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Bilvavi 3, Section 5: Mussar (Intro and 10 chapters)

Section Five: Mussar: Introduction

R' Yeruchem Levovitz on how to learn mussar

One time a young Yeshiva student asked Rav Yeruchem Levovitz: “How does one learn mussar?” Rav Yeruchem responded, “The same way you learn Gemara.” We will try to explain Rav Yeruchem’s words.

Every Torah student knows that when he approaches the Gemara, first he works on the simple understanding of the text. But it is clear that he hasn’t yet begun to reach the main points: the depth and understanding of the topics at hand, and the differences between all the various laws learned in the topic. In order to know it one needs tremendous effort and toil. Just as when we learn Gemara we need to get to the root of every law in order to understand the law, so too when we learn mussar do we need to get to the root. Just as when we learn Gemara we must learn how to funnel out the diamonds from the sand, so must we do so when we learn mussar.

How to go from a mundane life to a spiritual life

It is clear to all of us that by learning mussar we leave our mundane life and enter a spiritual life. So first we need to understand what the difference is between a mundane life and a spiritual life, and by this we will know what is the correct way to learn mussar.

The Chazon Ish writes (*Igros*, Vol.1: 3), “The Sages say, The words of Torah can only exist in someone who kills himself over them.” To kill oneself means to leave the simplicities of life and enter into the

deepest parts of life.”

These words reveal to us that when a person lives a materialistic life, he is living an external kind of life. Only when he has spirituality can he reach the depth of life itself. We will explain his words more.

An inner look on life

A person who lives without faith or believing in Divine Providence (even if he is aware of it, yet he doesn't live with it) encounters a difficulty and only sees the difficulty. But one who has faith reflects upon the difficulty: Why is he going through it? He comes to the conclusion that it is an atonement for his sins. His outlook is totally different than one who lives an external life. One whose life is materialistic only sees events without ever pondering their depth, while a spiritual life makes one ponder. A materialistic person only sees the external factor in everything, while a spiritual person sees the reason in everything.

Our earlier sages compare this to a fruit covered with a shell. Someone who only looks at the outside of the fruit sees nothing but a shell. But someone who peels it sees that the shell is only there to protect the fruit.

The same is with everything. Our world is really a world full of inner meaning, but it is all concealed. Materialism makes everything appear external, while spirituality reveals the inner part of everything. This is not just in mundane matters, but even in Torah and mitzvos. One who doesn't contemplate their inner meaning will only see the external factor of it. When one learns mussar, he uncovers the inner meaning in everything and searches for ways to incorporate it into his life.

Chapter One

Why Do We Learn Mussar?

Problems When Learning Mussar

Our eyes can see that many people learn mussar but give up as time goes on. Even those that remain steadfast are not significantly changed.

Many people learn mussar and feel this problem, but they rely on the words of Reb Yisroel Salanter who said that even if one sees that by learning mussar he is not changing dramatically, he is surely affected; and that it is just like Rebbe Akiva who saw the water constantly dripping on the rock, which eventually disappeared.

In the next few chapters we will explain what is the proper way to learn mussar.

Why do we learn mussar?

First, we have to know why we learn mussar.

This world exists because Hashem wanted to bestow good on His creations. If a person would get reward without any effort, it would feel like “bread of shame.” Therefore, Hashem created good and evil, so that a person can have free will to decide between good or evil. If a person chooses good he receives reward. It is like payment rather than a gift, so he doesn’t feel ashamed.

A person has in him both good and evil. Where are they found? They are both hidden deep in a person. A person’s goodness can be felt openly, but the evil that lies in a person cannot be felt except when it is strong.

The Chovos HaLevovos writes, “Son of man, you should know that the greatest enemy in the world is your evil inclination, who lies in the faculties of your soul and is mixed into your spirit. He is together in your physical and spiritual senses. He knows your soul’s secrets and hidden weaknesses. He is advising you in all your movements.” So a person has good and evil deep in him, and it is up to us to uproot the evil.

If someone doesn’t know where his evil traits lie in, how will he know how to uproot it? Because of this we learn mussar. We first need to recognize where the evil in us is located, and then we can fight it. This can only happen with learning Torah and mussar, as we will see.

