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The Soul's Ability To Constantly Think

The Gemara states (*Berachos* 24b) that a Torah scholar is not allowed to walk in an unclean place, because he is always thinking Torah thoughts. Here we see that the essence of a person is to think, and man by essence is always thinking.

But if a person never builds up his world of thoughts, his thoughts wander from place to place and he ends up imagining things. His thoughts are misplaced and there is no structure to them.

It is impossible for a person to go without thinking. He is for sure thinking something! The question is if his thoughts are stable or not. When a person doesn't build up his power of thought, his thoughts wander around everywhere. His thoughts are scattered and nothing holds them together.

The power of thought, in its essence, is really constant. The Ramchal writes (in *sefer Derech Eitz Chaim*) that it is the way of Torah scholars to always think as they walk. Why is it so important for a person to always think?

Just like we can understand that the body needs certain things to survive, so does our inner world need a certain vitality to survive. Our body needs to breathe in and out in order to live, and our inner world of the soul needs an able mind that thinks in order to feel vitality.

When we breathe in and out, we do this on a constant basis. We can't stop breathing for even one second. When it comes to our inner world, people are used to putting it to use only at certain times. We aren't feeling enough spiritual vitality that we need.

But when one lives an internal kind of life of the soul, he needs constant thought in order to feel alive. The Rambam (*Hilchos Rotzeach* 7:1) writes that those who seek wisdom cannot stop learning, because if they were to stop learning it would feel like death.

A Soul-Based Life Demands Constant Thought

How can a person learn how to have constant thought?

Superficially, this is through getting used to it. "When a person becomes used to something, it becomes second nature". The more a person does something, the more his heart is pulled after it; Chazal also say that "the heart is pulled after the actions." But this is only the superficial understanding of why we need to always think. The inner reason why we must always think is because we need vitality, and the thoughts of a person is his vitality.

If a person doesn't feel a certain vitality from his thoughts, he won't be able to develop constant thought, and even if he tries to develop it, he will just get headaches in trying to do so and he might even make himself get sick.

A person can only have constant thought when he has vitality from thinking. "*Wisdom sustains its owner.*" We will try to explain what this means in simple words and make it practical for us.

When a person isn't involved with thinking, he usually doesn't feel vitality from thinking. Even if he learns *Halacha* or *Daf Yomi* every day, it's only because of a good feeling he gets out of it, either because he feels like he's utilizing his time or fulfilling a goal. Although this is commendable, this doesn't show that he is connected to thinking.

A person on a higher level than this enjoys thinking, but only because it gives him a certain clarity and helps him feel more organized. He gets vitality from having clarity, and that is why he thinks. Another kind of person receives vitality only when he has *chiddushim*; they are busy all the time looking for *chiddushim*. Although this is also a holy kind of vitality, it is not yet deriving vitality from thinking

A person only derives vitality from thinking when he considers it just as important as breathing; when he realizes that his soul demands constant thought in order to feel alive.

How is a person able to always think? From where does a person draw this power from? It's not possible for a person to only live from his thoughts; such a person is mentally ill. What we want to know is: how can we use our thoughts to guide us (just as the Aron lifted its carriers).

If a person wants to live a wise kind of life, it's not about looking for *chiddushim*. A wise kind of life is a soul-based kind of life. We are not even referring to the Torah; the Torah is definitely the tool a person uses to get to a *chiddush*, but it is not the source to living a soul-based life. Only a life of constant wisdom can be a source for a person to find constant vitality. This doesn't mean a constant renewal, but rather, a constant vitality. It is when our soul lives based on wisdom, to learn about the wisdom that pertains to one's own unique soul. We don't know why it is that way that wisdom gives us vitality; Hashem made us that way.

To build our mind, we need to realize that life is a constant wisdom. Torah scholars don't just always think because they are used to it, but because they realize that wisdom is life itself.

Entering the World Of Thought

In order to live a life in which wisdom and thought is a reality, a person has to enter inward at least a little into a world of thought. There has to be somewhat of a disconnection from physicality as well.

One who lives only through his body's viewpoint doesn't have a constant source of vitality. In order to live a soul-based life, which is a life of wisdom, a person need to enter the world of the soul and be there. This doesn't mean to become "a thinker"; it is something else. Our teachers (the Ramban, and especially the Baal Shem Tov) taught that a person is found where his thoughts are. This is only true in the case of one who lives in the world of thought and knows what it is in a very real sense.

