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## Getting to Know Your Thoughts - 014 Experiencing Life By Existence Or By Imagination

### ***Holy and Evil Imagination Are Both Rooted In Yaakov and Esav***

There is a source to everything in the holy Torah. The source of the power of imagination is found by the story of Yaakov and Esav in the Torah.

Man is called “*adam*”, while Esav is called “*Edom*”; Chazal state<sup>[1]</sup> that the other nations of the world are not called man/*adam*. Esav got the infamous title *Edom* because he demanded that Yaakov pour the red lentils down his throat when he was starving; red in Hebrew is *edom*.

There is another reason why Esav is called *Edom*. The word *Edom* also comes from the word *dimayon* (imagination). Esav wasn't considered to be a person, since Chazal say that the nations who come from Esav are not considered 'man'/*adam*; if so, why is he even titled anything? It was because he made himself seem similar to what a person is supposed to be like. This was through his ability of *medameh*, to resemble. To compare, resemble or make oneself similar are all terms for *medameh* - they are all ways to use the evil power of *dimayon*/imagination.

This helps us understand a confusing story in the Torah. Esav was the first-born, and it seems that he was deserving of the blessings that his father wanted to give him. How was Yaakov able to trick him into selling it to him? Wasn't this unfair to Esav?

The answer to this is because Esav used the power of *medameh* to make himself resemble the ideal kind of person, while in reality, he was not. Yaakov used the power of *medameh* as well to dress up like Esav and get the blessings, but this was not the same kind of *medameh* that Esav represents. Yaakov used the power of *medameh* to reveal the truth, which was that it was he who deserved the blessings, not Esav. This was because Yaakov received the rights to the first-born through a sale, which was justified; therefore, at the time of the blessings, it was he who deserved it, not Esav. He was therefore allowed to use the power of *medameh* by making himself look similar to Esav, because he was doing so in the sake of the truth.

He did this precisely because Esav's whole power is the evil kind of *medameh*, and therefore, Yaakov used *medameh* for a holy purpose in order to counter the evil power of *medameh* of Esav. By doing so he took what was rightfully his; he used *medameh* to reveal the truth. (Although his father Yitzchok wanted to give the blessings to Esav, and Yaakov knew about this and initially refused to trick him, still, in the end he received the blessings by using *medameh* for this holy purpose).

What is the difference between the way that Esav used *medameh* with the way that Yaakov used *medameh*?

When Yaakov used *medameh* to dress up like Esav, he wasn't creating anything new. He was revealing the truth, which was that he was the true first born. Rashi says that really Yaakov was supposed to exit the womb first, because he was conceived before Esav. Yaakov used *medameh* to receive what was rightfully his. Esav used *medameh* to create a new situation, because since he wasn't supposed to get the blessings - for he was not the true firstborn - his demand for the blessings wasn't justified; he made himself appear as the firstborn [by exiting the womb first], while in reality, he was the faker and the undeserving one.

Here we can see when that *medameh* is used to reveal what's here, it is a good and holy use of *medameh*, but when it is used as a means to create something new, it is evil.

### ***Death Only Occurs To Our Imagination***

There is a deep point contained in this.

When something ceases to function, we call this death. When something is functioning, it is considered to be alive. What is death, though? And what exactly is it that dies when "death" occurs?

It is really only imagination which dies! Our wisdom of our mind never dies; it is written, "Wisdom sustains its owner"<sup>[1]</sup>. Death only happens to one's imagination!

How does this happen? When it is totally clear to a person that imagination has ended, this signals the death to the imagination. When imagination dies, that is how it gets fixed!

When a person experiences life only through the prism of his imagination and he never realized this, then death to him will feel like the death of his reality [because such a person thinks that imagination is reality]. But when a person discovers that it is only imagination which dies - not his actual existence - then death will feel to him how "from a wound itself comes the recovery."

Death is connected with the first sin in Creation. Adam and Chavah were warned that they would die if they would eat from the tree. Adam was convinced to eat from the tree because he wanted to be like Hashem; in other words, his imagination caused him to want to eat from it. "For on the day you eat from it you shall surely die." The "death" which occurred when he ate from the tree was that he exited his mind and entered instead into imagination. To leave the mind and enter into the imagination is really a description of death!

