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The Month of Kislev: The Power of "Sleep"

We are currently in the month of *Kislev*. Our Sages described the wintertime as a time of "sleep", and the month of Kislev is especially identified with the soul's "power of sleep".

Our Sages reveal to us that it is not only human beings and animals who sleep. Even the plants and even the non-living objects sleep. Therefore, there is a lot more to sleep than we think. But let us try to understand at least what our own soul's power of "sleep" is, and how we can channel it towards its proper direction. When a person sleeps, there are both negative and positive aspects of this human function.

Women and Sleep

Let's look at the first time the Torah talks about sleep. When Hashem created Chavah's body from Adam HaRishon's body, Adam HaRishon was put to sleep. Chavah's entire creation came about through sleep - thus, the entire creation of woman stems from sleep. Therefore, understanding what sleep is an important part of understanding a woman's *avodah*.

Sleep - A Time Where The Heart Dominates The Intellect

As is well-known, the strong point of a man is *seichel* (intellect), and the strong point of a woman is *lev*, the heart. What is the root of this difference? Man was created with Hashem's wisdom, which is called *chochmah*. The *chochmah* refers to the intellect. That is why a man's initial perception is based on his intellect and not from his emotions. Woman, however, was created when man was asleep. When a person sleeps, the heart dominates the intellect. As it is written, "*I am asleep, but my heart is awake.*" When Adam HaRishon was put to sleep, the only thing that stayed awake was his heart. Woman was created from this state, and that is why woman act more from their heart, from their feelings and emotions, and less from their intellect.

The Two Parts To The Heart - The Inspiration and The Desires

We need to understand how we use the power of "sleep", as a way to reach and reveal our spiritual heart.

As a general description, the heart is comprised of two parts: our feelings that inspire us, and our deepest desires. The second part, our deeply rooted desired, is also linked with our *middos* (character traits). The *middos* we exhibit are actually an offshoot of our deeply rooted desires (*retzonos*) that are

present in our heart.

When a person sleeps, the main part of the heart that stays awake when he/she sleeps is not the “inspirational” part of the heart, but rather the deeply rooted desires of the heart, which produce our *middos*. It is this part of the heart which becomes revealed to the person during the state of sleep.

Dreams

We are referring to dreams. When a person sleeps, he dreams. What is the source of our dreams? There are three different possible sources of a dream. The foods we ate during the day can affect what we dream about, and the body’s liver is involved with this process. The nature of the food affects our dreams, and even the thoughts of the person who made the food can affect our dreams.

There is also a second factor which can influence our dreams: Our Sages state that a person dreams about what he thought about during the day.

There is also a third cause for our dreams: we dream about our deep, subconscious desires that we may not even be aware of. It is written, “On my bed at nights, I sought that which my heart loved.” In the *sefarim hakedoshim*, it is explained that our dreams can show us what our deepest desires are; our dreams can help us figure out what our heart really wants deep down.

Each of our dreams contains a key to reaching a deeper understanding of ourselves. We can simply dismiss our dreams and just ignore them - or we can use them to uncover a great wealth. We will try here to explain, with Hashem’s help, of how we can use our dreams.

Our Dreams Show Us Our Pnimiyus

Every person consists of two layers: his *chitzoniyus* (external layer) and his *pnimiyus* (inner layer). We are all aware of the most external part of our *chitzoniyus*, which is our physical makeup. We see ourselves in the mirror so we recognize our *chitzoniyus*. A slightly deeper part of our *chitzoniyus* than this is our actions that we do. When it comes to this area, we can also identify this part of ourselves, more or less. We are all aware, somewhat, to the actions that we do, each of us to a different degree.

The more inner parts to ourselves, our *pnimiyus*, refers to our *retzonos* (what we want), our thoughts, and our *middos* character traits. This is the main part of who we are, and this is what more closely defines our identity. Obviously, our *pnimiyus* does not negate the need for our *chitzoniyus*. Our *pnimiyus* cannot be contained anywhere if we have no *chitzoniyus*. So just because our *pnimiyus* defines our self does not mean that our *chitzoniyus* is worthless. But what we need to know is that if we only acknowledge our *chitzoniyus* and we have no recognition of our *pnimiyus*, we are missing the main part of ourselves.

