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## Getting to Know Your Feelings - 017 Imagination

### ***What Causes Negative Emotions?***

We will now conclude the discussion on our emotions.

We left this chapter until now, because it is often useful to learn details before seeing the general “picture”. The general rules about our emotions, can take on greater clarity since we have seen the already studied the details of our emotions,

We have explored the seven main negative emotions. Now, we will try to understand the very core of these negative emotions.

### ***Real Feelings Vs. Superficial Feelings***

If we want to truly experience our feelings they must be real. They must be coming from a “feel” on reality, as opposed to just “I have a *feeling*”.<sup>[1]</sup> Just as we feel the physical sensation of cold and heat as a reality, and not just as a mere feeling, so should we feel our emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, etc. as real since we are actually feeling a certain reality.

Many people don’t view their feelings as reality, and although people can say “This is how I feel”, often the feelings are superficial. These are not feelings that bring them closer to grasping them as a reality that can be sensed.

We need to understand what, exactly, prevents people from experiencing their feelings as reality.

### ***Convinced By Imagination***

If our emotions remain as merely “feelings” to us and nothing more, then they are coming from the force in us called imagination.

The Vilna Gaon<sup>[2]</sup>, after listing the five main senses of seeing, hearing, smell, taste and touch continues with listing various senses of thought, including imagination. The Ra’avad writes explicitly that just like there are five senses that we perceive as real, there are also five “imaginary” senses. The *Mesillas Yescharim*<sup>[3]</sup> also writes of the phenomenon of imagination, in which one can fool himself in the dark that an object is a person.

Imagination is when a person feels a certain way and even though he knows that it is just a mere feeling, he continues to feel it anyway even if he admits that what he’s feeling isn’t real.

Sometimes a person imagines that he sees something but really he doesn't see it. This is clearly a product of his imagination. But there are other cases which are also products of imagination, and these situations are not as obvious to the person. For example, a person might claim that he feels love in his life, stating simply "I feel this way", even if he knows good and well that there is no reality of love. He continues to imagine the love, even though he's clearly aware that the love isn't real.

If a person ever has such a claim, his imagination is at work. Only imagination can convince a person that he is feeling something that he knows isn't real. Such a person is unaware that his imagination is behind what he's feeling. If you would ask him if perhaps he is just imagining things, he would respond, "No, I'm not imagining. I am feeling love." He's convinced by his imagination that he can have a feeling for something that isn't present in actual reality.

The root of all negative emotions is the power of imagination. None of the emotions we mentioned are negative at all in their essence; it is the imagination which turns them into negative uses.

### Gehinnom Is Fueled By a Life of Living In Imagination

In the previous chapters, we offered solutions how to remedy the seven main negative emotions. There are two general methods for battling and healing the negative emotions: One way is to work on each emotion separately<sup>[4]</sup>, and another way is to uproot the negativity from all of the emotions through one single power. What is the one single power that can uproot all negativity from our emotions?

When we perceive our feelings as a way to feel reality, they will all become positive. If we ever have negative emotions, it can only occur when we don't take our feelings seriously, viewing them as simply "feelings" and nothing more.

The angel appointed over *Gehinnom* is called "Dumah," which is derived from the word *dimayon* (imagination). This connection implies that the source of all suffering in *Gehinnom* is only in one's imagination. If a person made sure to rid himself of imagination in his lifetime, even when he goes to *Gehinnom*, he will not suffer, because all of the suffering in *Gehinnom* is fueled by imagination. Wicked people, however, who have sinned with their imagination in their lifetime and have never left it, are punished due to their very imagination.<sup>[5]</sup>

There are times when we have good feelings and times when we have bad feelings. It is not simply our job to fight the bad feelings and turn them to good which is only the superficial outlook. The more truthful perspective is that all good feelings come from feeling reality, and all bad feelings come from our imagination.

If we look at our feelings as a way to feel reality, they will always be positive, and if we look at them as just "feelings" that have nothing to do with reality, they will always be negative. Awareness of this makes it easier to leave the negative emotions behind.

### **Imagined Love**

We will explain further what it means to view our feelings as reality. Let's take the feeling of love as an example: love can be real, or it can be imagined.

