebrew (צרה), and he can switch around the letters to read "tzohar" (צוהר), which means "light." Or, a person may hear the word "nega" (נגע), which means "affliction", and switch around the letters to form the word "oneg" (ענג), which means "pleasure" - and other such examples.

If I simply hear what a person is saying, and he intended to tell me about a saddening or troubling event, I will not be able to switch around the meaning of what he is saying, because this is not what the person intended to say. But if I hear in someone else's words that there is a G-dly light contained in what he is saying, I am removing the 'garment' of the words I have heard, and I can hear the spiritual light contained in it, which is its inner essence. That is how one can change and switch around the letters and words [and thereby find a deeper, greater meaning to the words].

Thus, there is an ability of a person to identify the G-dly light that is clothed in the words that another person is saying. After one identifies it, he can then intellectually reflect into the meaning of the words. Firstly, he will discover a deeper intellectual meaning, in the actual combination of letters he has word. After that, he can find different combinations of these letters and words [and see different meanings of the words]. It is like the well-known rule that two Hebrew letters build two houses, three Hebrew letters build six houses, and so forth.

In summary, hearing from the *Neshamah* level of the soul is that after I have identified what was actually said, I can then reveal the hidden wisdom contained in the words, which are beyond the actual intention of the person who said them - to the point that I can even switch around the order of the letters and words and discover different meanings in them.

### 3d. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of "Chayah"

The first of the Ten Commandments was, "I am Hashem your G-d". The Sages state that the Hebrew word for "I am", "Anochi", is an acronym for "Ana Nafshi Kesavis Yehavis", "I have given you My soul, in writing." [7] As it were, Hashem gave of His very 'soul', so to speak - in the writing of the Torah. Similarly, when Rachel gave birth to Binyamin, her soul left her, and in the mystical teachings, this is explained to mean that she gave her own soul to Binyamin. This concept is rooted in the verse, "My soul leaves when I speak with Him." [8] The faculty of speech in the soul is called "nefesh chayah", the "living spirit", for the Torah states that when Hashem gave man a soul, He breathed into him a "nefesh chayah", and *Targum* translates this to mean as "ruach memalelah", a "talking spirit." [9]

Thus, whenever a person speaks, on any level, he is somewhat connected to the concept of "My soul leaves when I speak with Him." With most people, however, this is rarely experienced (unless a person gets very angry, or if he is particularly joyous). But the more internal a person becomes, the more he speaks from a source of *chiyus* (vitality) within him. When such a person speaks, his *chiyus*/vitality accompanies his speech, for he is realizing the true meaning of the "nefesh chayah" in man - the power of speech.

This level of hearing means that when a person is hearing a person speak, he doesn't just hear the words that are being said. He hears the words as a 'garment' of the *chiyus* (vitality) that is contained

in the words. It means that when I hear a person talking, I can identify two kinds of speech which I am hearing: the person who is talking to me, and the G-dly light which is hidden in his words. Firstly, I will be able to feel the *chiyus* of the person who is talking to me (which will cause me to connect to him and thereby love him). But even more so, there is a deeper purpose: I can identify the “G-dly vitality” that is hidden in each thing. When a person hears in this way, he receives vitality from the Source of all life – from the Creator.

If a person hears another person and he perceives it merely as a person talking to him, even if he connects to the *chiyus*\vitality of the person, he will not be able to receive *chiyus*\vitality from the words, because any person cannot become a Source of vitality. You may be able to reach a high level of connection to him, and it may become a great tool of *ahavas Yisrael* and *achdus* (unity) with him, for when two live beings become connected with each other, there is resulting unity. [But you will not be able to derive vitality from the person].

However, when you identify that each word contains a G-dly vitality to it, and if you are deeply aware of this and it is just superficial knowledge to you, you will be able to receive a level of spiritual inspiration from the emotion that is being conveyed in the words [*Ruach*], then you will be able to reveal the G-dly wisdom that is contained in it [*Neshamah*], and then you can receive G-dly vitality from it [*Chayah*].