How do we recognize our *pnimiyus*? Some of it we already recognize, and some of it is harder to recognize. We generally know if we are drawn towards laziness or towards being energetic, if we are drawn towards positivity or negativity, or if we are drawn towards joy or sadness. Anyone can have this general awareness of his character, when he makes a simple reflection about himself; unless he is a person who stubbornly refuses to acknowledge these tendencies in himself and he’d rather live in denial and fool himself.

So we have recognition of our *chitzoniyus* and we also have some recognition of our *pnimiyus*, to a certain extent. But we know that the soul is complicated, consisting of many deep layers, layer after layer. How do we get in touch with the more inner parts of ourselves? How do we get to know what is going on deep down in our *pnimiyus*?

Our soul is like a roll of string; the beginning of the string is thick, and we can see it. But as the string goes on and on, it gets thinner and thinner, and it becomes harder to see it. This is like the inner parts to our *pnimiyus*, which are so refined that it is very hard to discern. Almost nobody reaches the depth of their souls, because the more inner parts to the soul are extremely subtle to discern.

If someone thinks that he recognizes his soul well, it means that he is still found on the more external layers of his soul, which are thicker and easier to see. But the more a person is recognizing himself, he begins to understand that there is layer within layer, subtlety within subtlety, in the soul. He realizes that anything he does understand about himself is a drop in the ocean. *"It is very deep, who shall find it?"*

When a person remains ignorant of self-knowledge and he has never worked hard to understand himself, it is definite that his life will lead him in a proper direction. Living on this world for 70 or 80 years without knowing oneself is like a shoemaker who never learned how to make shoes and he tries to make shoes. A person will not be able to live properly if he does not recognize what is in his soul.

It takes a lifetime of inner work in order to recognize the soul. The Raavad and the Maharal and others, based upon the verse *"From my flesh I can see G-d"*, have explained that it is not possible to recognize Hashem unless we have a recognition for our own souls. That is why we need to work hard at understanding ourselves, more and more, discovering more and more subtleties about our souls.

Preface To Self-Recognition

Today there are all kinds of self-help books and different methods which teach people of how to understand themselves [psychology]. We need to learn about our souls using the information of the Torah and the Sages. In addition, even after a person has gone through appropriate *sefarim* that explain this knowledge, one must understand that is but a step in the process. It does not mean yet that you know yourself. Instead, all of what we learn about is like a stepping stool that helps us get more and more inward into ourselves.

Step 1 - Write Down All Your Feelings and Character Traits That You're Aware Of.

The first step of getting to recognize our soul is, to take a pen and paper, and write down all of the positive qualities you are aware of about yourself, and on a separate column of the paper, write down all of the negative qualities in yourself that you are aware of. However, make sure to emphasize the good parts about yourself.[\[1\]](#)

Simply write down all of the good *middos* and bad *middos* that you recognize in yourself, with emphasis on the good, and this gives you a general look at your soul, and it is the first step in self-recognition. You need to sit with yourself and write this list.

Step 2 - Write Down The Negative Feelings You Sometimes Feel.

After making this general list (which should include all the good\bad *middos*, all of the good\bad aspects of your personality, and all of the good\bad desires that you are aware of in yourself), now comes a more inner and fundamental part of this *avodah*: to understand that each aspect of our personality also contains an opposite feeling that we sometimes feel. If we have a good *middah*, there are also times where we experience the opposite of that good *middah*.

This is due to the complex nature of our soul. We are never one-dimensional, and that is why if we experience a good *middah*, we also sometimes experience its opposite. The deep reason for this is because every aspect of the soul consists of itself and its opposite; this is called *'dovor v'hipucho'*.