A husband may think that he definitely loves his wife. But if he has a reason for loving her, then his love is imaginary, and it is not based in reality.<sup>[6]</sup>

Let's go a little further with this. Let's say a person thinks he loves Hashem. If you ask him, "Why do you love Hashem?" and he answers, "Because He gives me everything I need," or "Because Hashem

loves me," this is a sign that he doesn't even recognize the Creator. His love for Hashem is a product of his imagination, and not his true feelings.

A person loves himself because he knows that he is real, but he doesn't love others in the same way as he loves himself [unless he works on himself]. Since he only views others through the lens of imagination, other people are dream-like images to him.

It is very hard for some people to accept that a person tends to view *himself* in a real sense, but the only way he knows that others exist is only by seeing them through his imagination – of them. This is an inaccurate way of recognizing others.

The words of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l are well known: A person cannot kill another human being. How, then, could there be murderers? Didn't Kayin kill Hevel? The answer is: if a person kills another, he never acknowledged that the other person exists.

This is possible because anything that is perceived outside of ourselves can only be filtered through one of the five senses; and even the senses work in tandem with the imagination. Thus, if the others' existence is only experienced through imagination, his existence is never perceived as reality, and the murderer is thus able to come to kill him.

### ***Emotional People Tend To Imagine More***

In general, emotions are highly prone to imagination. Many times a person imagines that someone else loves him; Reuven thinks that if he loves Shimon then Shimon will automatically love him in return. Reuven bases his feelings on the famous verse in *sefer Mishlei* [7], "Just as water reflects a face to a face, so does the heart of a person reflect one to another," and he's sure that Shimon will reciprocate the love. But when Reuven talks to Shimon, he realizes that his assumption was not true; Shimon doesn't love him, and he never loved him in the first place. Reuven realizes with disappointment that he was just imagining things...

Stories like this happen every day. Most of the feelings people have throughout the day stem from their imagination; they are not feelings stemming from reality. A person usually cannot grasp something beyond his imagination; if he can't imagine it, he can't relate to it.

It is human nature to imagine things; people have been this way since the sin of Adam. It can even occasionally happen that a person doesn't even grasp himself as a reality, and is only aware of himself as a figment of his own imagination.

### ***Imagined Emunah***

Even *emunah* can be imaginary!

It is not that people lack *emunah* in the depth of their souls; we all do, and we are all "believers, the sons of believers." [8] But the only *emunah* which we find revealed by people nowadays is often by way of imagination.

This is why many people can have a nightmare and feel very afraid when they wake up in middle of the night, only to discover that they no longer have *emunah*, shaking and wondering where it has gone. The reason for this is because the *emunah* was never real. It existed only in the imagination.

This explains why many people discover that when they are faced with a difficult test, they suddenly lose all their *emunah*, and wonder what happened to it. When someone's *emunah* is only lodged in his imagination, it never became real.

## ***Hatred Is Only Possible Because of Imagination***

A person is apt to do anything he pleases with his imagination. He can distort reality to his heart's content; anything is possible with imagination.

Hatred is also the work of the imagination! In reality, it is not possible to really hate another Jew, because the Jewish people are one unit. If we ever feel separate from another Jew, this isn't a feeling that's coming from reality. The separation is only taking place in one's imagination! When a person doesn't feel the reality that we are all one, he comes to hate another Jew, because he has lost touch with the true reality. Any hatred for another Jew can only be coming from imagination.

## ***Imagined Middos***

In the future, we will express, "*We were like dreamers.*"<sup>[9]</sup> The depth of this is that we will discover how much we imagined during this exile. Our bad *middos* will be removed, to our delight, because they were all being fueled by our evil imagination. But to our dismay, we will also find that many of our good *middos* have been eliminated, because we only imagined them.

Absorbing these ideas can be chilling! We are not trying to depress the reader – our intention is to arouse some soul-searching.

## ***The Danger Of Studying The Emotions***

It is human nature that more emotional people are prone to imagination. Some special individuals are blessed with a sharp intellect along with their heavy ability of emotion, and can easily deal with their strong emotions. Most emotional people, however, are not very drawn after the intellect, but only after their emotions.

When a person begins to enter deeply into his emotions (especially if he is young), he is in danger of falling prey to his imagination. If, for example, someone was learning Torah all day, but was cold emotionally, and then suddenly his emotions opened up one day – he is in danger of entering into his imagination.

