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## Getting to Know Your Thoughts - 002 Building Power Of Thought

### ***Each Person Has His Own Way To Think***

In the first chapter, we have laid the foundation for our thoughts; we have said what the groundwork for our thoughts is. Now with the help of Hashem we will speak about how to build the thoughts, and to be more exact, we will speak about how to begin building them.

Before a person builds something, he first thinks how he will build it. *"With wisdom a house is built."* To illustrate what we mean, we know that no two structures are ever the same; every house is different. If everything would be built the same, no one would have to think how to build. Even the *Beis HaMikdash*, which had a very specific design, was different each time in its measurements. Our soul is the same - there are always different ways how to think.

Chazal say that just as all faces are different, so does every person think differently. Every soul has its own way to think. It's not simply that everyone has their own opinion; it is that everyone has their own way to build their thoughts.

A person must see everything as a structure. The nature of a person is that we don't see how a bunch of things connect, but we need to see how things are not random and that they really connect.

To illustrate what we mean, we know that many times throughout the Talmud, there are two schools of thought - Hilel and Shamai. Every time we come across a statement of Hilel or Shamai, do we see how all their statements connect, or do we look at them as just randomly dispersed statements? A superficial kind of person would say that it's all random and there's no connection. But the truth is that each of them had their own way to think. A person with true wisdom can read a statement of Hilel or Shamai and be able to tell who is saying it, because he knows how the schools of Hilel and Shamai think.

There is a story that someone once came to Rav Chaim Soloveitchik zt"l and asked him for an approbation to a *sefer* he was publishing. Rav Chaim perused the pages of the *sefer* and said, "Whatever question you asked in this *sefer*, I can predict what you will answer." This was not *ruach hakodesh*. It was that he had absorbed the way of thinking of the author.

In order to know someone else's thoughts, one has to have *ruach hakodesh* or to be astoundingly brilliant. But something everyone can understand is that each person has his own independent way of thinking.

All the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* had their own way how to think and their own writing style. Some wrote in a lengthier manner and some wrote very briefly. In order for a person to build up his own way how he thinks, he needs to learn the different ways that there are to think. For this, a person to first amass a lot of information contained in the Torah.

### ***Learning How To Think On Your Own***

People are used to thinking based on the way they grew up and where they grew up; if a person's community thinks a certain way, then a person naturally thinks like his community.

The place where you grew up thinks a certain way, but does that mean that you must remain thinking that way? When you were a child, that is what Hashem wanted from you; Hashem wanted you to grow up in this place. It could be that even as you get older and mature you were also supposed to be in your community, but that still doesn't mean that you must think like how your surroundings think.

To explain what we mean, often people like to visit their families. But who says that a person needs to be around his family that he grew up with? Just because a person grew up in this family doesn't mean that he fits them. It could be that he was sent into this family so that his soul can be rectified...but that doesn't mean that he is in a place that's good for him. As long as the home isn't dysfunctional, a child loves his home; but that still doesn't mean he is growing up in a surrounding that is right for him.

Chazal say that in the first year of marriage, a married woman longs for her family (*Yevamos* 42b). But does that mean that it's good for her? Not necessarily. Some will say that if this is her family, then it must be that Hashem wants her to be around them. But this is not true; it may be part of her mission in life and it may even her develop into the person who she was, but this still doesn't mean it's good for her to be there. She may have been sent to this family to rectify her soul somehow, but this doesn't make it **good** for her to be there. Just like in Egypt the men had to women's labor and the

women had to do men's labor, so is it possible for a person to grow up in a family in which he wasn't being himself – he grew up in a sort of exile in which he had to do things that did not express who he is. Being in exile helps you correct your soul, but it's not meant for you.

Let's say a person feels a certain affinity to something. Most of the time a person just likes something not because of self-expression, but for superficial reasons.

For example, if a person grew up in a place where they eat certain kinds of foods and listened to certain kinds of music, and he likes that food and music, it's only because he grew up getting used to it, but not because he really likes those things. It is more like a physical manifestation of "*girs d'yankusa*" (what you learn as a child). It's not what you really like.

The same can go for our thinking. Many times in our thinking we rely on our *girs d'yankusa*, the way we thought as children. If a person doesn't try to change his thinking, he still thinks like how he used to think when he was a child.

We usually don't see people who worked on learning how to think. If they grew up a certain way, that's how they think, and it's not because they clarified this on their own. They just take life as it comes and never try to figure out who they really are and how they are really supposed to think.

Every person needs to search for a new beginning, just like Avraham Avinu had to leave his father Terach's house and never return to there.