For example, if we identify in ourselves an emotion of love for others, that means we also have hatred for others sometimes. We are already familiar with what it means to love and hate, but what we may not be aware of is that we sometimes experience hatred towards the very people we love! For example, if a mother feels certain that she loves her child, there are also times where she feels hatred towards her own child. It might not be absolute hatred, but there is certainly a slight feeling of hatred that she may feel sometimes at her child (and sometimes, unfortunately, it is even more than just a slight feeling). The same is true for all close relationships – husband and wife, and parents with children. There is always love, but there will also be hatred sometimes!

There is a well-known story that once a student of Rav Dessler dreamt that he had killed his own soul. He woke up terrified from the dream and he went running to Rav Dessler to ask him how it was possible that he could dream such a thing. Rav Dessler said to him, “You love your son, but sometimes you experience negativity towards him, such as when he wakes you up at night and your sleep is disturbed. This little feeling of resentment that you have towards him made it possible for you to have a dream of killing him.” Obviously, the father loves his child, and that is what he mainly experiences towards the child. But does he love him one hundred percent? No, because there is always an opposite point to each point in the soul, which makes its appearance sometimes. It came up in his dream.

Dreams - The Revelation of Our Subconscious Feelings

When a person is not trying to understand the subtleties of his soul, he doesn't take his dreams that seriously. He knows that sometimes he has pleasant dreams and sometimes he has nightmares. But when one understands that he is here on this world in order to serve Hashem and that self-recognition is a very large part of this (“*From my flesh I see G-d*”), he is aware that there is subtlety within subtlety of recognizing his inner layers, and such a person will view dreams as a great tool to help him gain greater self-awareness of himself and to improve his service towards Hashem.

Analyzing Our Dreams

Above, we mentioned three sources of our dreams. Our dreams can be influenced by the foods we eat that day, or by something we thought about by day, or by our innermost desires present in our subconscious. Therefore, after you wake up from a dream, try to see which of these three reasons caused the dream.

When we have dreams, we must figure out where they come from. We mentioned in the beginning three causes for dreams – what we ate that day, what we thought about that day and what we really want. If it did not come from foods or from our daydreams, it must be coming from something in our subconscious. It is hard for us to know exactly which kinds of foods we ate that day that may have caused the dream, therefore, we should mainly suspect that the dream came from our subconscious thoughts and desires.

[Here is an example of how our subconscious desires can show up in a dream.] Once the Chofetz Chaim dreamt that he has become wealthy. The next day, he fasted over the dream. He thought to himself, “Either way, this is not a good dream. If it happens and I become rich, my service to Hashem will be interrupted. And if it doesn't happen, it is bad that I had such a dream, because it shows me that I want to be rich.”

Our dreams can show us about what our deepest desires are. Sometimes they are about desires we are already consciously familiar with, and sometimes our dreams show us our deep desires which we were out of our conscious radar, and through our dreams, we discover them.

Listening To The Subtleties of our Soul

If one wants to listen to the subtleties contained in the soul, one of the ways is through using our dreams. With the help of Heaven, will briefly list here some ways of how a person can listen to the subtleties in the soul.

Now that we have explained the need to recognize the subtleties of our inner world, our souls, the question is: How indeed do we recognize those subtle parts of ourselves? Here we will present briefly a general picture of how we can know.

1- Learn Sefer 'Michtav M'Eliyahu' of Rav Dessler

The *mussar sefarim*, which span the earlier centuries down to the later centuries, were written by our Sages and *Gedolim*, and they exerted themselves to explain to us the most subtle and refined points. In the more recent generations, we have merited a particular sefer which does this job quite well: the sefer *Michtav M'Eliyahu*[\[2\]](#), written by HaRav Dessler zt"l. In this sefer, we can see how the author toiled to explain to us how to understand the human soul, based entirely on the words of the Sages. He shows us there the most subtle points about the soul.

The very first step we need to take in order to know our soul is to learn sefarim like this which provide us with an in-depth understanding of matters about the soul, which explain to us how our middos work, in their many details.