Some people get depressed from mussar

There are those who learn mussar and discover their weaknesses, and become depressed. Such people are lacking a basic understanding of why we are here on this world. A person is not in charge of deciding his weaknesses. He doesn't understand that the whole reason why he is on this world is because of these weaknesses. If he wouldn't have these weaknesses, he wouldn't be here. A person has to know that this is why he is living - to work on himself and fix himself. This is the truth, and it cannot be escaped.

Anyone who naturally wants to pursue the truth is drawn after mussar, and anyone who doesn't learn mussar is far from any truth.

Upon approaching learning mussar, the first thing a person has to know is to figure out what his unique purpose is. What are his bad traits that were given to him by Hashem? If he approaches mussar with this outlook he will be happy. There is no greater joy than knowing one's purpose on this world, and what Hashem wants from him. How sad is a person who will only know after 120 years why he was on this world; he never knew why he lived. Is there a greater joy than knowing it?

Why are so many people distant from truly serving HASHEM?

What is the reason that people don't pursue the truth? There are two reasons: 1) Laziness. 2) Various desires.

A person knows that serving Hashem is a big undertaking. People naturally want to relax, and don't want to push themselves and work hard in serving Hashem. This is laziness. But it is a mistake. A person has to know that it was decreed on him that he work hard. He has free will to decide if he will pursue materialism or spirituality. But there is no way to run away from working hard. A person should therefore be smart and choose to work hard in spirituality. "A person was born to toil - Praiseworthy is one who toils in Torah."

Furthermore, someone who wants to relax should know that the ultimate relaxation is to be connected to Hashem. All other forms of relaxing are imaginary forms of relaxation. The Sages say, "The wicked start out with tranquility, and end in suffering."

The second reason is our various personal desires. One thinks that serving Hashem will automatically make him suffocate his desires, but this is also a mistake, because there is nothing more enjoyable than being connected with Hashem. People are giving up the ultimate enjoyment - for mere scraps! It is definitely hard in the beginning to avoid materialistic pursuits, but as time goes on, the pleasure in connecting to Hashem increases greatly, and it becomes easier to avoid desiring materialism.

Chapter Two

Hidden Evil

Another Reason Why We Learn Mussar

In the previous chapter we learned why we learn mussar and how to avoid pitfalls. Now will say more reasons why we learn mussar.

Evil that lurks in the heart and mind

A person is made up of two things: a mind\brain, and feelings. In both of them lies evil. But mussar can cure it.

In the mind, there lies a certain evil: an impure mentality, and mentalities that are not exact. A person has to know that he must learn Torah and love Hashem and have fear of Him, but if he only knows this then his mentality is external. He doesn't know the inner meaning of Torah, the inner meaning of loving Hashem and fear of Hashem. He thinks he understands everything, but really he doesn't know anything.

The Mesillas Yesharim testifies in his introduction that "Awe is wisdom, and only this is wisdom. Wisdom is surely not acquired without deep study. Deep study is required to truly know everything, that they should not merely be imagined - and surely in acquiring and understanding it." So a mere glance at mussar is a mistake. If one doesn't strive to understand the concepts such as awe and love of Hashem, he doesn't know what these concepts are.

In order to correct this, one needs to acquire knowledge of all the seforim on awe of Hashem - from the early Sages to the latter Sages - and study them deeply, as when one learns Gemara. One must elaborate greatly on the subject of awe of Hashem, until he has it clear. All the details need to be studied in depth, no less than when one learns Gemara.

A healthy outlook is necessary for mussar

R' Yechezkel Levenstein zt"l told over he asked the Alter of Kelm: "What does one need to learn mussar?" One of the things he answered him is that one needs a "healthy head". In other words, mussar is not just an awakening. It is the way to look at the inner meaning of life. One who learns mussar and doesn't change his outlook on life is obviously not understanding what mussar is.

Two types of evil that lurk in the heart

Until now we spoke of intellectual matters – matters of wisdom. Now we will speak of matters of the heart. This will include two parts: Lack of feelings, and incorrect feelings.

A healthy heart is able to feel spirituality in everything and is drawn after it. It can dismiss all physical matters of the subject as irrelevant, and therefore is not drawn after the physical. However, an unhealthy heart is the opposite. It considers the physical aspect in everything to be the good part, while it doesn't really have a feel for the spiritual part of a matter, and is not drawn after the spiritual.

So it follows that someone who has an unhealthy heart is only using his mere intellect when he does anything spiritual; he has no feeling for it. (There are definitely parts in the heart, some being healthy and some being unhealthy.) Such a person must correct this by doing two things: he needs to awaken the good in him, and he must also root out the bad.