Understandably, when we say that every single word contains G-dliness to it, it is too difficult for us to actually live with this concept all the time, for we cannot live all the time with such an all-inclusive awareness. But every person on some level can reveal the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, which can receive the G-dly vitality in the words he hears.

There are many stories told of *tzaddikim* in which they would hear various words and expressions of gentiles, and they would receive inner vitality from it, using the words as a deep lesson of how to serve the Creator. This is reported about the great Chassidic leaders, as well as the Chofetz Chaim. These *tzaddikim* knew how to connect every word to the source in the soul where the words were coming from, and from this they would receive inspiration in how to serve the Creator. From a deeper understanding, it is because these *tzaddikim* connected to the Source of vitality contained in the words.

The above concept has the following deep ramification. When a person hears a person talking to him and he perceives it merely as a person saying something to him, and the talker happens to be a gentile, or, *rachmana litzlan*, a Jew who does not have that much holiness to him (to put it mildly) – in such a case, hearing the person talk will have a negative spiritual effect on the listener.

In contrast to this, it is well-known that *tzaddikim* were able to hear coarse kinds of people who would speak vulgar and negative language and yet be able to spiritually elevate them. How does this work? Whenever a person hears words, there is really a ‘double’ hearing process involved – hearing the person who is talking, and hearing the G-dly light in the words. The *tzaddik* *identifies* more with the G-dly light in the words, and identifies less with the person saying them. He can thereby elevate the words.

To illustrate the concept, Chazal say that whenever the *Megillah* says the word “*HaMelech*” (the king), it is really referring to the “King of the world” (Hashem).<sup>[10]</sup> When the *Megillah* says “And the king said”, it really means that Hashem was speaking. Let us reflect: When Esther heard Achashveirosh talking, what did she hear? She surely heard Achashveirosh talking, but she also heard within it the King of the world. This was an example of hearing from the “*Chayah*” level of the soul. Since that was the case, the wicked Achashveirosh’s words did not have a negative spiritual effect on her.

If Esther would have only heard Achashveirosh talking, she would have been spiritually harmed by the words of this wicked king, of whom Chazal say was more evil than Haman. But when Esther was hearing Achashveirosh talking, only a small percentage of her hearing was focused on Achashveirosh talking, for the main part of her hearing was focused on the King of the world talking. The G-dly light that was hidden in the words was far more interesting to her than the private conversation that Achashveirosh was having with her. Therefore, she was protected almost entirely from the harmful influence of Achashveirosh's speech, and that was how she was able to attribute each word to its Source.

If one isn't aware that all words really contain this 'double' hearing process, he will not be able to elevate the words to their Source, for he attributes the words solely to the person who is saying them. But when he identifies that the person saying the words is but a 'garment', and he mainly connects to the inner point contained in the speech [the "G-dly light" in it - Hashem's speech] as opposed to the 'garment' [the person talking] - he can then elevate the words to their Source, whether they are the words of a gentile or anyone who is far from holiness.

In summary, hearing from the "*Chayah*" level of the soul [with regards to bonding with the Creator] is to hear this 'double' process in any words that a person hears, and to thereby connect the Source of the *chiyus* (vitality) contained in the words.

### 3e. Bonding With The Creator through the Hearing of "Yechidah"

When we explained how to hear through the *Yechidah* with regards to revealing the self, we described it as a message that one hears forever, which he never forgets. On a deeper note, it serves to reveal the soul. Now we will explain how this concept is applied to bonding with the Creator.

We are pulled after certain sounds. A person is walking in the street and he hears a nice song playing, and he follows the sound; he's captured for a few moments by the sound.

There are stories of certain *tzaddikim* who said that they would bring the redemption in their lifetime. But, as we know, all of these *tzaddikim* left the world without bringing the redemption. One of these *tzaddikim* was asked in a dream, "Why didn't it happen?" And the answer was: "When I reached Heaven, I heard a sound that was so pleasant that I was totally pulled after it, unable to concentrate on anything else. I was brought into Gan Eden, and I forgot about what I had promised." There are other such stories like this, which contain great depth, but here we will take out the following deep point: A person can be so pulled after a certain sound and then he connects to the source of the sound, and then he totally forgets about everything else.

