



Published on www.bilvavi.net

[Home](#) > Bilvavi Part 2 - Chapter 02 Bringing it into Your Heart

Bilvavi Part 2 - Chapter 02 Bringing it into Your Heart

Intellectual Knowledge and Experiential Knowledge

As was explained in the previous chapter, the most central aspect of life for each person in every time is the matter of emunah. Even if he is awoken in the middle of the night, and he is still blurry and cannot think clearly, and he is asked, "What are you thinking about?" his immediate answer must be, "Emunah!" This is not some kind of information which needs reminding and prodding in order to be recalled, but rather, a knowledge that must be deep in the heart.

We have begun to explain the concept of emunah, and we will now develop the theme.

There are two ways in which one gains knowledge about something. There is information, and there is an experience of the thing. For example, if a blind person is given an object to feel, he cannot see it; he just feels it through his sense of touch. After he touches and feels it, he knows there is an object, because if the object were not there, he would not have felt it. If so, his first awareness of the object comes from the sense of touch, which generates the knowledge of the object.

These, then, are two kinds of knowledge: intellectual, and experiential, and the intellectual knowledge in this case results from the sense experience.

Let us now contemplate this: How do we begin to know that there is a Creator? Is it from the sense of touch, or from intellectual knowledge?

With Hashem, "No thought can grasp Him at all" (Tikkunei Zohar 17a), "He has no body or resemblance to a body" (siddur). Thus, He obviously cannot be touched with the hands. Clearly, this knowledge cannot start with touch, but it is an intellectual knowledge.

How, then, does one know that there is a Creator?

In general, this knowledge is built on two simple foundations: First of all, there is a tradition from our ancestors, generation after generation, reaching back to the Revelation at Sinai, and even before then, back to the times of Avraham Avinu and Adam. That is to say, we are believers, the children of believers, as the Ramban writes that Moshe received the Torah from Sinai, and from there proceeded the chain of Jewish tradition.

Secondly, even if one were born in the desert, and does not know that he is Jewish or even that there are other people in the world, he must behave as Avraham Avinu, reaching the simple recognition that nothing comes into being by itself, and so, there must be a Creator. A chair is not created by

itself, a table does not fashion itself, and so, they must have a Creator. These two kinds of proofs generate a simple intellectual knowledge: the world has a Creator!

This intellectual knowledge is not like that of the blind man who begins to realize there is an object by discerning its existence through feeling it, because one cannot feel the Creator. Rather, one begins with the intellectual knowledge itself.

Now that we have attained this perception, we must consider if this degree of knowledge is desirable. Is this the beginning and end of one's avodah? Is this meant to be the basis of one's Torah, mitzvos, and acts of kindness? Or perhaps, this knowledge is merely the root and the beginning, and from there on, the knowledge must continue and spread until it is somehow sensed and experienced.

Yet, this seems difficult. How could we talk about sensing Hashem? Is this not heretical? After all, it says (Shemos 33:20), "for no one can see Me and live." We cannot see or hear Hashem, and even the prophets did not sense Him in such ways.

In fact, we definitely did not mean to imply that one can sense Hashem through the hands, as we mentioned, but rather, to sense Him through the heart. This is the real essence of emunah. We will describe the foundation of this concept, and from there, build the rest, but first of all, the foundation must be clear. We will discuss the nature of this emunah.

Every Jew has the basic intellectual knowledge regarding matters of emunah. But how often does one think of this? Here, there already is a distinction between people. A person doesn't naturally spend any time thinking even about the very basic fact that the world has a Creator. And certainly, he doesn't think about Divine Providence. He assumes that he knows, and this knowledge is present in his mind.

There are two issues to consider here: 1) The knowledge itself that there is a Creator. 2) The frequency and quality of this thought, in which he applies himself to simply think, "There is a Creator Who created me," and so on. The main avodah is to ensure that the knowledge of the Creator is not only intellectual, but will be transformed into a palpable sense of Hashem's existence. This is not to merely grasp with the mind, but to sense it in the heart!