How does one do this? Firstly one needs to contemplate that the only good thing is the spirituality of the matter, as the Mesillas Yesharim writes, "As for me, closeness to Hashem is good – for only this is good, and anything else that people consider to be good is nothing but falsehood and vanity." In other words, a person has to firmly believe and say to himself that there is no true good except spirituality: Hashem. One needs to understand it well. One needs to also reflect on the evil of materialism. One can see how many pitfalls are caused by going after materialism, and that in the end a person dies and doesn't take any of it with him – upon thinking all this a person can reflect on the lowliness of materialism in all aspects.

Learning mussar with passion that can cause us to cry

There is another way how to awaken the good in a person, and root out the bad: to learn mussar with feeling. One can hum to himself while he learns mussar to a tune that touches his heart. One should study the section that focuses on the good – the section that deals with closeness to Hashem. He should read this section hundreds and maybe thousands of times with a sweet voice, and awaken himself to tears, until he feels that his inner desire for good has been awakened. The same goes for rooting out the bad. One should review the sections that deal with the pitfalls of bad traits. It is told of Reb Yisrael Salanter zt”l that for an entire night he reviewed the dictum, “One who doesn’t learn is liable to death.”

So learning mussar is made up of two parts: To learn it in depth, in order to understand the concepts; and to awaken in oneself the good and root out the bad. This can only be through contemplating, as well as learning with deep feeling, without a break.

Chapter Three

Internalizing Mussar

The Alter of Kelm’s Method on How To Learn Mussar

In this chapter, we will continue to bring the general rules in how to learn Mussar, and we will try with the help of Hashem to explain these ways.

The Alter of Kelm one time explained how we can learn anything, especially Mussar. His method was that after a person learns a certain concept, he should reflect: “What did I think before I saw this, and what is new to me now that I have learned this?” One should clarify to himself what exactly he didn’t know before he learned what he has learned, and what exactly he has discovered in his learning. Let us try to explain his words.

The secret of success is to live in a “clear world”. A person need to get used to clarifying things he encounters. We do not mean that when one learns Gemara, he should make sure to come up with difficulties and stay that way. This is impossible. Rather, we mean that a person should know exactly what he does understand – and what he doesn’t understand. The Alter of Kelm thus advised that in order to clarify what you learn, you should think about how you thought beforehand, and what has become new to you. This should not be a fleeting thought, but you should think into it deeply. If you try this, you will see how helpful this advice is.

Write Down Your Mussar Thoughts

It is also recommended that each person should write down his conclusions, as this helps greatly to clarify to oneself what he learns. Many times as a person writes down his thoughts, he sees that he’s confused about something. If one learns Mussar in-depth (in the way we described in the last

chapter), he should write it down in an orderly fashion. This might be the intention of the words of Rabbeinu Yonah, who wrote that “one has to write down entire discussions about matters of fear of Hashem.”

Clarifying Matters Through Thinking Into the Opposite

Another aspect which helps you clarify things more is “opposite thinking.”

To illustrate what we mean, when you place a white shirt next to a black shirt, you can see the contrast, and the black shirt brings out the whiteness of the white shirt. Comparing opposite concepts always helps you understand the concept you’re trying to understand. This should shape your mentality: always think about the opposite of what you’re dealing with.

We can give an example of this. When a person is learning the laws of “*Borer*” (forbidden mixtures) on Shabbos, he has to know what’s considered a mixture. A salad is an obvious mixture, and two cups on a table are obviously not considered a mixture. But let’s say we have a bunch of forks and knives piled together – here we have a doubt: is it like a salad, or is it like two cups? In order to know the answer, it’s not enough to wonder if the knives and forks together are considered a mixture or not. You need to know, what’s for sure a mixture, and what’s for sure not a mixture? What is in-between? The in-between is a gray area and up for debate. This is an example of trying to clarify something.

Let’s give another example. A person is thinking what *Chessed* is, and what it really means to do *Chessed*. There is “*Chessed shel Emes*”, which is to give even though you’re not getting anything back in return. The opposite of this is hurting someone else, which is all about being selfish. Is there anything in between these two opposites? If you think about it, yes. There is a gray area, and that is if someone just sits by himself and doesn’t give to anyone. He’s not hurting anyone, yet he’s not acting nice either. Another gray area is someone who acts kind but expects something in return. Can we consider this kindness? It’s something we need to think about. Compare it to *Chessed*, and then compare it to selfishness. See which one it resembles more.