2 - Time Every Day To Develop Self-Awareness

Just as some people were born with a sense for music or a feel for cooking, so are there people who are born with a subtle sense of discerning their inner worlds. If someone was born with this inner sense for soul matters, he needs to identify it, and he should have designated times each day where he concentrates on this sense for soul matters. He needs to bring out this power from its potential state and activate it, by having time every day for this.

However, not everyone is blessed with this ability. The first method presented above is applicable on all levels: everyone can learn *sefarim*, each on their own level, and gain some understanding into the subtleties of the soul. But the second way we are mentioning - setting side time each day to sense soul matters - will not come so easily to every person, because not every person is born with a sensitivity to soul matters. However, each person to some degree can sense matters about the soul and reach a certain degree of subtle understanding towards himself. But the understanding will differ with each person, depending upon how much sensitivity to these matters that a person has been born with.

3- Find A Friend Who You Can Talk To

A third way of how we can understand soul matters is, if possible, to find a friend whom we can talk to about these things. A man should choose a man, and a woman should choose a woman, and they should discuss matters of the soul together. Often the combined understanding of a close friend who understands you can be a great help in understanding yourself.

4 - Inner Silence

Now we will say a fourth way of how one can understand the soul, but let us emphasize that it should only be attempted after one is already doing the first step: to learn the sefarim written by our *Gedolim* which explain to us about the soul. We should not be learning any secular psychology books for this, and we should only seek the words of our Sages about these matters.

The fourth method which we will mention begins with having designated times every day for “heart time”, a concept which we have spoken about often in the past. When one has this quiet time each day, he can use the quiet as a way to reflect into his soul, until he eventually attains a certain inner calm. Once a person reaches this calmness, his sense of recognition towards soul matters will be heightened, and he will be able to sense subtler understandings of his soul amidst this quiet and calmness, things which he wouldn't have been able to sense amidst a noisy environment.

The more a person has entered this quiet and calmness, the deeper he can enter into himself and come across subtle areas in his soul. This allows him to better recognize what's going on inside himself.

This method is one of the strongest ways to recognize the deep areas of the soul: through having quiet, deep reflection, and subsequent calmness; amidst the calmness, one can sense understandings about his soul. Either one can reflect and then steadily reach the calmness, or he can begin right away with calming himself and then reflecting; it depends upon personal preference. When one reaches deeper places in his soul, he experiences his soul more, in a clearer and sharper perception. From there he reaches greater self-recognition - each person on his own level.

5 - Paying Attention to Fleeting Emotions and Thoughts

There is a fifth method of becoming aware of soul matters, which can be worked upon even as we are not amidst the quiet.

The more a person lives throughout the day with general self-awareness, the more he will notice and pay attention to any fleeting thoughts and emotions that quickly flit through his sensory process. There are some thoughts which we spend a lot of time thinking about, but sometimes we notice thoughts which pass by very quickly and they are gone in the blink of an eye. We also experience certain feelings and emotions which are gone as soon as we become aware of them. We can slowly begin to identify these quickly passing thoughts and feelings, and begin to recognize them and become more aware of them.

Throughout the course of the day, a person who is more self-aware will “listen” to the quickly passing thoughts and feelings which come and go very quickly. Don't take any thought or feeling lightly - each of them are saying something important. These quickly passing thoughts and emotions are portals that can open to us more awareness about what is going on inside our souls.

6 - Dreams

The sixth and final method which we will mention, of how we can come to better recognize the depth of our souls, is the subject of this chapter: the *avodah* of the month of *Kislev*, which is “sleep”. In our sleep, we have dreams, and our dreams show us our thoughts which we are not consciously aware of during the day.

When has already worked upon the previous five methods mentioned, he will access even greater depth to himself when he sleeps. As he sleeps and he is experiencing his dreams, he will be able to identify parts of himself which are hard to recognize during the daytime when he is awake. After he wakes up from the dream, he can analyze what caused the dream: if it was caused by certain foods he ate, or from something he daydreamed about or if it's coming from something deeper than these things. Often, he will find that the dream is caused by a deep subconscious thought, feeling, or desire.