In summary, this is the definition of the matter: There is knowledge of the intellect, which can come from tradition or the simple recognition that things don't come into existence on their own, and there is also knowledge of the heart, as it says (Devarim 4:39), "And you shall know today and settle in your heart that Hashem is God... there is no other." What does this tell us? First of all, there is "you shall know today," which is intellectual knowledge, and after that, there is "and you shall settle in your heart." This does not refer to lofty feelings during the prayers or during Shabbos. Rather, this refers to the basic principle that "there is no other." The heart must feel this.

We will explain this and expound upon it. May Hashem help us to attain experiential emunah, which is sensed in the heart.

The Understanding of the Heart - an Inherent Ability

A person has senses. For example, one has the sense of touch. He feels things with his hands.

There is a law with regard to shechitah (slaughtering an animal) that the knife must be checked for small nicks. The poskim (authorities) mention that the sensitivity needed to catch these nicks is dependent upon the feeling of the heart. If the shochet passes his hand over the blade, but his mind is elsewhere, he will not be particularly sensitive to existing nicks. To feel the nick, one must be focused, and devoted to one single matter. The more focused one is, the more he will be attuned to

the subtle sense of a nick in the knife.

Which senses of the heart are referred to here (with emunah)? The senses of the heart that we generally recognize are love, hatred, anger, and so on. These are emotions, in which the individual is moved. A person likes something and is drawn after it, or to the contrary, he fears it, and distances himself from it. Likewise, if he hates the thing, he is repelled by it.

All of these are movements and feelings of the heart. But here, with regard to feeling the knife, there is an entirely different point. To discern if the knife has a nick or not has nothing to do with love or fear. It is the ability to sense the existence of a thing. Is there a nick in the knife or isn't there? Is the knife smooth or not?

The sensitivity in the hand is not strictly in the hand. Ultimately, it stems from the heart, and from there, it extends to the hand and then back to the heart. In this way, the person is feeling with his heart, not with his hand. The hand is merely a tool for transmitting the feelings to the heart, but the real sensitivity to the existence of a thing is in the heart.

When we contemplate this, we will understand that the heart's ability to sense something is not necessarily dependent on the hand. The heart possesses its own ability to discern and sense things.

What is this discernment? The simple items we discern can be discovered through touching with the hand. That is how one can sense an item. But here lies the depth of sensing Hashem. The pasuk says (Tehillim 73:26), "God is eternally the Rock of my heart and my portion." Hashem is, so to speak, concealed in the minds of the Jewish people, but revealed in their hearts. "In my heart, I shall build a sanctuary for the glory of His majesty." Hashem is present in the heart of every single Jew. "And they shall make for me a Temple, and I will dwell amongst them" (Shemos 25:8) - in the heart of each of us. In the heart of each Jew, there is the presence of Hashem.

This sense, the ability to sense Hashem in the heart, is not related to the hands. It is an independent ability, through which the heart senses the reality, the presence of Hashem!

There are perceptions that exist outside of the person. For example, when one wants to perceive a chair, table, or house, he perceives it through sight or touch. But, let's say you ask someone if he has a leg or not, and he responds in the affirmative. If when you ask him, "How do you know?" he says, "I saw it," or "My father told me," and such, then he is in a pathetic condition! It must be that his leg is paralyzed, because he cannot feel it. Thus, he needs to see it, or be told of it. If a healthy person has a leg, he feels his own existence, and his leg is part of that existence.

If so, the heart senses in two ways: either it perceives something external to it, or something that is part of its own being.

Hashem, who is the "Rock of my heart and my portion" is part of a man's very existence. "I am asleep and my heart is alert" (Shir HaShirim 5:2). Chazal say, "Who is the heart of the Jewish people?" The Creator of the world! Certainly, one cannot feel Hashem with one's hands, because He is not outside of the person. He is found (sensed) in an inner true place in the heart. To feel Hashem in the heart, to attain emunah in the heart, so that one feels His existence, one must really be in touch with himself. Only then can he sense Hashem.