Of course we have to continue what we were doing until now and keep all our *minhagim* (customs) and *mesorah* (traditions) we have, but to remain at that level is to be superficial. At some point, each person needs to find his own way how he thinks.

A father and a son don't have to learn in the same *yeshiva*. We are not referring to choosing how you dress and how you behave, which are superficial discussions. We are referring to something that must go on in our soul. Even if someone lived a life of truth, this doesn't mean that his child has to continue doing everything his father did.

We must continue our *mesorah*, but that doesn't mean we have to continue how our fathers and teachers **thought**. We must continue our *mesorah* **in searching for the truth**, and that always stays the same. But *how* we get to the truth must be in each person's individual way.

Although we have been thinking since we were children, we can't just rely on our old thinking patterns. We need to build up our thoughts, and in order to do this we need to become familiar with the different ways how to think which are brought by our teachers. This takes at least a few years! After you know the different ways how to think, you can then begin to find where **you** belong in all of it.

If you don't know the different ways to think that are available, you will not be able to find where you belong in all of it. A young person cannot do this, and he will harm himself in the process if he tries to do it. But as a person gets older and is more mature - it is impossible to say exactly when and how much - a person should begin to acquire different ways how to think.

What we are saying applies to every part of the Torah - *Halacha, Agadta, Iyun* (learning in-depth) and *Bekius* (learning on a basic level). There are different ways to think in each part of the Torah, and a person needs to first have this information. There is no part of the Torah which doesn't have in it many ways how to think.

This is the beginning of building our actual self. When a person learns about the different systems of thought, he needs to find himself in it - where he personally belongs. But without first learning the actual information, a person won't be able to build up his self.

### ***Learning What Your Heart Desires***

This is a very subtle job. It is both a superficial kind of search and an internal kind of a search.

Sometimes a person feels a connection to something, but that doesn't mean it comes from an inner place in himself; it can really be superficial.

For example, Chazal say that a person should learn *mah shelibo chofetz*, "what his heart desires." Does this mean that if a person feels like learning in a bad environment that he should learn there?! Of course not. Just because a person feels a certain way doesn't mean that he should act upon it.

When a person is in a certain place that thinks differently than him, he naturally feels like a stranger there. He would rather return to the old way how he's used to thinking; he feels, "Well, Chazal say that a person has to learn in a place where his heart desires to be, and this is not my place."

Chazal say that a person should learn in a place where his heart desires, but does that mean that a

person should learn wherever it is pleasant to be? If a person finds it pleasant to learn in a place where a bunch of people sit around and waste their time and where he can hear lots of interesting conversations, does this mean that he should learn in such a place just because he finds it pleasant?! Certainly this was not the intention of Chazal. A person has to first “learn” in order to learn where his heart desires to be.

The point of what we are saying is that sometimes a person feels or thinks a certain way, but this doesn't emanate from a pure, deep place within himself. It is rather due to superficial reasons, not from his essence.

How can a person know if he wants something from his essence or if it's just coming from superficial influence? This is a very subtle point, but we will try to learn how, with the help of Hashem.

### ***Revealing Your Power Of Unique Thought***

Anyone who learns Torah goes through a beginning stage. At the beginning, a person first absorbs and receives knowledge from his teachers. At this beginning stage, that is the way to learn.

At the beginning stage, when one is still receiving knowledge from his teachers, he hasn't yet revealed his true self. He is only revealing the knowledge he is taught. There can be somewhat of a self-revelation as well in this stage, because in learning there are two parts - *Chochmah* (the wisdom that a person receives from his teachers) and *Binah* (what he has understood on his own). But the nature of a person in the beginning stage of learning is to focus on what he's receiving from his teachers and not look to come up with his own novelties (*chiddushim*). It is only when a person begins to come up with his own novelties that he begins to become like a “flowing spring” and reveal his true self.

Of course, a person must receive guidance from his teachers. But that is only part of one's goal in life. What you receive reveals your teacher, but it doesn't reveal who you are yet.

Let's say a person is able to come up with his own *chiddushim* (novel Torah thoughts) based on how his teacher thinks, but they are not based on his own way of thinking. Such *chiddushim* don't come from his true self, from the inner “I” that is in every person. A person needs to access his own unique flow of thoughts in himself, which are the source for his thoughts. Many *chiddushim* of people, although they are true, are not really their own *chiddushim*, but they are borrowed from what they have seen by others.