The actual mind in a person is his very life ("*Wisdom sustains its owner*"), while the imagination, which is a fake reality, is not real - and thus it not considered to be "life". From an inner perspective, Adam didn't "die" after 930 years of living on this world - he "died" as soon as he ate from the tree, because it was then that he left his mind and entered into imagination. It appeared that he was alive for 930 years, but that too was being imagined. Mankind has entered a deathlike kind of existence ever since the sin.

There is no such thing as death to our actual mind. Our minds cannot die. In the future, we will see that "*We were like dreamers*". We will then see that death is only occurs to our imagination - but it does not affect our actual existence.

To illustrate what we mean, let's say a person doesn't have children, and he has a dream that he had a child. only for the child to die soon after being born. He wakes up from the nightmare. Now he's back in real life, where he doesn't have a child. Does he think now that the reason why he doesn't

have a child now is because he had a child in the dream that died? If he entertains such a thought he's viewing life through imagination! The reality is that he doesn't have a child because he never had one to begin with, and it has nothing to do with the bad dream he had.

*Chazal* say that the righteous are considered alive even when they die, while the wicked are considered dead even while they are alive. The depth of this matter is that a righteous person lives through his real mind, while a wicked person lives through his imagination. A wicked person, who lives through his imagination, is really living a deathlike kind of existence, even though it appears as if he's alive. But he's really living a dream; he's walking on two feet, but he is living an imaginary and dreamlike kind of existence.

### ***A Mind Controlled By Imagination***

After Adam's sin, the world entered into a state of imagination. We are really all living in a world within an imagination!

On a more subtle note, this is the depth of our current exile, which is called the exile of Edom. Edom comes from the word *dimayon* (imagination).

When a person is in a dream, he's imagining everything. But a person, through his imagination, is also in a dreamlike state, even while he's fully awake. Just like a person can have a dream that he dies, so do most people experience death in their life - when they are caught up in their imagination! There are people who never left their imagination their entire life, so their entire life is spent in a deathlike kind of existence.

If a person never left the imagination, he lives his whole life through his imagination and then dies in that frame of mind. Even when his soul comes back down again as a *gilgul* (reincarnation) he is still in his imagination, and the process keeps repeating itself. His very existence, throughout all his lifetimes, is being experienced through his imagination!

If a person wants to leave this kind of existence, he needs to develop a holy mind, which is by refining his mind through the wisdom of the Torah. There is no other way - any other way is just being imagined.

### ***Imaginations Fools The Mind***

It is written, "*And the eyes of Leah were brittle.*" The words of *Chazal* are well-known: The rumors were that Leah would marry Esav, and that Rachel would get Yaakov. Leah feared this and cried so much in prayer that her eyebrows fell out from stress.

The depth behind this matter is that Leah's fear of marrying Esav was due to her imagination. She heard rumors that she would marry Esav, so her whole fear wasn't based on reality; it was based on her imagination. She wasn't seeing reality as it is; she was seeing a made up reality, which led her to become afraid. This is exactly imagination - when a person sees something, but he's not seeing the actual reality.

Where else do we find this? Chavah saw the *Eitz Hada'as* that the fruits were "good". She saw that it was good, but in reality, it was not. She was only seeing that it was good through her imagination.

The only way a person can really see reality is through using his real mind. This is also called *eini haseichel*, "eyes of the intellect", (a term used by the *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*).

If a person never learned how to leave the imagination, he lives every part of his life spent in

imagination. Even when we learn Torah it can all be just in our imagination! (On a deep note though, every Jew's soul still has some real part of the mind left in it that is unaffected by imagination.)

We must realize that imagination is not just another problem our soul can have. It can fool a person *entirely*.

A liar isn't believed even when he speaks the truth. Why? It is because even when he says the truth, the truth isn't part of him, so even when he speaks the truth, it's not really the truth.

Why do people have such a hard time living a truthful kind of life? On a superficial level, it is because it is hard for people to concentrate on what's important in life. But there is a more inner reason: because even when a person thinks, he usually isn't thinking, but just imagining a thought. Because people imagine so much, they have a hard time making use of their real power of thought.

For example, children get distracted very easily. A child is heading to go somewhere and then he meets a friend, getting distracted totally from what he planned to do. This is actually because a child doesn't think – a child lives in imagination. A child always thinks that something is similar, which is a use of the power *medameh*; that is why children are jumpy.