As long as a person does not sense Hashem, he is like a person who doesn't sense his own hand, as in the example above. This is a dead limb, G-d forbid! If one does not sense the Creator, he and the Creator are disconnected from each other. If a person would simply be connected to Hashem, he would feel Him like he feels his own hand, his foot, and other limbs.

Certainly, a lot of explaining is needed to describe the path to achieve this, but first, we must understand the fundamental point of what it is we are trying to create. What is the simple element of faith that the sefarim hakedoshim (sacred works) expounded upon and Chavakuk prophesied, "the righteous lives with his faith"? This is a very special matter!

The prophet was not talking of mental knowledge, but of the inner essence of every single Jew, which is "In my heart, I will build a sanctuary." A person must sense that "Hashem and the Jewish people are one." Just as one senses his own hands and legs, so must he sense Hashem.

Hashem, the Torah, and Israel are One

It is advisable to hear this and contemplate it again and again, and we will try to repeat it from many different angles. In this way, we can discover our current level of faith, and what the next step of emunah is for us.

The emunah with which we are familiar is the emunah we were raised with and taught its fundamentals - an intellectual emunah in the Creator. But in order to know Hashem in the heart, to really feel Him, one cannot suffice with what he has heard from others. Each person must exert himself to achieve it.

The question we must ask is, "What degree of emunah have we achieved, and what kind of emunah does Hashem expect from every one of us? As long as one does not grasp the emunah of which Chavakuk spoke, he will not grasp what we want from him. He hears a talk about emunah, and another one, and he thinks that emunah means this: when, G-d forbid, one has no livelihood, or there are illnesses, or other problems, one must strengthen his faith, and believe that Hashem is good and bestows goodness. Hashem knows what He is doing, and everything is from Him.

Certainly, all this is true. These are principles of emunah. But when we think about this, we will understand that we are lacking the basis for properly feeling emunah!

Eemunah in Divine Providence, Emunah in Hashem's actions and dealings with people, His love, His concern, are all of the next stage. Before all that, one must sense Hashem in his heart. Then, he will certainly feel Hashem's love and concern.

The mere knowledge of Hashem's love and concern based on familiarity with the relevant pesukim will not instill an emotional connection to these truths. There must be an inner recognition that Hashem is part of my being, so to speak. Just as one who has an injury in his leg will care for it, so does Hashem necessarily care for every Jew. This awareness will come from the heart's ability to sense Hashem as part of one's being.

If you contemplate this, you will see how simple it is, and yet, how much the yetzer hara tries to conceal from us the basic aspects of our avodah, which relate to each Jew. He encourages the Jew to run forward, telling him, "You already have emunah, now you must only learn Torah and fulfill the mitzvos." In this way, he uses the 613 mitzvos for his own ends!

Of course, you must learn Torah. The Torah requires us to study it, and the Torah is the root of all existence, but if one does not sense Who it is that gave the Torah (not in an intellectual sense, but in his heart), can its study be as valuable as it should?

"Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one" (Zohar 3:73a). The Torah we learn each moment is attached to Hashem. When a pure person learns Torah which is attached to Hashem, he too, feels attached to Hashem, and then, there is the "threefold string" of Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael in oneness. But if a person approaches Torah with a heart that is, chas veshalom, separate from

Hashem, which feels like a separate entity and only mentally knows of the Creator based on tradition, but without a sense of connection, how could he sense that Hashem is attached to the Torah?

Nothing connects a person to his Creator more than the Torah, but this connection primarily depends on the person's ability to sense in his heart that the Torah is really joined with Hashem!

In summary, a person must know that the purpose of life is emunah. We must review and repeat this point countless times. But we must also understand which emunah is meant by this: not intellectual emunah, not emunah that is considered once in a while, but emunah in the heart. But this is also not the kind of emunah that is a feeling of excitement and emotion, but a grasp of the reality of "Hashem is the rock of my heart and my portion." When a person attains this experiential awareness in his heart that he is joined with Hashem, he will be able to guard and fulfill the entire Torah!

May Hashem help us so that these matters will be understood properly, and we will have the privilege to truly please Him.

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-2-chapter-02-bringing-it-your-heart>