In this way, a person accesses the deep power that lays in “sleep”, and instead of viewing sleep as a wasted part of his life, he will see sleep as a valuable tool that helps him enter more within.

In Conclusion

All that was said here is only applicable to one who wants to live a more internal kind of life. It is not merely for one who wishes to live an inner life, but for someone who wants to actually *enter* into the inner kind of life. Entering into an inner kind of life doesn't mean to begin tasting it and then to remain at the doorway. It means to keep entering further within.

These words described in this chapter are not a way to begin serving Hashem. Rather, they are a continuation for someone who has already begun to serve Hashem and he has already traveling his inner world. The six methods mentioned in this chapter of how we can recognize our inner worlds were but general descriptions, which are describing ways of how we can enter into more subtle areas of the soul, enabling us to go deeper and deeper into ourselves, until we get to our innermost point.

We must remember, as we begin to embark on this journey into our inner world, that there is a greater purpose here we should be trying to reach. Our goal must be to gain a keener sense of the Creator. We are merely passing through these inner roads being described as pathways that lead to our innermost point, where we reach the Creator.

I want to repeat and emphasize, however, that the first step cannot be skipped: one must study the words of our Sages about the soul and its *middos*.

May we merit from Hashem to be of those who are seeking to know their inner worlds, of those who are trying to recognize their soul, as a way to reach true self and from there, to reach *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. May all of us merit to climb the spiritual ladder that leads towards Hashem, to recognize our souls with greater and deeper clarity, and from this we can come to have clearer recognition of Hashem, and connect to Him in a more complete way.

Questions And Answers With The Rav

Q1: Besides for *sefer Michtav M'Eliyahu*, which other *sefarim* can the Rav recommend to learn?

ANSWER: Besides for *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, any other *sefarim* learned will depend on how well understandings these things.

- One can try learning the *sefarim* of Rav Chaim Friedlander zt"l, the two volumes of ***Sifsei Chaim: Middos V'Avodas Hashem***.
- If someone is deeper kind of person, he\she can try learning *sefer Shiurei Daas* of R' Bloch zt"l [from Telz].
- If one is even deeper than this, he\she can try learning the *sefarim* of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l (two volumes of ***Daas Chochmah U'Mussar***, and five volumes of ***Daas Torah*** on the *parsha*).
- It is very recommended to learn ***Sefer HaMeoros HaGedolim***, which contains stories of the *baalei mussar* since the times of Reb Yisrael Salanter.
- You can also try learning *sefer Beis Kelm*, which was also produced by Rav Dessler zt"l; it contains the *mussar* teachings taught in Kelm which he hails from.

Q2: When we make a list of our middos and we discover bad middos in ourselves, what do we do about this?

ANSWER: Just write it down so that you are aware of it. At this point we will not yet be addressing how we actually uproot bad *middos*. Just write down everything you recognize about yourself, in general terms. Remember to focus on your positive points and to avoid focusing too much on your negative points. Don't ignore your negative points, of course. Write them down, but just don't focus on them too much. Make sure that you are keeping the focus on your good points.

Q3: Is there a spiritual meaning why women have a hard time falling asleep when we are getting older?

ANSWER: Yes. The simple reason for this is because when we sleep, our mind leaves us and our hearts dominate as we sleep. In women, the heart is more dominant to begin with, for their hearts are softer; throughout the day, their hearts are more active, so they are already drawn towards sleep from during the day, and that is why their need for sleep at night becomes lessened [which explains why there is a harder time for older women to fall asleep].

Q4: The Rav has said that it is more important to focus on our positive qualities when we write down a list of our middos. Does this include any desires I have that are in order to do the will of Hashem? Or can it also include things which are positive but they are not necessarily in order to do Hashem's will?

ANSWER: Any desire that is aligned with Hashem's will is a positive desire. The lower part of our soul, our *nefesh habehaimis*, contains a mix of desires – some of them are desired by Hashem, and some of them are not. Some of our desires are simply coming from our faculty of *ratzon* (will), and these can be simply desires to want a certain thing, and some of these desires can be channeled towards doing the will of Hashem. Each desire needs to be examined to see if it can be channeled towards doing Hashem's will or not.