If you think about it, there are four levels of how to treat people: cruelty, pure kindness, and two levels in between which we mentioned. (There are more, and it is up to each person to figure them out on his own!)

By getting used to this and taking apart information, a person sees the two extremes and the gray areas in between. Slowly he will be able to clarify where the gray areas belong under, and he will discover that things which he thought he understood are really very hard to define.

Know Before You Internalize

Although our mission is to internalize our knowledge into our hearts, you can only internalize a matter in your heart if you “know” it first. Although our goal is to internalize our mind’s knowledge, first we must make sure that we “know” matters on at least an intellectual level.

Take things that appear simple to you and probe into them. You will discover suddenly that what you thought was simple is actually very deep.

Without doing this, a person hasn’t even begun *Mussar*. We need to know what even simple matters are and clarify them. If someone can’t do this, then he needs a different method to help him, and the discussions here are not for him.

Chapter Four

Making Resolutions, Part One

Working On Mussar

Until now we have clarified why we need to learn Mussar and what the way to learn it is. Now we will explain how to work on these matters - the actual Avodah of Mussar.

The Chovos HaLevovos mentions a concept called "*pizur hanefesh*" - "scattering of the soul." We need calmness, both in physical matters and in spiritual matters. When there is a lot of "quantity", often this takes away our "quality." For example, it is better to have all of one's income come from one steady job, as opposed to many jobs. The same goes for spiritual matters - it's better to work on one thing alone and concentrate on it rather than to work on many things at once, which will result in a half-baked job.

A Mistake About "Making Resolutions"

This applies to very much to spiritual matters. We will explain why.

Many people who want to grow in their service to Hashem, especially when it comes Rosh HaShanah, make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (self accounting) with themselves and make *kaballos* (resolutions) for the coming year. The first thing one has to know about this is not to take on things that are too hard to implement. Just take on small changes that are feasible for you to work on.

But there is more you should know about this. There is a way how to take on a resolution. Let us clarify what we mean. Let's say a person makes a *cheshbon hanefesh* with himself and realizes that he has a bad middah of anger, or evil desires, or laziness, or gossip, or a lack of concentration when he makes a beracha. He then takes on to improve in all these areas. This is a big problem, because he just works on a bunch of things at once, and there is no connection between them. He is working on his anger and also on his evil desires, but there is no connection to both of these two resolutions. He is just working on five separate things at once. This is total *pizur hanefesh* -- he has scattered himself around.

The Proper Way To Accept Resolutions

What, then, is the way that one should take on resolutions to change? The advisable method is to take on one thing and stick to it. This one point will eventually lead you to everything else you need to improve.

What is that one point that a person needs to focus on? There are generally two ways to get there. One way is to realize that all evil in us comes from our body, and our mission is thus to reveal our soul outward. The second way is to act Lishmah (for Hashem's sake).

The First Way - Fighting The Body

Let us explain this more in detail.

In Section One (Ladder of Growth, Chapters 5 and 7) we explained that there are two forms of Avodas Hashem, and now we will review them and learn them more in-depth. In Chapter 5 we explained that a person is made up of two parts, a body and a soul. All evil comes from our body's hold on us, and all good comes from our soul. Our purpose is to find our soul, our true self, and realize that our body is just a mask over our true essence.

The body masks our essence in two ways. There are the bad middos, such as haughtiness, anger, sinful speech, evil desires, and laziness. Let's say a person is trying to work on his *gaavah* (haughtiness). He should not be thinking, "I want to become humble, and get rid of my haughtiness." You don't "get" humility - it is already in you, because you have a soul, which has all the good in it you need. The only issue is that our soul is hidden from us, and that is why we don't feel humility.

So our job is not to "get" the middah of humility, but to reveal our soul. Avodas Hashem is not about working on this detail and that detail, because that would be impossible, since there are endless details. The sensible way is to uproot the root of our problems, which are the body's interests. We need to nullify the body - not the desires that come from the body - with the intention of revealing our soul.

By focusing on one point alone in your Avodas Hashem, you leave the attitude of "separateness" and instead involve yourself with "unity." All the various details in your Avodas Hashem will then be unified by one point - the fact that you are trying to nullify your body's hold on you. That should be the focus; don't get caught up in the many details.