In order to discover who you really are, you need to reach your power of *chiddush* – to develop your own new thinking. When a person never reaches the inner source of himself, he hasn't yet identified himself. He might know what he likes and what he doesn't like, and he can know what's close to his heart and what isn't – but he hasn't yet identified his true self. But when a person discovers that deep down he has an inner source from which original thoughts flow out of, he reveals his true essence. We are not saying that he must differ from the way of thinking of his teachers; a person's power of original thought that he must uncover should be coming from the tools he has received from his teachers to learn how to think. But this discovery will be his own unique inner flow of thought.

### ***Bribery Of The Mind***

There is a danger to this though, because many people are really lying to themselves and they aren't aware of it. Their thinking is based on haughtiness, and they are entirely focused on their "I" that is thinking.

Some people cannot learn something unless they have what to say on it, because they have to always see how "I" come into the picture. If Rashi says A, such a person is inclined to say B. He might say, "Rashi is true, but I have my own way to explain it."

This is not because of his inner source of thought we are speaking about; it is just an inflated ego. It is his haughtiness which leads him to always find "his" opinion; such a person will force himself to always say something different than what is in front of him. A person might be aware of this or he might not be, but even if he isn't, it is still going on in his sub-conscious.

There are also people who have a different problem: when they learn a sugya, they feel that it is dry unless they are able to come up with a *chiddush*. His *chiddushim* aren't true *chiddushim*; they come from his ego which always seeks to get noticed. His ego is at work even as he learns Torah, always trying to find itself by coming up with something new.

The real, true inner source of thought in a person is a pure place in the soul, but there is a force called *shochad* – a bribe, which distorts someone's perception and makes him biased. A person can have bribery in his mind, and if he does, everything he says comes from his warped thinking, a result of his mental bribery.

To illustrate, you can have pure spring water, but by the time it comes to your cup it has gone through a lot of dirty pipes, so it is not as clear as its original source.

Most people, in fact, never reach their true unique flow of thought inside of them, and there can be many reasons for this. But what applies to us is because they have a mental bribery, which warps their whole thinking.

We are not speaking about a monetary bribe; we are referring to the personal desires of a person, which are the root of swaying one's mind. When a person wants to arrive at a certain conclusion, his whole head is leaning toward what he wants to arrive at, and he misses his real source of thinking.

The Chazon Ish said that there are people who already have their preconceived agendas even before they begin a *sugya*. For example, if a person wants to conclude that something is permissible to do, he will learn the whole *sugya* in order to arrive at this conclusion.

Even when a person asks a question to a Rov, who is wiser than him, it is possible for him to mentally bribe the Rov! The Rov might give him the answer that the questioner wanted, and he won't even realize that the questioner has bribed him into his thinking. This is quite astounding! Unless the questioner is really prepared to accept the answer of the Rov, it is possible that he's bribing the Rov...that is the power of bribery.

### ***Reaching Your Potential In Learning Torah***

Chazal (*Niddah* 30b) state that a baby in its mother's stomach learns the entire Torah. We are taught that this doesn't only mean the Torah we received at Har Sinai, but it refers to one's unique part of the Torah. Whatever you will learn in this lifetime, that is what you are taught. When he exits the womb, an angel strikes him and he forgets all his learning. A person's job in his life is to return to his unique portion in the Torah which he was taught in the womb.

But if a person hasn't purified himself, it is possible that he is learning a part of Torah which isn't for him. He might learn Torah his entire life, but it won't be his unique portion. When he comes to the world of truth, he will be shown that he didn't learn what he was supposed to...

How can a person know if he is learning his rightful part of the Torah? The Ramban says that since we can't find out from a prophet what's right for our soul, we need to get rid of our mental bribery. Just like a person is able to know how something tastes, so is a person able to know what part of the Torah he must learn. A person can't know if it if he is blinded by personal interests.

In other words, in order to know your unique part in the Torah, you will need to do two things. The superficial part of your job is to amass the information you must know, and the inner part of your job

is to reach your inner source of thought. The information which you amass is the tool you need to receive your inner source of thought. If we don't have a container to hold what we gain, we won't be able to hold onto it. But if we just build our "container" and don't put anything into it, we might know a lot, but we won't reach our own potential.

### ***Torah Lishmah Enables A Person To Trust His First Thoughts***

If a person isn't learning Torah *lishmah* - if he isn't learning for the right reasons (even if it's a small reason, like that others should give him honor), he won't be able to reveal his inner source of thought.

A person who reaches Torah *lishmah* learns for the right reasons, and he is able to reach his *machshavah rishonah* - his first thoughts. The first thoughts that enter a person is not the only true thought in the world - there are many souls in the Jewish nation, and each has his share. But a person's first thoughts, which are the source of the thoughts, are what's specially designated for that person.