The same goes for someone who, for example, never once felt a good *davening* in his life, and suddenly one day he begins to get a feel for his *davening*. Another scenario is someone who never experienced the holiness of Shabbos before, and now he does. Although he has opened up his feelings, he has also opened up the door toward imagination, which puts him in danger.

This is problematic, because if we don't ever have feelings for our *avodas Hashem*, we are clearly lacking. Yet, as soon as we begin to have those feelings, we are in danger of imagining the feelings.

The simple antidote for this is to balance one's intellect with his emotions, so that the intellect will be in control of the heavy amount of emotion. The deeper solution, however, is to learn how to have emotions that are based upon reality. This will bring clarity to a person and enable him to differentiate between a real feeling and a figment of the imagination.

## ***Feelings Are Within, But We Need To Reveal Them***

How indeed can we determine if our feelings are coming from reality or not?

If person feels that he has to acquire his emotions, this indicates that he thinks he is getting his feelings from outside of himself – such a person's feelings are only coming from his imagination. To "acquire" means "*kinyan*" in Hebrew, which has the same root letters as the word *Kayin*. In other

words, when a person views his feelings as something that comes from outside of himself which he must acquire, he has the viewpoint of “Kayin” who was only able to kill Hevel because he viewed Hevel as some outer entity, not as a reality.

But if the feeling is real, it will come from a person’s very essence, and this in turn shows that the feeling is coming from the reality.

This doesn’t mean that one can only experience feelings from within himself and never from an external source. There is definitely a purpose to feelings that come from the outside, because they can awaken one’s inner feelings that come from his essence.

The mistake that people make in regard to their emotions is that all of feelings of love, fear, happiness, etc. are by their nature “acquired” from outside of oneself. When a feeling has to be “acquired” from outside of oneself, it can only be in one’s imagination, and therefore not a real feeling.

[The story of Kayin and Hevel in the Torah reveals to us an important truth.] Kayin was called *ish adamah*, “man of the earth.” The word *adamah* comes from the word *dimayon*, imagination. And as we said above, Kayin also means *kinyan*, acquired. When we put these two facts together, it alludes to how our imagination can convince us that we have actually acquired a feeling.

We don’t get our feelings outside of ourselves; all we need to do is reveal them from within ourselves! We need to bring them out from our innermost self into the outer layers of our souls. Any feelings that we do get from the outside are there in order to stir up our inner feelings, which are already present deep within us.

### **Reading Gedolim Biographies - Good Or Bad?**

Let us consider the following. When a person reads a story about a *Gadol* – a great Torah sage – there are pros and cons. The pros are clear: that a person will gain a fiery drive to reach higher levels in his *avodas Hashem*. But the cons are that the reader is not that *Gadol*; the reader will attempt to draw from within himself the same strength that a *Gadol* had, and perhaps be able to identify with him, but the truth is that he doesn’t even compare to the *Gadol*. No one is like anyone else, and comparisons should never be drawn between any two people. A person who reads Gedolim books and compares himself to the *Gadol* is setting himself up for failure.

It is clear that the root cause for all problems in Creation stem from the power of imagination. Our feelings are filtered through the imagination, leading to all the confusion.

### **How To Recognize Yourself**

The ability to recognize that we exist<sup>[10]</sup> is one force in the soul that doesn’t pass through our imagination, however. A person accepts his existence as a fact, and not a product of his imagination. A person may imagine that he has this or that *middah*, that he is talented or lacking in this or that area, or that he recognizes the various forces in his soul, but there is one thing that no one is imagining: one’s very existence.

There are, of course, individuals who are so confused with who they are that the recognition of their existence is based on superficial causes. This can only be a result from a person’s tremendous lack of *yishuv ha’d’a’as* (settled mind). Most people know for a fact that they exist, and they will not be so stubborn to deny this fact.

Every person has this ability, and it is not hard to express. Anyone with a little peace of mind is fully

aware, with utter certainty, that he exists.

This is the meaning of the verse in *Iyov* [11]: “*From my flesh I see G-d.*” One can acknowledge Hashem’s existence through recognition of his own. Loving Hashem, the Torah and all Jews is, at its essence, love for the intrinsic existence of Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people. When a person realizes that Hashem exists, love for Hashem will result. When a person realizes what the reality of Torah is, he will love the Torah. When a person realizes that others exist, he will also love them.

No one has to “acquire” a feeling of love for others. All you have to do is recognize that the other exists! Once you see someone else exists, you will automatically love him.