If someone reads these lines and thinks this is too hard, it means he hasn't understood them.

The Second Way -- Lishmah

Another way to unify all the points we work on is through *Lishmah*. People have all kinds of desires - honor, money, physical desires, peace of mind, etc. These are all a bunch of separate desires in a person that have no connection with each other. Compare this to a father who asks his son for a cup of water. Here, the desire of the son is only one desire alone - to give satisfaction to his father. This is an example of one single desire that unifies many desires into one.

If a person is serving Hashem but he's doing it all for himself, he has all sorts of agendas that aren't unified with each other. He learns Torah - either because he wants to know *Shas*, or because he wants others to think he's a *lamdan* (intellectually gifted). He does the mitzvos, but only because he's afraid that he'll go to Gehinnom otherwise. He wants to go to Gan Eden also. But when someone serves Hashem *lishmah*, he does everything with one intention alone - to give satisfaction to Hashem. Of course, there are still many details - there are 613 mitzvos with many branches to them. But his intention is all one - to give pleasure to Hashem. If someone acts like this, then all day he is focused on one thought alone.

Chapter Five

Making Resolutions, Part Two

How To Use A Notebook for Resolutions

Many teachers of Avodas Hashem would keep a notebook in which they would write down their resolutions, and they wrote down their successes and failures. However, people who try to practice this often make a mistake: they get too uptight from this. For example, a person accepts upon himself that he will concentrate more by davening. After each davening, he writes down if he had concentration or not. But the problem that results from this is that even while he is davening, he's already thinking about what he will write down afterwards: Am I davening good or not...?

The point of the notebook is not to live with it 24\7. You should write down your experiences in it and the changes you feel in your life, and the point of this all is to change your perspective on life. But you should not keep being involved with it throughout the day. That is not the way to use a notebook.

Four Times of Teshuvah

In the *sefarim hakedoshim*, it is explained that there are four times to do Teshuvah: Every night before one goes to sleep, every Erev Shabbos, every Erev Rosh Chodesh, and Erev Rosh HaShanah. A person should try to utilize these times to make a *cheshbon hanefesh*.

But know that there is a difference between every day and Erev Shabbos than the *cheshbon hanefesh* that one makes on Erev Rosh Chodesh and Erev Rosh HaShanah. Let us explain. As we said, the point of taking on resolutions is to change your perspective on life, and to be practical. The practical changes in your life are utilized by the *cheshbon hanefesh* which you can make at night before you go to sleep and on Erev Shabbos. A *cheshbon hanefesh* should be done calmly, and not out of pressure. Pressure causes a lot of damage to one's Avodas Hashem.

Changing your perspective on life, however – how you feel and think – should not be practiced so regularly. Don't make an introspection each day on how you think and feel and if you've changed or not. If you do feel that your perspective has changed, you can write it down, but don't sit down specifically to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* on what your *hashkafos* are.

On every Erev Rosh Chodesh and Erev Rosh HaShanah, take out the notebook and see what has

changed in your life. Ask yourself what you thought beforehand, and what has changed in your perspective. If nothing new has come to you during a whole month, something is wrong here, and you need more guidance in Avodas Hashem.

Exceptions to the Rule

Know that all the rules here have some exceptions to them. For example, sometimes a person feels a tremendous change in his life that need to be written down, although the month isn't up yet. These are extreme situations. Generally speaking, though, one has to be more organized, and only write down his changes once a month.

Please be sensible with the guidance here and realize that although we have given the rules, there can always be exceptions. Part of the wisdom of Mussar is knowing when to follow the rules and when to make exceptions.

Don't Take On Long-Term Resolutions

Another important point we need to add on is that you shouldn't take on things that are for a long time to practice. It is advised to only take on a small change for a few days or a week. After a few days, see if you have kept to your resolution. Taking on a change for a long time usually doesn't work out, for two reasons. First of all, when you know that you have to do something for a long time, it's very hard to put into practice. Secondly, what's good for you now doesn't necessarily apply to you next month. Use your judgment to see if it's the right time to work on whatever it is that you want to work on.

Happy To Change

Also, all Mussar has to be done happily. Realize that it is a *zechus* to work on this and get to know yourself and fix yourself. Therefore, don't take on anything that causes you sadness, pressure or anxiety. Feel happy that you have taken on a change. If you are scared of taking on a certain resolution to change, it's a sign that you shouldn't do it. It's above your level right now to work on.