When a person reveals the first thoughts in himself, he is able to identify the source of building his thoughts.

Chazal say "Whoever takes advice from the wise does not stumble." How does the sage know he is right? Maybe he's making a mistake?

The answer to this is that a regular person has a hard time knowing what the truth is, just like a prisoner can't release himself from jail. If he asks another person in a similar situation how he can release himself, he can't either get helped, because the other person has his own prison to deal with - his own personal interests. But a Torah giant, who is pure and clean from such motives, is able to give reliable advice, because his wisdom is drawn from a pure place in his soul that has no personal interests.

To say this in a different way, the *Gedolim* (our leaders of the generation) were able to answer issues because they would use the first thoughts that entered their mind. When a *Gadol* is asked about a certain *shidduch* if it is good or not for someone's child, he was able to give the accurate answer even though he didn't know who the boy or girl was. This was because a *Gadol* used the first thought that enters his mind.

Why does a very great leader use his first thought? What is so special about the first thought? Shouldn't it be the other way around - that only after hearing all the details can a person decide? A

*Gadol* doesn't think that way. It is precisely his first thought which he trusts; why?

By a *Gadol*, the first thought that entered his mind comes from a pure place, from the true source of thought in the soul. A *Gadol's* thoughts come from this inner source, because since he learns the Torah is a true way, he bears the "seal of Hashem, which is truth".

A person can only trust his first thought if it is certain that he learns Torah *lishmah*. One who doesn't learn Torah *lishmah* is not able to give advice from this inner place in himself.

### ***Build Up The Way You Think, Not The Way Others Think***

This last point was said just to intensify this discussion, but practically speaking, there is no person who is totally clean from personal interests. We are just saying that there is an inner place in the soul where a person desires the truth.

Without reaching this inner point in our soul (of reaching your own unique way to think, which is the source of your thoughts), a person can go his whole life and amass a lot of Torah knowledge, but it's like a contractor who is always building houses according to his buyer's exact wishes. A good contractor builds houses that he designs and then he sells them; a person has to build "his" house, not others' houses.

There are people who know how to build up entire structures of thought in the Torah, but they never end up building their own potential in learning. "And give to us our portion in Your Torah" – we each want our own portion in the Torah. To uncover our unique potential that each of us has, we all must reach our inner source of thought.

It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that in the upper worlds, each scholar has his own *beis midrash* (place of study). What is the depth behind this?

Why are there so many *yeshivos* and *batei midrashim* in heaven? Why doesn't everyone just learn in the *beis midrash* of Avraham Avinu? It is because every *beis midrash* there has its own way how to think. Each person has his own *beis midrash* in heaven that he builds up, using his inner source of thought which is unique only to him.

It is written, "With wisdom, a house is built." We build our "house" through how we think – through our own wisdom. We can't remain satisfied with what we were taught by our teachers. We need to build upon that and uncover our own way how to think.

Later we will learn that these are essentially two different stages to our thinking. The first stage is the lower kind of *Chochmah*, in which a person receives from his teachers. The second stage we need to reach in our thinking is the higher *Chochmah*, which is to think from ourselves.

### ***Beginning To Understand A Sugya***

To give an example of what we mean, when the Chazon Ish learned a *sugya*, he didn't glance right away at Rashi. First, he thought on his own what the Gemara could mean, and only after that did he take a look at Rashi. If he found that Rashi said the same thing as he thought, good, and if not, he would try to understand why not.

We are not saying that everyone needs to learn like this; the point is that when one learns Gemara, he has to have his own original understanding at first.

The tools we need to think are what we gain from our teachers, and this is an unchanging chain throughout each generation. But the subtlety and the depth of how we think is up to each person to uncover on his own.

The truth is that everything has already been revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai, but it is our job to actually come and reveal it to its full potential. This is our job - to reveal our potential. It is up to each person to do.

This is not because we are trying to simply sharpen our brain, but it is because we need to find our unique way of thinking. You need to train yourself and get used to thinking according to your own unique thinking patterns. If a person begins to learn something only according to another person's understanding that is not his own, he right away loses his own thinking. Again, we must emphasize that we are not saying that one should be haughty and only value his own opinion; we are referring to the deep place in one's soul where his thoughts flow from.

We have mentioned so far two things. The first thing we need is to truly learn the Torah. We have to dedicate ourselves to it; when one learns Torah, he is actually connected to his very self. This is difficult; the second thing we need, which is also hard but not as hard as the first, is to train ourselves to always think in the same pattern. One's thoughts should be an expression of his own source of thought, found in his own soul.