Hating another person is only possible when a person imagines the other’s existence, and he doesn’t fully grasp the simple truth of the other person’s existence. When a person doesn’t realize the other person’s existence, even if he would work on himself to love the other, it would only be an imaginary love.

The truth is that everyone person knows deep down that he is an existing reality, but in our daily life, people often live through the lens of their imagination. For this reason, most people compare themselves with others; “If he does it, I’ll do it too” or “If he was successful at this, I will also be successful at it.” Why are people comparing themselves all the time with others? It is because often, people aren’t experiencing their true existence, and they are instead living through the prism of imagination.

It’s unbelievable when you think about this.

Of course, every person is a little in touch with himself, but sometimes a person entirely loses touch with his true self and pushes away his true self-recognition, living instead through imagination. This is what causes people to compare themselves with others.[12] As an example, a person gets up in the morning and immediately turns to see if his roommate has gotten up yet: “Did he get up yet? If he got up, then I’ll get up....”

When a person lives all the time through his imagination, not only is he denying himself the use of his soul abilities, but he will essentially go his whole life in denial of his true self.

### Accessing True Self-Awareness By Realizing Our Existence

When *Adam Harishon* was first created he recognized the Creator as utter reality in his pure state before the sin. He had no doubts! It wasn’t because he was able to prove logically that there is a Creator. He was aware of Hashem without all this. On the other hand, Avraham Avinu needed proof that there is a Creator because he lived after the first sin.

Until Adam sinned by eating from the *Eitz HaDaas (Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil)* there was perfect awareness of Hashem’s existence. After the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*, all of our knowledge has become dependent on how much we utilize the power of our *da’as*. Therefore, we are able to have questions and doubts about reality. Avraham Avinu searched to discover the existence of the Creator, and indeed he succeeded, when he was just three years old. But the whole need to search for the Creator’s existence was something that came about due to the first sin. Had there been no sin, there would never have been any doubts in the first place.

After the sin, awareness of the reality of a Creator is hidden from us. However, even after the sin, we still remained with the ability to be aware of our true self. Of course, it’s possible to forget who we really are, as people often do. But the ability to have true self-recognition is still there, ready for us to access. From true self-recognition, we are able to come to recognize other realities.

Before the sin, awareness of reality was evident without having to figure it out from within oneself. It was an inherent awareness, and it didn't have to be proved. Now that we are after the sin, anything we recognize can only come to us when we understand it from within ourselves. If we try to recognize something that isn't coming from our own self-recognition, then it is only imagination.

Most of the time, our true self-recognition isn't revealed, and therefore, people view most of their life only through the prism of imagination. Whatever we experience in life is therefore only being experienced through our imagination [unless we work to improve, as we will soon explain].

The beginning of the remedy is that we need to concentrate on our own, existing reality. We do not mean to become self-absorbed and egotistical; we mean to get in touch with the reality of who we are.

Once a person recognizes his existence, he now comes to the following point: he has to be able to differentiate between reality and imagination. This is a very subtle power of the soul.

As much as we will try to explain what this is, it can never be explained fully. We will try to explain this matter clearly, though, as much as Hashem allows us to.

### ***Two Forms of Recognition: Within The Self, and Beyond The Self***

Becoming aware of reality is a two-step process.

In the initial stage, a person must at least recognize his and another's existence in equal terms, realizing another's existence no less than he realizes his own. After beginning to get used to this awareness, at first a person will start out being more aware of his own existence than the other, but he will still be acknowledging that another person exists.

The more a person focuses on the fact he exists, the more he will realize that the truth is that he doesn't perceive the existence of others through the same lens that he views himself.

We can compare this to the following scenario. Someone is shown a white color and is asked what color it is. He of course responds, "It's white." Then we show him two shades of white - a lighter shade, and a slightly darker shade. Now he says, "Ah. What I first thought was white isn't as white as this one. The first color I saw was darker; the one I'm seeing now is a truly white color."

The lesson from this is that initially, we think that all our forms of recognition are on the same level. We start out thinking that our awareness of Hashem, ourselves, and other people are all equal levels of awareness. But once we become more aware of our own existence, we will slowly begin to become aware that there are forms of recognition which aren't coming from our "I." We then uncover a whole new depth to reality.