### ***Developing The Mind***

Let us think about this a little more. A person consists of three factors: the actions, the emotions and the thoughts. These are three parts to our soul.

If a person's actions are based upon his imagination – he acts based on what he imagines – it can be said of him that he is mentally unstable. If a person all day or most of the day thinks that his imagination is a real action, this is clearly not healthy. All of us tend to imagine a little, but if it's only a little bit, a person is still able to have a normal life. But when the imagination gets a little overboard than the usual amount, that is when a person has a real problem: he leaves his natural state and lives a life of imagination. If this is the case, such a person is not healthy. We aren't addressing such kinds of intense issues here.

We are discussing here a more subtle kind of a problem: when people experience their emotions through their imagination. This is apparent when a person wants something and because he wants it so much, he imagines that he has it already.

This we can see clearly from a child. A child wants a certain toy and thinks that he has it already; a little girl sees a doll in the window of a toy store and wishes so much she could have it that she demands, "I *must* have it!!" The older a person becomes, the more his mind matures and he sees that just because he wants something, that doesn't mean he must have it.

In relevance to us, what happens when we get older? Are we gaining a new and mature kind of mind, or are we still thinking like a child (except for the fact that the variables have changed and now we want different things)?

When we were first children, we learned everything using our imagination. We received all our Torah knowledge through our imagination as well. Are we still using our old imagination to learn Torah, or are we currently developing a whole new kind of mind to think?

Usually, people are continuing how they thought as children, and they remain their whole life that way; the only change is that as adults, people want things that are simply bigger and better. Although adults are smarter than children, their thinking can actually be the same exact as a child's thinking. The only gain that an adult has is that he has expanded his imagination a lot more since he was a

child....

Although it is true that an adult knows that there is such a thing as imagination, and that he can't get everything he wants - and thus he learns that you have to be realistic in life - still, he can still be living the same kind of life as a child. He is still living a childish kind of life. A person can be at the ripe old age of seventy and still remain with the same kind of thinking he had since he was a child.

This is many times, it can happen that people think that what they have imagined is real. It is because people are so used to thinking through their imagination that eventually there comes a point where people confuse imagination with reality. Just like a person acts upon his thoughts, so does a person act upon his imagination - when he thinks that imagination is the reality. In fact, a person might even think that what he is imagining is more real than even reality, and he thinks that there is no greater wisdom to be found than in the power of imagination.

For this very reason - and it is quite clear - a person doesn't also sense the existence of Hashem, because the only reality he knows of is the imagination, and he cannot sense any other reality other than what he imagines; he can't even sense the reality of Hashem's existence!

Imagination makes a person think that what he imagines is real, and it doesn't show a person reality the way it really is. If a person lives his life through imagination, he only knows how something exists through his imagination; all he can do is imagine how something exists.

Even when two people look at the same thing, they never see the same thing - if they are both living lives through their imagination. An example of this we can see is by Queen Esther, whom each nation claimed looked to like their own, while in reality, she did not look like any of them, due to her unique complexion.

### ***Senses Controlled By The Imagination***

Now that these points are clear, the question we must begin to ask ourselves is: How can we leave our imagination and instead enter into our real mind?

A person knows he exists, simply because he exists. We also sense our own existence, but our senses are not the only way we know we exist. This is because our senses can sense reality, but they can also be imagined. So we cannot know we exist based on our senses alone. We know we exist -- simply because we know so.

There are many things a person can imagine, but one thing we do not imagine is our own existence. We all know we exist; we are not experiencing this through our imagination. Your senses might even be imagined, but your existence is not being imagined. Why? It is because your power to recognize that you exist is in a place in the soul that is above your ability of imagination, and therefore, your imagination cannot affect your existence.

How do we know this is true?

Imagination is called *medameh*, which also means to compare. The entire concept of the imagination uses a human ability to compare things [at its root]. How does a person compare? He sees one thing and then another, and he can see that the second thing is similar to the first thing. But when it comes to a person, can you know he exists because you compare something else to him? There is no such thing. A person knows he isn't someone else. If I am not him, then I must be me.

What we are describing here is really a description of the innermost point of our soul; it is also called the *yechidah*, and it is otherwise known as the power of *levad* - "alone."