Q5: What then does the Rav mean that we should focus on the positive? Is it referring only to our positive desires, or does it also include our positive middos and other positive aspects of our personality?

A: If a person only writes down on the list the desires he has which are aligned with Hashem's will, he is probably fooling himself, because a person is usually not on the level where his main desires in life are to do Hashem's will. That is why we should write down on the list all of the natural desires we recognize in ourselves. We can also include in it our spiritual and holy desires which are Hashem's will, but we should not focus on this part alone, because then we would be avoiding a basic part of our self-awareness, by ignoring our natural desires. If someone is at the level where he only does the will of Hashem, that is wonderful, but most people are not living that way, so we need to be honest with ourselves as we make this list.

Q6: Based on what the Rav said earlier that older women need less sleep, does that mean that a woman who has more “heart time” each day will also need less sleep?

A: Often it can happen that the more spiritual a person becomes, the less sleep he needs. Some people need more sleep due to certain physical conditions in their body, but generally speaking, the more a person is living an internal kind of life, his need for sleep is greatly weakened and he will find that he doesn't need as much sleep. Of course, we are physical human beings, and we need to sleep. Chazal say that it is impossible for a person to go three days without sleeping. But the need for sleep can be greatly lessened, with the more a person is living an internal kind of life.

Q7: We have a general question about how to serve Hashem. We are a group of a women who learn Chovos HaLevovos (Shaar Avodas Elokim), and it is explained there that a person cannot reach his neshamah (soul) until he has purified his middos (character traits). But we are getting the impression that the Rav's general approach towards Avodas Hashem differs with this, for the Rav is saying that we must first reach the depth of our neshamah and after that to work on our middos. This implies that we don't have to first work on our middos in order to reach our neshamah. How do we reconcile the Rav's approach with the words of the Chovos HaLevovos?

ANSWER: That is a very good question. The *Chovos HaLevovos* lived in the times of the Rishonim (the earlier sages, spanning the tenth and fifteenth centuries), but we live in the times of the Acharonim (the later sages, which began from the period of the fifteenth century), of which it is written about by our *sefarim hakedoshim* that we are closer to the time of Mashiach, in which the light of the *neshamah* is easier to access, for it will soon be revealed upon the world. This phenomenon contains both an advantage and a disadvantage, as follows.

The advantage is clear: the *neshamah* is made easier to access, in our times. But it also presents a certain danger. You can have a person who did not sufficiently work on his *middos* and he begins to enter inward into his soul, and he reaches the light of the *neshamah* which is more easily accessed nowadays – and then what happens? The light of his *neshamah* enters his unfixed *middos*, and then all of his *Avodas Hashem* is not genuine, because he is still full of unrefined character.

Can we say that one should first work on his *middos* and only after that he should enter into his *neshamah*? This is certainly a valid point. But in spite of this, the *sefarim hakedoshim* state that as the generations get closer to Mashiach, it is easier for us to access our *neshamah* and reach its innermost point.

Therefore, our *avodah* ends up being two-fold. We need to work on our *middos* at the very same time that we work to reach our *neshamah*. We have to be careful not to fall into the trap of neglecting to work on our *middos*, *chas v'shalom*.

Q8: The Rav has said that men are more gifted with chochmah and seichel (the intellectual abilities) as opposed to “heart”, whereas women are more gifted with “heart” and less with intellect; because Chavah was created from a state of sleep, where the intellect isn't working and only the heart is active. However, it seems that the sefer Chovos HaLevovos, which is explaining to us the duties of the “heart”, is certainly teaching us how to approach the world with intellectual chochmah and seichel, and not with spiritual feelings

of “heart”. What is the proper path in a woman’s Avodas Hashem? It is it the path of the Chovos HaLevovos (which seems to stress the use of seichel\chochmah), or the path of the Rav, who is explaining that womanly are meant to mainly use the heart and not the intellect....?

