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## Getting to Know Your Thoughts - 016 The Detrimental Effects of Imagination

### ***“Yaakov” and “Leah” - The Roots Of Imagination***

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of [higher] imagination, which we have already mentioned before: one kind of imagination is when we compare knowledge, and the other kind of imagination is when a person compares two actions with one another.

Right now, we are speaking about the third, evil kind of imagination, which is also manifest in two ways.

One kind of evil imagination is when a person distorts the truth. An example of this is written by sefer *Mesillas Yesharim*, who writes that a person can feel like he is walking in the dark and imagine that objects are dangerous people.

This is the kind of imagination that *Yaakov* used when he used *medameh* to look similar to *Esav*; he distorted the truth [except that he knew how to use this power for good]. A person has this ability in to distort information - because the original fact and the new, invented idea look *similar*. Since *Yaakov* used this power of *medameh*, is known in the *sefarim hakedoshim* as an ability called “*Yaakov*”, and it can be used for good or evil [as we will explain].

Another kind of imagination is when a person imagines that something exists, when it really doesn't. For example, a person is walking in the dark at night and he thinks he sees a snake in front of him; he has used his imagination to make up something new. This kind of imagination is termed “*Leah*” - and it can also be used either for good or evil.

### ***The Connection Between Leah and Imagining New Information***

The second kind of imagination, making up new information, is called “*Leah*.” What does this have to do with *Leah*?

*Leah* imagined that she would marry *Esav*. In the kind of imagination we find by her, she didn't exaggerate something, but she made up something totally new; she made up that she is destined for *Esav* (On a subtle note, she was destined for *Esav* because of her tendency to imagine in this evil way, but because she davened and cried so much that this shouldn't happen, she rectified her imagination and merited *Yaakov* instead).

With this kind of imagination, a person imagines something totally new that does not exist. For example, a person wants a car and imagines that he already has it. It's not that he's imagining that his old car has become new; that would be the first kind of imagination. In the second kind of imagination, a person makes it up totally.

Leah was able to take this kind of imagination and use it for good. She was really destined for Esav, and by the natural course of events she wouldn't have become one of the Matriarchs; each of the forefathers had only one designated wife. Sarah was destined for Avraham. Rivkah was designated for Yitzchok. Rachel was the future soul mate of Yaakov. Leah was not in the equation - she was really destined to marry the wicked Esav. Through her prayers and tears, though, she altered her destiny, and she became instead a second wife to Yaakov. She came up with something entirely new - she went from her future of remaining a non-Jew to being a Jew, and to become a fourth matriarch. Leah used this power of *medameh* for good.

Because she came up with something new, "*medameh*" when it comes to coming up with something new is therefore generally referred to as "*Leah*."

### ***The Downfall Of The Imagination Is When Our Emotions Are In Control Of Us***

In terms of our soul, this applies to us as follows. In the mind, we have the three mental abilities of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*, and our mind also contains the power of imagination. When does the imagination become evil?

This can be in either one of two ways: either as a materialistic kind of imagination, or when the imagination makes the emotions take over.

The soul [generally] consists of three layers - action, emotion and thought. When the thoughts become negatively affected, they can either become demoted to the level of emotion and become controlled by them, or they can fall even lower into the actions. In either case, imagination is the cause.

When the thoughts fall to the level of the emotions, this is synonymous with the concept of using the imagination to make up totally "new" information. When the thoughts fall even lower to the level of the actions, this becomes the kind of imagination which "changes" information.

These are two different ways how the mind can fall from its level: either by imagining something totally novel, or in a different way - by changing and distorting the information. "*Yaakov*" is the term that implies imagination which changes information, and it is when the thoughts fall to the level of action. "*Leah*" is the term that implies the power to make up new information, which is when the thoughts fall to the level of emotions.

Now that this is clear, we can continue to the next step.

### ***Trying To Resemble Hashem***

Before we explain how to fix the problems with our imagination, let us first describe what exactly the problem is.

The two kinds of imagination really represent two root functions in our life: our mission to improve our middos, and to deal with the fact that man was created from "dirt." Each of these plays a role in our life's mission.

A person has a general avodah to cleave to Hashem, through perfecting his middos. *Chazal* say that

the way one can 'resemble' Hashem is through having good middos ("hevay domeh lo"). That is one aspect of a person - his middos, which he must use to emulate Hashem.

Another aspect of a person was that he was created from the dirt of the earth; he has a body, which is the way the design of man. This shows us that there is another way for a person to emulate Hashem - not through his middos, but through the way he is designed. All the 613 mitzvos are the way a person is supposed to look in the spiritual sense, just like the physical body is made up of 613 bones and sinews. So the mitzvos, which are done by our body, are what represents the second part of our mission on this world.

These are two ways for how a person can come to emulate Hashem: through the middos/emotions, and through the mitzvos, which are performed by the body.

