



Published on [www.bilvavi.net](http://www.bilvavi.net)

[Home](#) > Bilvavi Part 6 - Chapter 06 Lishmah Part One

---

## Bilvavi Part 6 - Chapter 06 Lishmah Part One

### **Lishmah - The G-dly Element in the Soul**

Chazal (Pesachim 50b) state that “one should always learn Torah *shelo lishmah*, because *shelo lishmah* leads to *lishmah*.” Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained that there is always some *shelo lishmah* involved in a person. We will try to understand why this is so, and this will help us, *b'ezras Hashem*, understand the inner meaning of “*lishmah*” and “*shelo lishmah*.”

*Shelo lishmah*, upon a superficial perspective, seems to differ depending on the situation. There are many different kinds of ulterior motives that a person can have. However, the inner point of it always remains the same, and it contains everything we need to know about *shelo lishmah*. The same goes for understanding what *lishmah* is. There are many *sefarim* that give definitions of *lishmah*, but there is one inner point that always remains true about *lishmah*, and it contains the whole essence of *lishmah*.

What is that inner point? The inner point is that our “I” in us represents our *shelo lishmah*, while the ability in us to go above our “I” – to reveal our power of *elokus* (Godliness) – represents our *lishmah*. In our “I”, there is no *lishmah*. The more and more we reveal Hashem within ourselves, though, the more we reveal *lishmah*.

In other words, the inner desire of a person who really seeks Hashem to leave *shelo lishmah* and enter into *lishmah* is essentially a desire to leave one’s ego, and to instead integrate with Hashem. *Shelo lishmah* thus is when we are separated from Hashem, while *lishmah* is all about connection with Hashem.

When a person only thinks superficially, it appears to him that he really wants to learn Torah and do mitzvos *lishmah*, and that it is just the *yetzer hora*, bad *middos* and other deterrents that hold him back. But upon reflection, one can discover that his very “I” is all about *shelo lishmah*, and that is what is holding him back from *lishmah*. It’s not that a person has both good and bad desires. It is that his whole essence is to only be involved with his “I”, and thus he is at the level of *shelo lishmah*.

Where do we find in ourselves a desire for *lishmah*?

This is the power of *Elokus* (Godliness) that is deep within us. There is a spark of Godliness in everything, and in a person, it is mainly manifest in our heart. The *lishmah* in us is not found in our “I”, but in our Godliness – the fact that we are a *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a “piece of Hashem.”

There can be two underlying motivations when a person desires to leave *shelo lishmah* and instead be

*lishmah*.

If it is for a truly spiritual reason, then it is coming from his spark of G-dliness that is found in every Jewish soul, the part which is pure, nullified from any sense of self, and thus totally *lishmah*.

But it can also be coming from an unrefined motive – a motivation that comes from *gaavah* (haughtiness), to feel exalted that one is on the high level of *lishmah*. If a person is just desiring *lishmah* because he wants to be on a high level, it's really *shelo lishmah*. His haughtiness is what is spurring on him to be “perfect”. Such a motivation will prevent a person from reaching *lishmah*, because the person is desiring a high level for his own personal esteem, to feel that he has reached a high level – and it's just a desire to feel as if he's G-d.

We do not know where motivations are coming from in our soul. If we feel a desire to be *lishmah*, is it coming from the pure spark of G-dliness in us, or is it coming from haughtiness? It's possible that a person claims for many years that he wants to be *lishmah*, but he really just wants himself. It's all about himself, and this is *shelo lishmah*. The true desire for *lishmah* is when a person makes room in his heart for Hashem to be revealed there.

### **Lishmah Is Above Logic**

These words are about how we use the power of our soul, and to what we are aspiring to. Logically speaking, it doesn't make any sense why a person would want to be *lishmah*. We will explain why.

There are situations in which it seems as if the person is acting *lishmah*, but really he's acting *shelo lishmah*. To give an example, a person gives up worldly desires so he can get Olam HaBa. He can really be just exchanging a “cow” for a “donkey”, because he's giving up one high level for another high level. It might be more *lishmah* than what he is ordinarily, but he's still not doing anything for Hashem. Why, indeed, would a person ever want to be *lishmah*?

The real answer to this is that it cannot be explained; it is above logic. The essence of a person, his very “I”, is one's *daas* – the knowledge which we can comprehend. But the point that is above our “I” is above our *daas*, and thus we cannot comprehend matters that have to do with going beyond our “I”, which is the matter of *lishmah*.

The “I” of a person is not just mixed with ulterior motivations (*shelo lishmah*); our very “I” is in essence *shelo lishmah*. This is not a weakness in a human being; it is the entire idea of a human being – we do things only for ourselves. We are all about *shelo lishmah*.

A person, by definition, is all about *shelo lishmah*. The desire that a person can have to give up his ego is not a logical matter. Why on earth would a person want to give up his ego? What do we get out of this? What's in it for us...?

This is the first thing we should understand. The fact that we are human beings makes us be *shelo lishmah*, by very definition. The power to act *lishmah* is not a human ability – it comes from a point of G-dliness deep within our soul.