We don't mean that you should take on resolutions which make things easy and comfortable in life. We are supposed to work hard at this, but it should be a kind of working hard that gives us satisfaction and happiness inside, not internal pressure and anxiety. Many people do not understand this point, and thus they don't keep their resolutions.

Chapter Six

Simplicity In Mussar, Part One

Mussar Needs Simplicity

Another fundamental point about Mussar is that it needs *pashtus* (simplicity). We will explain this.

A person has in him a mind and a heart. As a person gets older, his mind usually matures; this is definitely the case as a boy goes through yeshiva and thinks more into the Gemara. His thinking gets sharpened. But the heart often remains immature. The Alter of Kelm said that a person can have the brain of a grown and mature man, but his heart is the heart of a child. There is a big chasm between the mind and the heart.

A Big Problem In Avodas Hashem

This created a big problem. When a person wants to internalize an important matter, he attempts to use his intellect, and he doesn't know how to use his heart. What results from this is that he attempts to internalize things which his heart isn't on the level to absorb. We can compare this to a father who talks to his three year old son and has with him an adult conversation. The child won't understand a thing. Since the mind is generally more mature in a person than the heart, a person's heart isn't yet ready to absorb the knowledge one has in his mind, because his heart is still immature and hasn't grown yet.

This has led to many a downfall. People's hearts are closed up, and they aren't aware of this. They try to internalize in their heart deep facts that the mind knows about. This cannot be done. What a person should do is instead only work to internalize simple facts that the heart can comprehend. A person can teach his heart about simple matters, not deep matters. The immature heart of a person is like a child, which can only be taught about simple matters. We must understand that.

Examples of Simple Facts

We can give many examples of "simple" facts.

A person is sitting and learning Gemara. He can think: Who wrote this Gemara? The answer is, the Taanoim and Amoraim. Then he can think: Where did they get this knowledge from? The answer is that they exerted themselves in the Torah and davened to Hashem that they be able to understand the Torah and explain it, and Hashem blessed them with the great wisdom to do so. Then he can ask himself: How could it be that human beings could know such a profound kind of wisdom as the Torah? The answer is, it is Hashem's endless wisdom, and if someone really attaches himself to Hashem and works hard to understand the Torah, Hashem bestows upon him this wisdom.

Then he can ask himself: Who printed this Gemara? The answer is, Hashem gave people the ability to print sefarim. He can keep thinking into all the simple facts of life, and keep seeing how Hashem is behind all of it.

Simple Reflection Can Bring A Person to Endless Knowledge

The next step is to think: What is this Gemara standing on? It is on a table. Who created this table? Hashem. He created trees at the beginning of Creation, and from there comes wood to make tables with. A person can then ask himself: So many trees?! He can answer to himself, Yes – billions of trees, because Hashem is endless.

When a person begins to contemplate about things that are endless, he opens himself up to the concept of the Endless. By getting used to thinking into the Source of all details in life, a person can get even his immature heart to receive new levels of growth.

Chapter Eight

Simplicity In Mussar, Part Two

Relating to Hashem as our “Father”

Another name of Hashem is “Father”. A person who relates to Hashem as his Father lives a whole different kind of life, a life full of love. Without this attitude in life, a person doesn’t taste life on this world. We will explain this more.

In the last chapter, we explained how to relate to Hashem as our “King.” This is a relationship of awe toward Hashem. Now we are learning how to have a different kind of relationship with Hashem – a relationship based on love.

The Jewish people are called “children” of Hashem. Every single Jew is Hashem’s child, and Hashem loves each and every Jew like a son, and even more than the love that a human father has for his own son. What we need to do is open ourselves up more and feel His love for us. In order to do this, we need to think about all the details of our life and see how much Hashem loves us, and how much He worries for us, just like a father worries for his child. We should see how in everything we have, Hashem gave it to us out of love.

Examples of Feeling How Hashem Is Our Father

We can give many examples of how to acquire this perspective on life.

A person is sitting at the table and ready to start his meal. He has in front of him a table, a chair, a plate, utensils, cheese, vegetables, bread, salt, etc. He can think: “Who gave me all this? Where did so much come from? It came from my Father. Why did my Father give me so much? Because He loves me!”