The first kind of evil imagination [changing and distorting information] can be fixed through doing mitzvos. The second kind of evil imagination [inventing new information] can be fixed through hevay domeh lo, "resembling the ways of Hashem".

### ***Cleaving To The Middos Of Hashem***

When a person uses his *middos* and emotions to emulate Hashem, he must realize that his *middos* come from Hashem. If one thinks that his *middos* are his own, he is creating something from new, which is really evil imagination.

The *middos* which we aspire to have are *middos* which come from Hashem. They are not the same emotions we are used to. For example, the *middah* of Avraham Avinu is *ahavah* (love). The love that he had for Hashem was a revelation of Hashem's *middah* of *ahavah*; it is not the same kind of love that a person has when he likes a certain type of food. It is a whole different kind of emotion.

*Chazal* say that a cat is modest and a stork is kind. Is this the same *middos* of modesty or kindness in a person? The *middos* of a person come from his *cheilek eloka mimaal*, from the fact that he is "a piece of G-d". The *middos* found in a person are totally different *middos* and emotions than the good *middos* we find by certain animals.

If a person thinks his *middos* are his own, then he will have good *middos* and bad *middos*. But when a person reveals the root of his *middos*, all his *middos* will be good.

This is really the depth of working on our *middos*. Working on ourselves doesn't simply mean that we have to transform our bad *middos* into good *middos*, for example, by turning our anger into patience; it means that we reveal the root of our *middos* - the *middos* of Hashem - which is when we connect our *middos* to Hashem's *middos*. In other words, the way we emulate Hashem is by revealing His *middos* within ourselves.

That is how we use and repair the first kind of [higher] imagination/*medameh*: by 'resembling' Hashem, through improving our *middos*, in the perspective that was described here.

The second way we use and repair our imagination is different: when we use our materialistic body to emulate Hashem. This is practically reached when we use our body to perform the *mitzvos*. This is not the concept of revealing Hashem from within us, because Hashem is not materialistic, and therefore we cannot reveal Him from within our materialistic side of existence. But it is a different angle of revealing Hashem - it is to shine the revelation of Hashem onto our materialistic body (through doing the *mitzvos*).

### ***The Dismal Situation In The World Today***

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a) say that the world will last for six thousand years.

Which world are we in? (There are four worlds – a world of action, a world of *middos/emotions*, a world of thought, and a world which is more sublime than even that.) If Adam wouldn't have eaten from the tree, we would have all been living in a world of thought. "*Wisdom sustains its owner*". That was the way things were supposed to be. This was revealed in some way at the giving of the Torah, and it will again be revealed in the future.

But because of the sin, we remained on this six-thousand year world – a world of *middos/emotions*. On the other hand, we are also living in an even lower world – a world of action. One of the most difficult things to understand is: Where are we? Are we in a world of emotions, or are we in a world of action?

The answer is that we are in both, and thus we have the advantages and disadvantages of both. We will explain this.

Before the sin, had Adam not eaten from the *eitz hada'as*, we would have lived in a world of thought, which is a higher world than the worlds of emotions and actions. The sin caused Adam to leave the world of thought and instead enter into a world of imagination, either for emotions or for actions. Death, which came to the world as a result of sin, is essentially a curse caused by imagination; it is a fall from the level of thought to the level of imagination.

The two kinds of imagination – exaggerating information, and making up new information – are all the result of Adam's sin. If imagination would have entered the world as a separate force in Creation besides for the other forces, then it wouldn't be such a problem. But the problem is that ever since the first sin, imagination came and corrupted the very fabric of the world. It has created a new reality for the world, making us think that the imagined reality is the actual reality. On top of that, we have imagined more and more – since the sin, we have been piling up on ourselves another imagination upon another imagination!

The depth of the dire situation of today's world is that we are in an *imagination within another imagination*. We have even distorted and added even more changes to the new realities we have come up with. Our lives are full of imagination based upon another imagination.

It is a long time since Adam's sin. The world has changed a lot since then, and it is constantly changing – and it is all another imagination upon another imagination.

For example, you can ask someone, "Why do you do this?" and he responds, "Because that's what my father did." And why did his father do it? Because that's what his grandfather did – and why did his grandfather do it? If you trace it all back to the source, it was made up, and upon that it was only changed more and more until it got to be to what it was today – a total fabrication...

This shows us the impact of imagination on our soul. The Snake convinced Adam and Chavah to eat from the *eitz hada'as* because they thought they would become like Hashem and be able to create universes. Where did such a desire come from? It is force in a person to desire a new, fabricated reality. What happens if a person imagines that he is creating worlds? It starts off as a total fantasy and then gets changed into different versions. All the changes being made are just distorting what's already in the imagination, fluffing it up even more than it already is.