### **What Can Spur Us On To Act Lishmah**

We have just said that it not humanly possible to act *lishmah*. If so, what can spur us on to leave our *shelo lishmah* state and enter *lishmah*?

If someone merits to reveal the G-dliness within himself, then he doesn't have this question. All he has to do is expand that G-dliness more and more, but he doesn't have this issue.

How can a person awaken himself to leave *shelo lishmah* and instead enter *lishmah*? This is when we make use of “*yirah*”. There are levels in *yirah*, but the depth of *yirah* is to bring a person to nullify himself. This is a level of *yirah* which is even above *ahavah*, love of Hashem, as the *sefarim hakedoshim* explain.

Really, it is impossible to escape *shelo lishmah*, because Hashem has willed it this way, that human beings are *shelo lishmah*. The only thing that can make us leave *shelo lishmah* is the *yirah*, the fear, of remaining at *shelo lishmah*. First of all, one should be afraid to remain at this level, and secondly, a person is permitted to act *shelo lishmah* if he eventually wants to arrive at *lishmah*, but without this intention, it is forbidden to remain at *shelo lishmah*. Thus, one should be afraid lest he remain forever at *shelo lishmah*, and this fear will be able to help him nullify his ego. Without this fear, one has no hope in breaking his ego.

### **Reaching Lishmah**

That is only one side of the coin – *yirah*, to be afraid that one will remain at the level of *shelo lishmah*. Along with this one needs also *ahavah*, and that is to actually have a desire for *lishmah*. This is the power of G-dliness in a person, and it is the ability in a person to go above his “I”.

However, a person is apt to become mixed up and attempts to reach *lishmah*, by doing actions to reach *lishmah*; but although he is doing deeds of *lishmah*, he has never reached his “I” yet. When a person hasn’t yet reached his “I”, his desire for *lishmah* is simply a desire to reach high levels. It is coming from a self-love. Even if he acts with *mesirus nefesh* (altruism for G-d) and he tries to awaken *lishmah* in himself, he is just doing it all to reach levels, and when he finally reaches *lishmah*, he will discover that he isn’t being himself. When a person hasn’t yet reached his own “I” yet and he attempts to reach *lishmah*, he will not reach it, and he will become very broken in the process.

Even if he reaches *lishmah* and he feels that “This is what I am”, he is really confused. He might have some spark of *lishmah* here, but because he hasn’t yet clarified who he is yet, he has confused “*lishmah*” with his “I”, and this is wrong, because “*lishmah*” is really beyond the “I” of a person.

To summarize, *Lishmah* is the point in which one removes his “I”, and *shelo lishmah* is when one’s “I” is revealed.

### **Lishmah is D’veykus**

Chazal revealed to us that the purpose of learning Torah – and our entire mission in general – is to reach *lishmah*. “One should always learn Torah *shelo lishmah*, because *shelo lishmah* leads to *lishmah*.” On one hand, it appears that *lishmah* is our goal on this world.

Yet, we also find that the goal of Creation is *d’veykus* to Hashem, for it is written, “*As for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*”

This is a seeming contradiction. What is our purpose on this world – *lishmah*, or *d’veykus*?

However, upon analysis, they are really one and the same concept. A person has to reveal Hashem in his life – in other words, he has to nullify his ego.

When a person nullifies himself, that itself is the concept of *lishmah*. This is also essentially the same thing as *d’veykus* with Hashem – being close to Hashem is to reveal Hashem in one’s heart.

*Shelo lishmah*, though, directly contradicts *d’veykus*. A person either has *d’veykus* or *shelo lishmah*. In order to reach *d’veykus*, one needs *lishmah*, like the words of Reb Meir. This is not just a “*segulah*”

to reach high levels. It is the very concept of *lishmah* – to remove one’s “I”, which brings one to have *d’veykus* with Hashem.

It is written, “*I stand in between Hashem and you.*” This alludes to how the “I” of a person holds back connection with Hashem. When a person is at *shelo lishmah*, he is still in his “I”, and he will not be able to have *d’vekyus* with Hashem.

This is the inner structure of all of our Avodas Hashem. The Ramchal writes in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim* that “man was not created except to bask in the pleasure of Hashem”, and later in the chapter about Chassidus, the Ramchal writes that if spiritual bliss is one’s sole desire in serving Hashem, then he is still not reaching perfection, because it is still *shelo lishmah*. Perfection, writes the Ramchal, is to act selflessly for Hashem, and not for a person to think what he will get out of it. He shouldn’t be in it for the pleasure.

On one hand, we have a part in us that only wants to serve Hashem for personal gain. This is our element of *shelo lishmah*, and this is a desire to experience spiritual bliss. On the other hand, there is an element of *lishmah* in us that only wants to reveal Hashem.

It is not possible for a person to totally nullify his ego. There is no such thing. The only thing we can do is raise the amount of our non-ego over the amount of our ego. But our “I” will not be totally nullified until the end of the year 10,000.

So there are altogether three levels:

- 1. Total *shelo lishmah*.** This is when a person doesn’t have any motivation whatsoever for G-dliness or even for spiritual pleasure.
- 2. *Lishmah*, mixed with *shelo lishmah*.** The *lishmah* in a person wants G-dliness, but the *shelo lishmah* in a person is it for the pleasure.
- 3. Total *lishmah*.** This is when a person removes his ego, and this level will only be revealed in the future.