Now think more: “For how long has Hashem loved me? I am a soul, which is a piece of Hashem. If so,

Hashem was good to me way before today. He has given me everything: food, clothing, health, etc. He created me to bestow good upon me. It is not only today that Hashem has been good to me, but ever since the day I was born, He has been good to me. After all, the reason He created the world was to bestow His goodness upon His creations.”

Learning Torah

Another example of how you can work on this is that as you are sitting and learning, before you begin to learn, think: “Who told me to learn Torah? Hashem. Why does He want me to learn? Because He loves me, and He wants me to be close to Him. Thus, he gave me His Torah, so that through His Torah I will become close to Him. A father wants his son to be close to him....”

Davening

Another example is davening. A person should think right before he davens: “What am I going to do now? I am about to talk to Hashem. Why should I talk to him? Because I am missing this and that in my life, and therefore I need Him to give me my needs. Why doesn't He just give them to me without me having to ask for it? Because He is my father, and He wants me to speak with Him, and He wants to hear my voice.

Davening to Hashem is all about the closeness of a son to his Father. It is a longing of the Father to hear His son's voice. If you approach davening like this, it will change your davening entirely.

The Question of Many

There are people who will read these chapters and think this is so strange: How many times can a person repeat to himself all these simple facts?!

But this is a grave mistake. These are not intellectual matters – they are matters of the heart. First they need to be thought about simply, and they need to be sensed. It's not enough to think about these things on an intellectual level. The father-son connection that one can have with Hashem is not an intellectual matter – it is a heart matter, and it needs to be thought about in terms of a very real relationship between a father and a son. Of course, this is not an easy realization, but this is the way: to think about it simply with your mind, and then to try to sense it more with your heart. Think about all the many different ways how our relationship with Hashem can resemble a father-son relationship.

If you do this for many months, you will receive help from Hashem in this, and your heart will be opened up to sense how He is your Father.

Chapter Nine

Lishmah

Lishmah and Simplicity

In the first section (Ladder of Growth, chapter 7) we began to explain the concept of “*Lishmah*.” Now we will explain how we reach simplicity, through *Lishmah*.

The Mesillas Yesharim (chap.19) writes that to serve Hashem for His sake alone, *lishmah*, means that one is serving Hashem in order to give Him honor. We will try to explain how one can do this practically.

The Rambam writes that every person can become like Moshe Rabbeinu. The Chofetz Chaim (brought in *sefer Kovetz He'aros*) explained that this does not mean that one can become entirely like Moshe Rabbeinu, but rather that one can become just as devout to Hashem in his life just as Moshe Rabbeinu was, on his level.

Reb Elchonon Wasserman zt"l testified that his rebbi, the Chofetz Chaim, did everything for the sake of Hashem and never acted for himself.

Davening Lishmah

What does it mean to act *lishmah*? We can give a few examples.

A person is davening Shemoneh Esrei, and he comes to *Selach Lanu*. He should think: Why am I asking for forgiveness from Hashem? There are many possible reasons.

1)The person is afraid that he will go to Gehinnom. 2)He is afraid that he will get punished even on this world. 3)He doesn't want to sin because he wants to be on a high level. 4)He wants to enjoy spiritual pleasure, and sin will hold this back.

Any of these intentions have nothing to do with *lishmah*, because they are about one's self. The real reason why a person should be afraid of sin is because this disgraces the honor of Hashem.

Another example is *Attah Chonen*. A person asks Hashem for wisdom and understanding. Why does he want to know the Torah? The real reason should be because He wants to increase the honor of Hashem on the world.

Eating lishmah

Another example: a person is sitting down to eat. He can think: Why am I eating? If he is eating simply because he is hungry, this cannot be *lishmah*. He can think: Who made me hungry? Hunger doesn't happen by itself. Hashem made a person hungry – He made our physical bodies become hungry when we need to eat. Why did Hashem make it that we have to eat? It is because He wants us to utilize this to increase the honor of Hashem.

How do you increase the honor of Hashem through eating? Firstly, when you make a *beracha* on the food and you thank Hashem for it, there is no greater honor to Hashem. Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l once said, "People think that you make a *beracha* in order to eat, but really, we eat so that we can make a *beracha*." The nature of people is that when they feel pleasure, they are able to thank Hashem more easily, and this sanctifies the food. (There are deeper intentions as well in eating, but this is just a basic intention one can have).