Machshavah - thought - doesn't just mean that a person "thinks." It is to experience the reality of what thought is, to live there. This is not an intellectual definition. It is an essential concept about the soul and any person can absorb this point, each according to his own level of understanding.

To give an example, we can find people who are so deep in thought that if they are waiting at the bus stop, they don't even realize how late the bus is, because they are so immersed in their thoughts. From a superficial understanding, this sounds like something negative, but upon an inner outlook we can understand that there is an ability in a person to live in his thoughts. When a person lives in the thoughts, he is able to disconnect from his surroundings.

To disconnect from one's surroundings doesn't mean to become disconnected in the simple sense. It

is to enter into an inner place of thought and to be there. In the world of thought, the bus never comes to pick you up! The bus is in the street, but the person is in his thoughts – the bus doesn't even pass by him...!

In the inner sense, a person who is in his thoughts isn't here on this world.

A person who lives in the world of thought simply isn't here on this world. If someone comes to the door and asks him if anyone else is home to speak to, and he answers, "No" (when really there is someone else home) is not lying! (I am not saying you should actually do this, because your children might learn from this that it's permitted to lie, since they don't understand why you didn't say "Yes.") In the inner take on reality, a person who is immersed in thoughts isn't living in his house – he's somewhere else. This is only true with someone who is really in the world of thought.

This is the depth of the statement, "I have seen those who ascend spiritually, but they are few" (*Sukkah* 45b). In a house, there is a first floor and an attic; one person can inhabit the first floor, while another person lives in the attic. In practical terms for us, we have in us a body and a power of thought. Our body is like the first floor of a house, while the attic is our head – the place which we use to think. There are indeed few people who live in thought.

This doesn't mean simply that a person always thinks. It means that a person is found in a world of thought.

Disconnecting From Physicality

A person who lives in a world of thought is also able to experience the reality of the feelings. He experiences the emotions of happiness or sadness as a reality, no less than he feels the senses of being cold or hot.

There is a famous story in which Rav Chaim Soloveitchik was learning and he hurt his hands, oblivious to this fact. (I am not getting into if this story is true or not, but even if it isn't, there are many such stories brought in the Gemara where one of the Sages was so immersed in his learning that he wasn't aware that he was suffering physically).

From a superficial viewpoint, this appears to be a negative outcome of learning – he's learning so much that he loses attention of his surroundings...he's brilliant and gifted, but not all there...that would be a reaction of a superficial person who sees this. But the inner way to view this is that because Rav Chaim lived in the world of thought, he wasn't living with his body at all; he was totally divested of his body, because he lived in a world of the soul.

Why People Like To Get Their Pictures Taken

We will give a simple example that brings out this point (of disconnecting from physicality).

People often love to get their pictures taken. Whenever people make a family occasion or whenever they go away on trips, people usually take pictures of themselves.

Why do people want pictures of themselves? It is because people want to be remembered...and why do people indeed want to be remembered?

The deep reason behind this is because people identify themselves as mainly being a body and not a soul. If people would identify themselves as being a soul, why do they need their body to be remembered in a picture? It is only because people place their main value on their body, and thus they want their body to always be remembered...

When a person identifies himself as his body, he wants his physical appearance to be remembered, because he thinks, "This is how I look." But when a person knows that he is his thoughts, he considers his body only to be a garment on top of his essence.

When a person is very concerned about his ego, it is really because he identifies himself as being a physical existence. He thinks that his body is who he is; he fears death because it's very scary that his body will disappear after he dies, and he therefore wants very much to be remembered in a picture. But if a person knows what his essence is, he knows that a picture of him is not really his picture, because his physical appearance isn't himself. He knows that he doesn't ever die, because the soul is eternal and does not die.

"The righteous are called alive even when they die." Great people don't view themselves with a body attitude, but from a soul attitude.

A more inner kind of person, when he sees a picture of himself, is able to say, "This isn't me. It might be a garment of who I am, but it's not who I am." He differentiates between his physical appearance and his essence.

Identifying Who You Really Are

Everyone knows he has an essence, but the question is: how do we identify ourselves? We are not

having an intellectual discussion here, but how you actually feel toward yourself.