### ***Which Comes First?***

A person’s mission, then, is to first clarify to himself what *lishmah* is, and what *shelo lishmah* is.

*Lishmah* is the point of G-dliness in the soul, while *shelo lishmah* is a person’s “I.” The most refined kind of *shelo lishmah* there is the desire to have spiritual delight, (as described in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim*.) A person should keep clarifying his motivations more and more and see how much *shelo lishmah* he still has left in him, until he finally begins to reveal some *lishmah*.

After this becomes clarified to the person, he now has in front of him two options.

There are two forces in us – our point of G-dliness, our ability of non-ego, and our “I”, which is our ego. From where in our soul do we start to serve Hashem – by trying to reveal Him more within us (which implies that we need to build our “I”, by seeking to reveal Hashem more in our life) or by nullifying our “I” (which is to first attempt to break our ego)?

On one hand, it is written, “*Remove yourself from evil and do good,*” so it seems that first we must remove ourselves from evil by nullifying our ego, and only then should we “do good” by using our “I.”

On the other hand, there is an opposite approach to take: the Baal Shem Tov explains this possuk to mean that *through* doing good, *that* is how we come to remove our evil.

So, where do we start? Should we first remove our ego – and that will help us reveal Hashem within us – or should we first attempt to reveal Hashem within us, and only after we should attempt to purify ourselves from our ego and nullify it?

Our *sefarim hakedoshim* have different approaches to this. Some of the ways brought in them is to break our *middos*, enduring physical suffering, and fasting. The common denominator between all paths, though, is to somewhat nullify the ego, to get used to giving up a little of the self. If a person bears in mind this point, this will help him clear space in himself for Hashem to enter and be revealed, and from this he will come to have spiritual delight in Hashem. That is one approach: breaking the ego.

The second approach is the opposite: don't start by breaking your *middos* or by fasting. Instead, draw upon yourself spiritual light by thinking about the Creator, such as thoughts of love toward Him. This is the approach brought in many works of *Chassidus*.

Either way has its dangers. The first approach has a danger in that a person is focused on breaking his "I", and if he breaks his "I" without having a source from where to draw his vitality from (since he hasn't yet merited to reveal Hashem in himself), he will have no vitality.

The second approach also has a risk, because if he is focused on revealing Hashem more and more inside himself, then even if he does arrive at that point, he still has bad *middos*, because he hasn't worked on himself yet. What will happen is that his bad *middos* will only get fueled on more from all his spiritual revelations.

(This is reminiscent of a story told about a certain person who was known as a "big *tzaddik*", who one time cursed someone who wronged him, and the curse took effect. When someone told this to Reb Yisrael Salanter, he said, "This person damages people with his mouth.")

When we hear this story, there are two different reactions one can have. A person might hear this and say, "Wow. What a high level this person was on, that he was able to curse people, and Hashem carried out all his curses... he must have been so close to Hashem." But Reb Yisrael Salanter did not look at it this way. He felt that this story showed that the person lacked good *middos*, because he was using his high spiritual level as a weapon to hurt people with.

What is the depth of Reb Yisrael Salanter's view of this person?

In the spiritual realm, there are *oros* (Heavenly lights) as well as *keilim* (containers that receive the light). If a person is worthy, he merits to draw forth Heavenly lights upon the world, *oros*; but if he hasn't yet purified his *middos*, he might even be capable of performing miracles, yet his *keilim* are still dirty, because they haven't been purified of bad *middos*. The person will receive the *oros* with *keilim* that are dirty, and who knows what will become of him...?

Thus, it is clear that we **both** need to reveal Hashem within us, as well as break our "I." We can start with one way and then work on the other way, but the point is that we need to do both. One of these alone will not get us to our goal.

We all have these two forces within us: the power to be *lishmah*, which is to be G-dly and have no ego, and the power of *shelo lishmah*, which is to have a sense of self. It is a person's mission to try to leave his *shelo lishmah* as much as he can and reach *lishmah*.

Even if a person has purified his *shelo lishmah* and he has more earnest motives - such as the desire to have spiritual bliss in Hashem - he still has to purify his motives even more, until he's totally not focused on his personal gains at all from Avodas Hashem.

A person has to always check if he has any G-dliness revealed in him, that he is not in the category of the statement, "I and him cannot dwell under one roof." Even if a person sees that has revealed some more *lishmah* in himself, he still has to see if his *shelo lishmah* aspects have become more purified as well with this.

### ***Daven For Help About This***

The truth is that everyone has to *daven* special about this to Hashem, and to beg Him that he be shown the way how to begin.

However, *sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah* - "the end of the actions is first with thought", and thus we have to be aware of our goal - where it is exactly that we are striving towards.

The purpose of our existence is to become close to Hashem; "And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good." That unbelievable closeness has to ultimately be felt by our "I", and so we have to purify our "I" more and more<sup>[1]</sup> until we merit to truly connect and integrate with Hashem.

---

[1] By always seeking to reveal Him more and more in our life.