Living to Increase the Honor of Hashem

A person has to understand that he should live his whole life for Hashem. Whatever act he does, he should do it with the intention of increasing the honor of Hashem. Even though we do not understand how our actions increase the honor of Hashem, Hashem commanded us to act this way, and the fact that we are doing His will is an increase of His honor.

Chapter Ten

Subtle Feeling In Mussar

The Ability of “Subtle Feeling”

Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt” once asked his rebbi, the Alter of Kelm: What is necessary in order to learn Mussar? The Alter answered him that there are three things, and one of them is “a subtle feeling.”

Two Reasons Why We Need “Subtle Feeling”

There are two reasons why we need an ability of “subtle feeling” for Mussar.

The first reason is because we have to internalize our knowledge into our heart. First we need to know something in our mind, and then we need to internalize it into the heart.

First we need to think about something on an intellectual level, and after that, we need to see and feel where our heart is found. We need to reflect on the contradiction between our intellect and heart, and feel how much our heart contradicts the intellect. A person has to know clearly what his level is – where his mind is, and where his heart is, and which point he is trying to internalize.

Many people are mistaken and think that what they know in their minds is considered “internalization.” This mistake comes from a lack of having a “subtle feeling.” The person doesn’t pay attention to the fact that his heart – his subtle feelings – have never absorbed the information in his head. When a person never clarifies to himself what his feelings of the heart are and he doesn’t see how his heart contradicts his mind, all his Avodas Hashem is in error.

Since most people do not have subtle feeling, they will not understand what we saying here. “A dead person has no feelings”. This is a big problem that affects many people – people do not recognize the level of their heart, and they mistakenly think that their heart has internalized what they know, while the truth is that they haven’t.

If You Don’t Have the Subtle Feeling

If someone is reading this and he does not identify with what the words here, it can be because of two possible reasons. It could be that he does have subtle feeling, just he is not aware of it. If that is the case, he should open it up more by paying attention more to subtle things such as honor, anger, happiness, etc. These are subtle feelings, and he should pay attention to them when he feels them. The other possibility is that he doesn’t have subtle feelings, and he should thus daven and cry to Hashem that his heart be opened to begin to feel subtle feelings.

Consciousness and Sub-Consciousness

Another reason why subtle feeling is needed for Mussar is because we need to realize our sub-conscious - in Hebrew **נת הַכֶּרֶה**

A person is made up of consciousness (*hakarah*) and sub-consciousness (*tat hakarah*). Consciousness is when a person is aware to his thoughts. The sub-conscious is what you’re not aware of. When a

person purifies his consciousness, it is now upon him to work on his sub-consciousness; tzaddikim work on this point until their last day on earth.

How A Person Can Recognize His Sub-Conscious

The question is, how do you recognize your sub-conscious, if it's something you're not aware of? There are two answers to this.

One answer is that sometimes, a thought falls into your head, and you have no idea where the thought came from. These are thoughts that come from our sub-conscious – and in these thoughts, our hidden, inner world is contained. For example, sometimes a person gets a temptation to steal someone else's money or object, and then he quickly pushes away such a thought, thinking, "I would never do such a thing." But although he didn't steal, the thought to steal came from his sub-conscious, because deep down, he has some desire to steal. We only gave one example of this concept, but if you think about it, you can uncover many hidden desires from your sub-conscious.

Using Subtle Feeling To Recognize the Sub-Conscious

Another way to recognize the sub-conscious is through the ability of subtle feeling. The truth is that if someone has the ability of subtle feeling, he doesn't need to see the words here, and if he doesn't have the ability, he won't understand what it says here. However, there is still a point in writing this, so that if one realizes that he doesn't have subtle feeling, he can daven and cry to Hashem that his feelings be opened up, and then he will be able to know what's going on in his sub-conscious.

The Common Mistake

We can see many times that people work very hard at their Avodas Hashem, yet they are still far from true Avodas Hashem. This is because they don't know themselves well, and they don't know where their hearts really are. They know everything in their head, but they don't know what the "heart" is. People mistakenly think that the heart is something that you use to clarify matters intellectually, but really, the heart is used for simple feelings, an ability to recognize simple realities.

How can a person know if his heart is open? If he sees that when he davens, his heart pours out to Hashem in prayer and his tears flow freely and simply, and not because he strained himself to cry – this is a sign that his heart has been opened up.

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-3-section-5-mussar>