After arriving at this perception, it should then become clearer to a person that there are two different forces in the soul: an ability of self-recognition, which is coming from within our self - and an ability of recognition which isn't coming from our inner self, but somewhere from outside the self.

When we become clear that that we have these different two forces interacting at once - and that they are as different from each other as night and day - our soul experiences its personal redemption from itself. This is what is written, *"My soul is close to her redemption."* [\[13\]](#)

When a person becomes aware that he has these two different abilities, he will attain a certain inner calmness, and from that calmness, his true self-awareness will become revealed to him. He will get in touch with his true self, and from then on, whatever information he comes across will be protected in

his subconscious in a way that will allow his soul to develop more from the information.<sup>[14]</sup> He will be able to develop feelings that are come from his true, inner self.

This inner place of the soul is essentially the point which all *tzaddikim* accessed to receive their highest comprehensions. *Tzaddikim* didn't attain their high levels because of anything they read, and not even because of any Torah that they learned. Of course, they read and learned a lot of Torah, but all of their learning served to awaken the innermost point of the soul we are describing. Once the *tzaddikim* reached their innermost point in their souls, all of their Torah learning and all they had comprehended after that was a whole new kind of Torah learning than before. After reaching their true essence, their Torah learning came from within themselves; as Chazal state, "Avraham Avinu learned Torah from himself."<sup>[15]</sup>

Even when a *rebbe* teaches a student, the knowledge that the student accumulates from his *rebbe* is coming from whatever the *rebbe* has revealed from within himself. But if the student succeeds in internalizing his teacher's lessons, the knowledge will eventually emerge from the student's own inner essence.

### ***The Purpose Of Studying Our Emotions***

Therefore, let us be clear that the purpose of studying our emotions is not to learn how to become more emotional. Rather, it is to become aware of reality, and once we realize that, our emotions will reflect reality, and they will then be totally different kinds of emotions from what are used to.

A person who lives through his actual essence, and not through his imagination, is living reality. All of his thoughts and emotions will then be coming from the reality, not from the lens of imagination. He will experience his thoughts and feelings in the same way he experiences himself, and he will know the difference between what is reality and what is imagination. Understandably, he will come to a pure perception of reality, because his viewpoint on life has become cleansed and purified.

When we look at the world today, we see that this is not the reality in front of us. We are living in a world after the sin of Adam, in which everything has become a mixture of good and evil, a result of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas (Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil)*. If we are basically aware of what life is truly supposed to look like - that there is a purified state of life that exists, in which our feelings come from reality - then we will be able to achieve the greatest perfection that our soul can currently attain. From that perception, we will truly be able to come to the clearest recognition of reality - that there is a Creator, who can be plainly sensed.

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<sup>[1]</sup> *In the next chapter, this concept will be explained more fully*

<sup>[2]</sup> *Gra to Yeshayahu 11:1*

<sup>[3]</sup> *Mesillas Yesharim, Chapter 3*

<sup>[4]</sup> *As explained in Chapters Two through Seven.*



[5] Sukkah 52b

[6] *Mishnah in Avos (5:19) which states, "Any love that is dependent on something will not last, while any love is that is not dependent on something will last forever."*

[7] *Mishlei 17:29*

[8] Shabbos 97a

[9] *Tehillim 126:1*

[10] *This is the soul faculty known as "havayah" (the sensing of our existence), discussed in תא טו נפשך "Getting To Know Your Soul."*

[11] *Iyov 19:26*

[12] **Editor's Note:** The Hebrew word "medameh" can either mean "imagination", or it can mean "compare", because the tendency in people to compare themselves to others is essentially linked with the power of imagination.

[13] *Tehillim 69:19*

[14] **Editor's Note:** *This is either due to the power of "shoimer" in the soul, which is the ability in a person to "protect" information in his mind; or it can be coming from the power of "zoicher" in the soul, which is the ability to "remember" a thought. This is explained more in-depth in the series תא טו מחשבותיך "Getting To Know Your Thoughts" (Chapter Five) already published in Hebrew. The abilities of "shoimer" and "zoicher" are also explained in the author's series Da Es Kochosecha, which explains the seventy forces of the soul. These shiurim are available at [www.bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.koach](http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.koach) [1] and also on Kol haLashon's telephone service in the USA 718.395.2440 and Israel 073.295.1245*

[15] *Midrash Tanchuma, parshas Vayigash*

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