ANSWER: You have made a clear and proper definition. But the truth is that if there is just heart and no use of the intellect, a person will not succeed in *Avodas Hashem*. Even more so, there is additional reason today why women need to use their intellect in *Avodas Hashem*. Women today are more worldly and are anyways using their intellect, to think about other things that are not spiritual. If women would not be using their intellect at all, they would easily connect to the “heart”, but since women are using the intellect more these days, for materialistic concerns, the only way to counter this problem is to put their intellect to holy uses.

So in essence, the heart is the main function of the woman, as opposed to the intellect; but in more recent times, where there are women who have become more intellectual as they are involved more with the outside world, they are using the intellect for non-spiritual purposes, so they are less drawn towards using the heart; and the only way for them to counter this is to use their intellects for holy purposes. However, in most women, the heart is the stronger point than their intellect, and thus the main *avodah* of a woman in most cases is to use the heart, and less with intellect. The language of our Sages, such as the words of *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*, is certainly a more intellectual approach that is geared towards men and not towards women, but in our times where women are anyways using their intellect in all kinds of areas, they need to channel their intellect towards holy areas, to counter the use of their intellect that is being used towards mundane things.

Q9: If we learn a sefer such as *Sifsei Chaim*, and we come across parts that have to do with Gemara that are only for men, what should we do?

ANSWER: If you come across any parts in the sefer which you cannot understand, skip those parts. The truth is that sefer *Sifsei Chaim* was written for yeshiva men, so you will definitely come across parts that are not meant for women to learn. Rav Dessler’s sefer *Michtav M’Eliyahu* is preferable for women to learn because it is written in easier language. If you find *Michtav M’Eliyahu* too hard to understand, you can try learning sefer *Alei Shur*, which is easier to understand. (Volume II of *Alei Shur* is easier to understand than Volume I).

Q10: If we recognize our desires and middos, does that mean that we recognize our “neshamah”? Or is the “neshamah” deeper than this and it requires more layers to traverse?

ANSWER: The second option you guessed is correct. We begin to understand ourselves by recognizing what is taking place in our *nefesh habehaimis*, There are many levels (the ‘animalistic’ part of our soul), after that we can recognize our *nefesh Elohis* (the G-dly part of our soul), after that is our *Ruach*, and after this is our *Neshamah*. It takes a long time in order to reach the *Neshamah*.

Q11: Since the Neshamah is very far from a person's reach, is it possible for a person to feel a closeness with Hashem after gaining the more basic levels of self-awareness? Or is this not possible until a person reaches the Neshamah?

ANSWER: It surely is possible. We have been describing a path here in which we build our way upwards, beginning from the bottom levels and working our way upwards. It is definitely possible for a person to feel sparks of higher levels even before he is there, because the light of the higher levels sometimes shines itself onto the lower levels. However, we will not be able to understand the sparks of the higher levels until we have actually entered more inward.

Every person contains a spark of the *neshamah*, which enables him to feel a deep closeness to Hashem at times, even before he has risen to the higher levels of his existence. There are several ways of how it is experienced. Sometimes it happens when a person has a deep feeling of simple faith in Hashem (*peshitus\temimus*), sometimes it is experienced through a deep experience of *davening*, sometimes it is felt through talking to Hashem, sometimes it can come from feeling a deep love for Hashem.

But it still does not mean that the person's actual soul level is there. There is a 'crack' in the soul which enables us to connect deeply to Hashem through those places, as we mentioned earlier, due to the light of the redemption which is closer to us now, which enables the light of the *neshamah* to be more easily accessed. That is why it is easier these days for a person to feel deep experiences in his soul, long before he has entered within.

However, as we said earlier, it doesn't mean that person is actually there at that level. It is just that sometimes, the light of the *neshamah* penetrates into the lower layers of the soul and enables a person to connect to it easily.