Where are you? You have a body, from your head to your toes. Somewhere inside this is where you are. Where do you think you are? Some people will remark to this, "What does it make difference where I actually am? My whole body is who I am."

But if a person thinks this way, he is too connected to his body. It could even be that he learns Torah and does mitzvos, but he identifies himself as a body.

Where is your "I"? Although your "I" extends to every part of your body, that is only the vitality that extends from your "I." It is not your actual "I." Where is your actual "I"?

If a person closes his eyes and tries to sense his existence and he cannot feel his existence within his body, it is clear that he doesn't really know of his own existence yet. He might be aware of the fact that he is alive, but he doesn't know his essence. He identifies his body as the source of his life.

But when a person knows how to identify the source of his vitality, he discovers what is called "a flowing wellspring." The Gemara (*Berachos* 63b) states that "If one wants to become wise, he should study financial matters, because there is no part in Torah that has more wisdom than this; they are a flowing wellspring (*maayan hanovea*). Chazal are teaching us that there is a place in our soul that is called a "flowing wellspring", from which our thoughts flow out from. This wisdom is found in the monetary laws of the Torah, but inside ourselves we can find it also. Where can we find this inner flow -- the place where we can identify our essence?

You Are Found In Thoughts

The answer is in the thoughts (and also in the heart). All other places in the body are just extensions of one's life-giving energy, but they are not the actual life force in a person. The actual vitality of a person, his very essence, is found in the thoughts (or in the heart).

This is essentially what we said before: there are some people who are thinkers, but then there are people who are actually **found** in their thoughts. A person who is found in the thoughts is not simply because he entered the world of thought, but because he identifies it as his source of vitality. He lives this vitality and thus he lives the thoughts.

When one learns Torah *lishmah* (for its own sake), he merits to become a "mighty wellspring." One who learns Torah for pure motives, even for a short amount of time, connects to this inner source of vitality in himself, and it is there that he identifies himself. "*Wisdom sustains its owner.*" He feels his existence in this place of thought in himself.

If a person doesn't feel that it is his mind or heart which is where he exists, he has never reached his essence yet. He will not either be able to reach his potential in learning. It's possible for a person to learn a lot of Torah, but he has never yet reached his unique potential in learning.

Everyone has a unique share in learning from Hashem. It is there where a person can feel his existence.

In the beginning of this chapter, we mentioned that the Ramchal writes that it is the way of wise scholars to constantly think wherever they go. This is because they have found their inner source of thoughts which flows out from their essence. This doesn't come from straining the mind to concentrate very hard. It comes from the source of thought in a person - his very essence.

To illustrate, if a person is dead, he still exists, but he is dead. When a person isn't connected to his inner source of thought, he still exists, but it is as if he is dead. He isn't connected to himself.

To live in a world of thought means that one lives in a place in which he is connected to his actual self.

The Torah Of Truth

Wisdom is "*the Torah of truth planted within us.*" The Torah is called a "Torah of truth" - as opposed to not being a Torah of truth. What does that mean?

The truth is really what sustains anything to exist. Falsity cannot sustain anything - it is a lie, so it cannot give vitality to anything.

Truth is essentially a continuation of something, while falsity is when something begins from nowhere. When a person has falsity in his soul, he is always making new beginnings with no solid basis to rely upon. He produces ideas which don't come from his essence.

When a person never reaches his essence, he is really living a lie. When a person lies to himself, he isn't connected to his actual self and creates a new "I" that isn't who he is. This cannot be a source of vitality to him.

If a person doesn't reach the truth of who he really is, he will never have the inner source of thought from which his true wisdom is found in – he will never reach the “Torah of truth”.

We do not mean that he is a liar. We are referring to something else – one who does not reach the truth of himself. This is when one learns someone else's share in Torah and not his own. Such a person doesn't connect to his own source of thought – he is living something else other than who he is, and he is just creating new ideas that are not who he is.

Chazal^[1] say that “Every day, a person should consider the Torah as precious as on the day he received it at Har Sinai”. The depth of this is that each person needs to learn his unique part of the Torah that is specially meant for him; if Reuven learns Shimon's part of Torah, he isn't connected to the wisdom he could be having. Even if he learns a lot, in his soul he is living a lie, and as a result he doesn't derive vitality from such knowledge.