When a person hears through his *Yechidah*, he hears the "G-dly light" that is contained in a sound. He feels the meaning of "*Pull me after You, quickly.*"<sup>[12]</sup> He connects to the Source of the sound he is hearing and he is captured by it, like a rope is pulling him in.

Chazal say that at Har Sinai, our souls left us.<sup>[12]</sup> We heard the voice of the Creator, and we were so pulled after it that we wanted to return to it, for it is our Source. When a person hears the innermost sound there is, the reality of the Creator, he is pulled after it, and captured by it, and he bonds with the Creator.

This is what it means to hear through the *Yechidah*: to hear the reality of the Creator, which causes one to connect completely to that reality. This is a very inner sound, and when a person hears it, he feels a powerful G-dly light that envelopes him and penetrates into his innermost point of his soul.

It can be experienced sometimes when a person listens to a very holy *niggun* (tune) as a person is

amidst a deep inner silence. One can then feel *"My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living Almighty."*<sup>[13]</sup> And that thirst is filled through *"Pull me after You, quickly."*

#### **4 - Using The Sense of Hearing To Reveal The Creator Alone**

We have explained how one hears from his soul in order to reveal his self and his bond with the Creator. Now we will proceed to the third step of hearing: to hear the Creator, as it were.

We explained earlier that the purpose of using the sense of hearing is to bring oneself to a point in which he is not thinking of anything at all. But there is an even deeper level: one can use his hearing to reach the depth of his soul, and there, he forgets completely that he exists.

When a person hears something, he is usually very aware of what he is hearing. He thinks into the words. When one thinks of the letters of a word, we said that this is essentially what it means to hear through the *Nefesh*. When one is inspired by what he hears, he is hearing through his *Ruach*. When one is inspired by this to the point of reflecting on what lays behind the words, he is hearing through the *Neshamah*. When a person can identify what the tune of a song is conveying and he realizes that it can be a source of vitality to him, this is hearing through the *Chayah*.

Hearing through the *Yechidah* is to reveal the endlessness of Hashem in what you are hearing. It is beyond the level of one's private *Yechidah*, and it is even beyond the level of *Yechidah* when one personally bonds with the Creator. It is to reveal the endlessness of Hashem within oneself.

It is accessed when a person hears something that is so deep that he forgets he even exists. This does not mean that he hears the Endlessness, of course; this is impossible. It means that one hears so deeply that he has totally abandoned any thoughts about his existence.

There is a kind of hearing which pulls a person after it, as we explained before. In that kind of hearing, a person is still aware of his existence, but he connects himself to the Creator. There is still some trace of one's "I" here. But in the absolute level of hearing, the hearing is such a deep experience that a person doesn't feel himself at all. He does not feel what he is doing. He does not feel any words he is hearing since all is silent; his feelings and thoughts have become integrated in their Root.

At this level, a person doesn't feel his "I" at all; he doesn't feel a thing. When a person is there, he doesn't feel a thing, for it is the level called "*ayin*", nothingness. When one returns from that state, he is very calmed and renewed, and he feels that he has been created anew. It is experienced when a person hears a *niggun* deeply and it touches the depths of his soul, until he feels totally nullified from his own existence. He is consciously aware after this experience that he has become renewed from this state of nothingness; he feels the meaning of how Hashem renews all of Creation.

A person can reach the absolute state of "*ayin*" within himself, and then he can return to consciousness, whereupon he feels like a renewed being. He can now feel like he has become a whole new person.

We have merited to explain, with assistance from Hashem, of how to hear from the soul: to hear one's self, to hear one's bond with the Creator, and to hear the existence of the Creator alone. May we be given from Hashem the ability to really enter within ourselves and reveal our bond with the Creator, until we merit to totally integrate with Him.