Thus, generally speaking, we must work our way upwards, starting from the lower levels of our soul. That is why when we work on our middos, we begin working with the lower levels and we work our way upwards, as opposed to beginning from a higher plane. We need to start from the bottom upwards. First we need to recognize the lowest parts of our soul and work our way upwards. We work to 'build' ourselves in this organized manner.

It is certainly possible for one to begin with the "*neshamah*" level, but it is a dangerous to do so. There are some people who begin with this path because they cannot deal with their weaknesses, and if they were to begin analyzing their weaknesses, they would do nothing to improve themselves, so they instead begin to enter the "*Neshamah*" level as an alternative. For such people, there is no realistic alternative, so they feel no other option other than to begin with the "*Neshamah*" level. Others are inclined to begin with *Neshamah* because there's a strong portal available in their souls that enables them to reach their *Neshamah*, and they would have a hard time descending to the lower levels of the soul and working from there. Others want to begin with *Neshamah* simply because they want to see success right away and they wouldn't want to deal with the failures of their weaknesses that are present in the lower layers of their soul.

So it is possible for a person to begin with the *Neshamah* level, but in all of these cases, it is always risky to do so.

The path which we must mainly use to traverse in our *Avodas Hashem* is to work in a step-by-step manner, beginning from the lower layers of our soul. This was the main path which our great leaders traversed throughout the generations. There were always exceptions to this who began to work on themselves from the higher plane [of *Neshamah*], but they were still taking a risk, and it is usually dangerous for us to take that unusual route.

Q12: When I begin this avodah of calming myself to enter deeper within, I try various ways of trying to calm myself. I am doing so in order to connect to Hashem. I think of pesukim (verses) that mention Hashem, and I think about the “Ein Sof” (the Infinite) of Hashem, and this calms me, and I truly feel that I am more connected to Hashem when I do this. Is this a true feeling that is coming from my neshamah, since I am feeling a deep feeling? Or is it just something that calms me and there is a lot more for me to feel....?

ANSWER: I do not know personally who is asking this question, so I cannot give a complete answer to this question. But generally speaking, any feeling which feels deep to you contains some truth to it, for there is a ‘crack’ in the soul that enables you to experience the light of the neshamah somewhat. But it is only experienced temporarily and it doesn’t mean that you are at that level. It is possible for a person to live in that higher state on more permanent basis, but if a person has not purified the lower layers of his soul, he is taking a very dangerous path by attempting to live in this higher state. It is fine to connect to this higher place in yourself from time to time, but then you must make sure to return to your lower levels and continue fixing yourself there.

When one is working his way upwards, beginning from the lower levels of the soul, and he is not yet feeling a deep connection with Hashem, it is very hard for most people to patiently work on themselves, when they are not getting a feeling of more connection to Hashem. This is especially the case with our generation. That is why every person needs to connect to Hashem from the place where he is currently found in, and along with this, he needs to work his way upwards. Each person can connect to his inner point of the soul, on his own level.

The truth is that sometimes a person is only imagining that he is becoming closer to Hashem, and sometimes it is a real feeling. However, even if it’s being imagined, he is still being spurred on to become closer to Hashem and to enter deeper into himself; and if only all people could imagine in this way. But, we cannot build our path in *Avodas Hashem* based upon this point. It is fine to feel a deep closeness with Hashem if this will calm you and then you immediately return to reality and you work on yourself; as long as you understand that you have merely entered into a ‘crack’ in your soul which lets you experience a higher level. But you must immediately return afterwards to the actual level that your soul is found on, and to continue to work on yourself from there.

[1] Editor’s Note: This is based upon the approach of **Reb Yeruchem Levovitz** zt”l, that the first step in self-awareness is to become aware of one’s qualities, for “woe is to the person who does not know his weaknesses, but even worse is a person who does not know his qualities.” (See **Daas Torah, parshas Bamidbar**). This point is further explained by the Rav in **Fixing Your Fire_012_Individuality**

[2] Available in English from Feldheim Publishers as “Strive For Truth”

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/rosh-chodesh-avodah-009-kislev-sleep>