A person needs to realize that his senses and his existence are not one. The senses are in a place in the soul that is covering over the recognition of our existence, so we need to remove the senses and see that our existence lies underneath it all, in the inner layer of our self.

By realizing one's existence, two things are accomplished: first of all, the person has revealed his actual essence, and in addition to this (which is no less important), a person has revealed reality: the depth of his own existence. Through this self-recognition, a person is able to come to recognize the ultimate existence, which is the existence of Hashem.

When a person commits a sin, it can always be felt through one or more of his five senses. This shows us that there is a connection between sin and the senses: the entire concept of the senses was brought about through sin. As soon as Chavah sinned by eating from the *eitz hada'as*, creation was altered and now people only sense their existence through their senses. When a person experiences life through his imagination, he loses the self-recognition of his existence.

### ***Your Existence Is Above Your Imagination***

By contrast, when you recognize that your existence is above the reach of your senses and above your imagination, it is only then that you can have a real self-recognition. This is also the only way how you are able to come to recognize Hashem's existence.

Only your actual existence can show you what reality is. Our senses aren't guaranteed to last; people lose their vision and hearing in their old age. This is actually because the senses are based upon imagination, which doesn't last.

Reality itself never dies. The very concept of death is really all in imagination, as we explained; because death only happens to our imaginary existence, not to our actual existence.

*Chazal* say that Hashem created a light on the first day in which a person can use it to see from one end of the world to another; why don't we have access to this light? It is really because our vision is through our imagination, and imagination is not capable of seeing so far.

It is for this reason that a person can't either hear or smell something on the other side of the world; it is because our senses are only through our imagination, and the imagination is limited.

### ***Most People Are Living Lives Of Imagination***

We can expand this discussion a lot more upon the words of *Chazal*, but our main point here is to explain the root.

Our senses are experienced through our imagination, and thus a person who only feels reality through his senses is living a life led by imagination. When a person looks at something, he gets caught up in his senses and loses focus. Sometimes shutting one's eyes can help one concentrate a little, but it's still just a sensual kind of life: using one eye to see positive, another eye to see the negative, smelling with the nose, hearing with the ears...it's a scattered way of thinking. The problem with such a life is not that the person's mind is scattered. The problem is that the person is living in imagination - and imagination is split up into the five different senses.

*Chazal* say<sup>[3]</sup>, "The soul has five names: *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah, and Yechidah.*" The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that it is only our imagination which makes us think that there are five different parts to our soul. Really, we have one existence; our existence is not split up into five different parts. Our imagination though comes and makes us think that we have five different parts to our existence. Our existence is really one unit.

Ever since the first sin, people are usually only aware of their senses, but not their actual existence. A person's intrinsic existence is very hidden from himself, and most people therefore end up spending their whole lives instead through their imagination.

*Chazal* say that most people have to endure some Gehinnom in the next world; this is because the angel appointed over Gehinnom is called *Dumah*, which is similar to the word *dimayon*, imagination. It is not because people sin that they have to endure Gehinnom; it is more than that. It is really because people are spending their entire existence in their imagination. When a person leaves his mind and descends to the lower part of his psyche - the emotions - this is the root of imagination. As we explained before, *middos* (emotions) has the same letters as the word *medameh*, imagination, because imagination is the root of the emotions.

A person has to reveal his own existence, and this cannot be done through any of the five senses; the existence of a person is not felt through any of the physical senses, because it is above the senses. It is an ability in and of itself.

When a person reveals his actual existence, he reveals a whole new reality than what he was used to living with until that point. But this does not mean that a person has to reveal a "new" depth to his life, or a "new" idea or a "new" source of vitality. These definitions do not bring out the concept. It is really a *revelation* of your own existence; upon revealing it, a person will realize that whatever he perceived until now was only through the lens of imagination.

Once a person reveals his actual existence, he sees and hears things from his own existence, and the same goes for the rest of his senses: his own *senses* will also be felt through his actual existence. These are highly developed senses which never die - they spread to the rest of one's reality, and from there, to the rest of all senses that are holy. These are higher kinds of senses, illuminated the light of one's intrinsic existence.

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[1] Yevamos 61b

[2] Koheles 7: 12

[3] Devorim Rabbah 2: 37

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