We are not saying that a person has to remain with thinking like how he first thought; we mean that a

person should **begin** to learn a *sugya* after he has his own thought about it, and then see *Rashi*, *Tosafos*, the *Rishonim* and the *Acharonim* until he learns the practical *Halacha*; he doesn't necessarily have to end his learning like how he thought originally.

### ***Learning The Details Of A Sugya***

When a person begins to reveal his inner source of thought, his thinking strengthens with time. It's like weaving a garment; the more you weave it, the more beautiful it looks in the end.

At the beginning stage of this, a person learns a *sugya* and tries to understand what he has to say about it. He then learns another *sugya* and again tries to know how what he thinks about what he has just learned. After getting used to this a person should then clarify for himself: What is my style of thinking?

Although "A wise person learns from each person", you shouldn't forget about yourself when you learn a *sugya*. Although there is much wisdom to be learned from all wise people, there is an even deeper wisdom than this, which is what you learn from yourself. We aren't addressing right now how the soul works; we are speaking about how you think. What do we mean by this?

Superficially, this means for a person to know how he is making himself think. But the true definition of it is for a person to see if his thinking is emanating from within himself.

The inner source of a person's thoughts doesn't get revealed all at once. Each time a person taps into it, more and more thoughts are revealed from it. The Vilna Gaon said that this was because ever since Moshe Rabbeinu hit the stone, a person's thinking only comes to him drop by drop. It doesn't all come out at once.

So even if you get one of these inner thoughts, this still doesn't mean that you know how you really think. It is only after you see the general style of your first thought, which you need to amass a lot of. Slowly you will begin to see how you think.

When we learn the words of Chazal, we know that it's not enough to just read what it says; we have to learn how they think. The same goes for our own thinking; we need to know how we think. The way a person can know this is by writing down all his *chiddushim*. After some time, take a look at your notes and learn what you written in-depth; you will see your train of thought from within the words.

In this way, what a person learns reveals to a person how he thinks.

Sometimes it will happen that you notice contradictions in your way of thinking, and you will need to look into yourself and ask yourself why you didn't think the way you really should have. These are very subtle matters, but it's possible for a person to do: a person has the subtle ability to be able to discern what his root thoughts are. This is how a person reveals his unique potential in learning.

Without seeing how you think, it's possible that you will enjoy learning, but you won't know from where your thinking is coming from.

Sukkos is called *zman simchaseinu* (time of our happiness) and it is also *chag ha'assif* (time of gathering). There is a connection between happiness and what we gather. When we gather together all our knowledge, there is a certain happiness. By gathering together all our thoughts, we see the details of how we think as well as the general way how we think. Through collecting all this together, we reach our root thoughts - we discover how we think.

This is how a person builds the power of thought.

### ***Building Up The Way You Think, Step-by-Step***

On a superficial level, building our power of thought is like how we understand simply to build a building, which is by adding brick by brick until it is complete. But really, building our thoughts is not like that. There actually is a structure that is already there in ourselves, and all we need to do is to remove what's covering it.

To illustrate what we mean, the first and second *Beis Hamikdash* was built by people, so it was built brick by brick. But the third *Beis Hamikdash*, we know, will come down from heaven already complete. All we need to do to build the third *Beis Hamikdash* is by taking away what holds it back, and then it will come down, complete.

When a person never uncovers his own way to think, he might know how others think, and he might even work it this step-by-step until he discovers how his friend thinks. But he will just be absorbing information - he isn't using his deep thoughts. It is only when a person reveals his true source of thought that he already has hidden within himself that he can know how he thinks. This is also a step-by-step process, but when he arrives at the end, he will see that he is just revealing what's already in him.

For this reason our *neshamah* is called *seichel d'kedushah*, the holy intellect. It is because each person has his own way to think, and each soul has its own root. Each person receives his special part

in learning Torah according to his unique soul root (*shoresh haneshamah*).

How can a person actually reveal it? Each time that a person thinks on his own, more and more details of how he thinks are being added up to give a person a general idea of how he thinks. When a person sees how he thinks, he will realize that he didn't actually build it - he has simply revealed it. Something which is physical and superficial has to be built, but a person's source of thinking is an inner material, which isn't "built" but instead "revealed."

Thus, when we speak of "building" our world of thought, we aren't really "building" it. We are really learning about the way to build it, but the way that the thoughts are actually built is through revealing what's already in us. It is hidden deep within us and we must uncover it.

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