### ***False Reality***

This brings out the difference between holy imagination and evil imagination which he mentioned before. Before, we mentioned that there are two ways how imagination is holy: through using our logic to compare facts, or through comparing one action we saw by our teachers to another action of

our teacher.

When a person uses his logic to compare facts, what he learns from his teachers is true information. But when a person uses imagination in the second way, which is to deduce information on your own, you might still not be accurate; what you are taught by your teachers is true, but you don't always understand the depth behind how your teacher acts.

When a person uses imagination to compare something to another in this way (the second way), the person is actually not living in reality. Let us explain why this is so.

When a person compares facts, even if he doesn't make a perfectly accurate comparison, he is at least dealing with reality. He might be a little inaccurate, but at least he is involved with something real to begin with. But if the whole comparison is based on something made up, then this person never dealt with reality, so it's a much worse problem.

If we think about it, we are really living in such a way. We tend to copy and compare one thing to another, but it's all a fabrication that we make up. What happens when we do this? We won't want to accept if someone tells us that we are off-base. Maybe a person will accept that his comparison is incorrect, but he will never want to accept that his whole entire way of thinking was incorrect to begin with, because no one wants to negate what they think is their own reality.

Any reality which we know of today – except for an inner reality which is so deep within us that it is very hidden – is based on a non-reality! All our comparisons we make between one thing and another is based on a false reality that was one time concocted. It's all imagination on top of imagination.

When this idea is absorbed by the soul, it can really shake a person up. The question is what we do with that discovery. Will we use this realization to revitalize ourselves, or will we just tremble about it?

### ***Imagination Ruins The Mind As Well***

Now we can understand with greater depth why the *yetzer hora's* whole power is with imagination. The *yetzer hora* is able to convince a person to make up new information when it comes to actions, emotions or thoughts.

The *yetzer hora* doesn't teach a person to live in imagination. It makes up totally new information, and upon that adds and distorts the information more than it already is. A person's mind trusts this distorted information and makes comparisons based on it, and this greatly ruins a person's mind.

Before, we mentioned two kinds of evil imagination – imagination that uses the emotions is when a person makes up new information, and imagination which involves the actions takes information and distorts it.

But when the thoughts as well are affected by imagination, the detriment is much worse. When this happens, all the information we learned from our teachers – even what was true – becomes corrupted and false from the imagination. The imagination causes a person to make inaccurate comparisons based on the information he knows, because the very information becomes corrupted.

When this happens, the teacher of a person becomes his *yetzer hora*! The *yetzer hora* is an evil teacher who misleads a person into falsity. With imagination, the *yetzer hora* is able not only to corrupt one's actions and emotions, but even one's very thinking mind gets stolen for evil purposes.

### ***Amalek, the Erev Rav and The Yetzer Hora - The Evil Power To Look Similar***

It is written, "*The first of the nations is Amalek.*" Amalek was the first nation to fight against the Jewish people, and because of this nation, other nations were able to copy suit and do the same. In doing so, they enabled other nations to compare themselves to Amalek, starting up with the Jewish people the same way that Amalek did. Amalek thus enabled the other nations to use their evil power of *medameh*.

The evil of Amalek was that they created something new. In essence, it is not really impossible to fight the Jewish people, but Amalek came and created a new reality: It's possible to fight the Jews. Amalek taught the other nations that they can fight the Jews - this nation is the teacher of the other nations, and there is no greater false reality than this. They used the evil power of *medameh*, which is to create new realities that were previously nonexistent.

There is another evil that exists, the *Erev Rav* (the "Mixed Multitude" of Egyptians who left Egypt together with the Jewish people). These were people who looked like members of the Jewish people, but in reality they were not. Only the Jewish people were in the plan of Creation; the members of the *Erev Rav* are not part of the souls of the Jewish people.

In Persia as well, after the events of the Purim story, there were non-Jews who tried to save themselves by claiming that they are of the Jewish people. All of these instances was the use of the evil power of *medameh* - the power to create new realities which Hashem did not intend.

How are the Jewish people different from these fakers, the *Erev Rav*? The souls of the Jewish people are all part and parcel with the wisdom of Hashem; "*Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people are one.*" The *Erev Rav* used the power of *medameh*, making themselves "similar" to the Jewish people, but they are not part of the collective wisdom of Hashem.

This is the prime example of the evil of imagination - *medameh*, which also means to compare and resemble. All the forces of evil -- Amalek, the *Erev Rav* and the *yetzer hora* - use the evil power of *medameh*. Amalek creates false realities, which is evil *medameh*. The *Erev Rav* make themselves look similar to us, which is also an evil kind of *medameh*. And evil itself, the *yetzer hora*, uses *medameh*/imagination to convince a person to sin.

To summarize what we have said until now (we still haven't explained yet how to actually fix and improve our imagination), there are generally three kinds of *medameh*: in the actions, in the emotions and in the mind.

If we allow imagination to be in charge of our abilities, then we don't stand upon reality.

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