Thus, he has to always connect to his part of the Torah -- which he received at Har Sinai.

Searching For The Truth

A person must seek the truth if he wants to be connected to his inner flow of thought and to live a life of wisdom. Sometimes a person needs to endure a lot of physical suffering for this, but the proper way we can all handle is to live a truthful kind of life.

The Torah gives a commandment to avoid lies^[2]. A person needs to always look for what is the absolute truth. If you look for the real truth in something, you will be able to reach your inner source of thought from that.

Searching for the truth doesn't just mean to look for the truth – it means that you look for the truth which is meant **for you**.

For example, when a person is learning and he comes up with a certain *sevarah*, and he wants to know if it is correct or not – it is not enough to ask someone else what he thinks. Even if you get someone else's approval of what you have come up with, you need to still ask yourself if it's really the truth. When you keep searching for the truth – the absolute truth – eventually you will find your inner source of thought.

There are other ways to reach the truth, such as physical suffering or absolute dedication to learning

the Torah. But there is a more inner way to reach the truth – by always searching for the absolute truth.

For this, a person must be very determined to find the truth – it is not about looking for every opinion out there, nor is it about finding out always how to act (although these two things are necessary). It is to find what the truth is in any point – to turn it over again and again and see if it's really the truth.

We are not talking about guessing right when you're learning. This can happen also, but that is not the depth of this matter. When a person guesses the truth, he got there only because he reached his inner source of thought, and it is only the truth comes from his inner source of thought.

Don't Look For Leniencies

This is a very refined and subtle part of our soul – the power to search for the truth. To illustrate this, we will give some examples from life to explain what it is.

People often ask if it is permissible to lie in certain situations, but just because it may be permissible doesn't mean it's the truth. It might not be a lie, but it's still not the truth.

It is told about Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel (the Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva zt"l) that when he had to sign on certain government papers to finalize a new yeshiva building, he refused to sign it, because he could not get himself to say that certain rooms were for children and that the *beis midrash* was really a gym. Although he could have found permission according to *Halacha* to write it anyway, he couldn't write it, because it was a deviation from the truth.

When he refused to sign it, the people involved said to him, "But everyone else does it. It's the only for us to get a grant from the government." He replied, "Yeshivos can be based on this, but Torah cannot."

There is definitely a lot of Torah in today's times, but there isn't that much truth.

One time I dealt with someone who lied to me. I wasn't aware that he lied to me at first, and after some time, I found out that he had lied to me. I asked him, "Why did you lie to me?"

He told me, "I lied to you *l'sheim shomayim* (for the sake of Heaven)."

I said to him, "For the sake of Heaven, I don't believe you. Maybe you won't go to Gehinnom for lying to me, but I'm never believing you again for anything, because you will probably just lie to me again for the sake of Heaven."

It's not an issue of if it's permitted or not. It is simple that if it's a lie, it's not permitted. But even if it's entirely permissible, it still goes against the truth. "*He speaks truth in his heart.*" There is a deep place in the soul which is the total truth; it is hidden deep down in the soul.

If a person doesn't experience such a place in his soul, he will not be able to derive vitality from the world of thought and wisdom.

Many people wonder why they aren't successful at trying to enter the world of thought. There can be many reasons for this, but along the lines of our discussion here, it is because people aren't truthful enough.

If we want to arrive at the truth, we need to purify ourselves and work on acquiring the truth - and only the truth.

Sometimes a person can start entering the truth only to become crooked a little bit afterwards. We can hear someone beginning to say something truthful, and then the next thing he says is something twisted. This is because the person hasn't really worked to purify himself; even when he gets to the truth in something, it comes out in a crooked way.

There are people who can say very impressive *Chiddushei Torah*, but they aren't true. By contrast, there are those who just learn the simple meaning of a *sugya*, and even though it's not a *chiddush*, it is the truth; even when they do come up with a *chiddush*, the point is not the *chiddush* - the point is that their understanding is the true understanding.

Purifying The Thoughts

Let us now make this more practical.

The power of constant thought is that a person is able to look for the truth in his thoughts and examine if what he is thinking is true or not. (Obviously, one should not do this with every thought,

but we are just saying the root point).

Ever since Adam sinned by eating from the *eitz hadaas*, everything in the world became a mixture of true and false. The only question is how much truth there is in something and how much falsity there is in something. Besides for the holy Torah, which is entirely true, everything else we know of is a mixture of true and false. It is our job to sift out the lies and find the truth in something. How can we do this?

We need to get used to constant thought. There are two steps to this. The first step is to start checking our thoughts. When a person thinks of a thought – whether it is a thought that comes to him in learning Torah, or a thought about anything about that is meaningful in life -- he should try to sift out something that doesn't seem true. A person should keep sifting out his thoughts and slowly he will arrive at the truth in something.

From a superficial understanding, this seems that a person needs to think more and wonder, “Is this okay according to everybody?” But it's really more than this. It is an inner test that takes place inside one's self, a self-examination to try and see what the truth is.

Just like a *shochet* (butcher) checks a knife to see if there is nick in it, so too when it comes to our mind we have to feel if something sounds right or not.

Even after we get used to checking our thoughts we will still have a tendency to be swayed toward things that aren't true, so we need to be concerned that this as well needs to go away.

Thinking Something Over - Again and Again

This kind of a life is what the Ramchal describes – that it is the way of Torah scholars to always be thinking. What are they always thinking about?

Constant thought does not mean that one learns 18 chapters of *Mishnayos*, then he learns two chapters of *sefer Shemiras Halashon*, and then he learns Gemara for a set time every day. This is all wonderful, but this has nothing to do with constant thought.

To have constant thought means to think about the same thought, again and again.

The Ramchal compares this to a coal; just like the more you blow on a coal the more embers you create from it which weren't there before, the more a person thinks into the Torah, the more he brings out what is behind each word.

This brings out another point to what we are saying. It is not enough to go from one thought to another; this will not get a person to arrive at inner wisdom. We don't mean to say that a person should spend his entire life learning only one *masechta*; we just mean that a person should get used to thinking about the same thing, again and gain.

When you think about the same thing again and again, what do you think about? This consists of two steps. One part of it is to think simply about it, again and again. These were the words of the Ramchal, that the Torah is like a coal which the more you "blow" upon it with your thoughts, the more you bring out the wisdom in it.

The second part of it – which is the point that we are dealing with right now – is to constantly think about it and as a result, to come to purify the thought.

There are people who learn a lot, but it doesn't open up their soul. The real way to learn Torah is to always look for the truth in everything you learn. The more you try to get the truth, the more you reveal your soul in it, and you can keep doing this until you get to the innermost point in the soul.

This revelation usually does not happen right away. It can come suddenly, but generally speaking, it only comes the more and more a person learns how purifies the thoughts.

The Source Of Your Inner Thoughts

The generic term for what we have been describing in this chapter is a power of constant thought, but the depth of it is to think about the same thing again and again.

This gets a person to reveal his own unique source of thought, which is also the revelation of one's very self – his true "I."

What is the truth for one person isn't always the truth for another person. Beis Hilel and Beis Shamai always had opposing views, yet both of them are correct – "*Their words and their words are the words of the living G-d.*" They each arrived at their own truth, which was not the truth for the other.

When a person purifies his thoughts through getting down to the truth, he gains in two ways: first of all, he is more accurate, and secondly, he reveals the truth that is **for him** and he begins to reveal his true self.

If a person just reads something in the Torah simply and doesn't think into it, he is probably not learning what's meant for him. The Torah is always true, but a person needs to find his unique share in the Torah.

Two people can learn the same *sugya* and arrive at the same exact conclusion, but one of them got there in a superficial way, and the other got there based on his own inner thoughts; he got there from within his own self, and not from any external factor.

All of this is a way to get to one's innermost point in his soul. What happens when a person gets to that point? There, everything gets turned around. When a person gets to the innermost point, the inner thoughts will come to him naturally without any strain.

These are the words of Reb Meir that one becomes like a *mayaan hanovea* - a "flowing wellspring."

Chazal say that when a person begins to learn Torah, it is very difficult. It feels like using a rope to pull buckets of water out of a pit. But at a certain point a person can merit that the water rises up to meet him, just like by Yaakov Avinu.

[1] *Yalkut Shimeoni, Devarim 938.*

[2] *Shemos 23: 7*