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Getting to Know Your Thoughts - 008 Connecting To Your Decisions

(Summary: We have begun to discuss the two modes of thinking – mochin d'gadlus and mochin d'katnus.

In mochin d'gadlus, the higher mode of thought, a person is able to use three different abilities: Chochmah, Binah and Da'as. The higher kind of Chochmah is when one sees the wisdom in something. The higher kind of Binah is when one understands what he sees. The higher kind of Da'as is when one connects himself to this information.

In mochin d'katnus, the lower mode of thought, the abilities of Chochmah, Binah and Da'as are lower. The lower Chochmah is the knowledge that one receives from his teachers, the lower Binah is to understand something based on another thing (which even children can do), and the lower kind of Da'as is to weigh out the information.)

The Two Kinds of Da'as

The lower kind of Da'as is to weigh out the information and decide what to do. This is essentially to use one's imagination by comparing information, and then deciding what to do. This is when a person makes a mental decision in his mind what the information means; he doesn't necessarily connect to it. But when a person uses the higher Da'as, he connects to the information.

The higher kind of Da'as really comes from the state that existed before Adam sinned. Before the sin, Da'as was used to connect, like we find by Adam and Chavah, "And Adam knew (yeda, from the word Da'as) Chavah." Rashi explains that over here, to "know" means that he procreated with her; in other words, Da'as, to know, is to connect.

In order for a person to know how to use his higher Da'as, he first has to make use of his lower Da'as. If a person tries to jump to the higher kind of Da'as before he develops his lower Da'as, he will harm

his mind. This is because he doesn't know how to connect properly, and he won't know how to avoid connecting to what is evil.

Therefore, first we must learn how to use lower *Da'as*, which is to weigh the information. We need to sift out the bad from the good in the information we encounter, and after that we can use our higher *Da'as* to be able to connect to the good in the information.

The lower kind of *Da'as* is to be able to weigh out information and decide what it is. Just like a manager of a company makes accepts certain decisions about the company, so does a person have an ability to decide about matters in his own life. The person doesn't connect to the information; it isn't yet a part of him. He simply decides what it is. Just like he decides for himself, he is also able to decide for others.

When a person reaches the higher kind of *Da'as*, he actually lives by each decision he makes - they are not just decisions he is aware of, but something he connects to. Someone who lives with his higher kind of *Da'as* is connected to what he learns; his learning emanates from his essence, and the knowledge that he has is what he is; it becomes natural to him.

As we said before, there is a great danger to using higher *Da'as*, and that is if a person never yet developed his lower *Da'as*. If a person doesn't know how to sift out the bad from the good in something he encounters, and he connects to his knowledge, then he is apt to connect to something evil. But if a person first develops his lower *Da'as* and then his higher *Da'as*, he is able to connect in the proper way.

The discussion here mainly is mainly about building up how we think when it comes to learning the Torah, and this is the root of the matter. But the goal of all this should be to affect our whole life in general. For now, we will focus on how lower and higher *Da'as* affects our learning.

When a person who only lives with the lower kinds of *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as*, he isn't really connected to what he does. It could be that he knows how to weigh out all the information very well and come to decisions, but his learning isn't a part of him; it's all happenstance. His decisions are only superficial - he is outside of them.

But when a person lives with the higher thoughts - *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*, then his *Da'as* is higher, because he uses his *Da'as* to connect to what he knows. He is able to transform whatever he learns into a part of his essence, like Chazal^[1] say, "At first, the Torah is called by the name of Hashem, but in the end, it is called by the person's name, for it is written, *"The Torah of Hashem is his desire, and in his Torah he thinks about day and night."*

With the higher *Da'as*, a person connects to what he knows, and the Torah he learns goes from being Hashem's Torah to become *his* Torah, so to speak.

Constant Thought Makes Use of our Higher Da'as

Before, we spoke about the ability to have constant thought. Now this concept takes on greater clarity.

If a person is still at the lower mode of thought, what does he think about? He is all the time weighing out information and deciding. It seems like he's always thinking, but if you think about it, he's not really thinking - he's trying to have constant thought, but in actuality he's not.

The ability of constant thought can only be with one whose thinking is part of his essence. If it's not part of who he is, it's just happenstance, and even if he does always think, it's just by chance. It doesn't come from his real self.

When a person learns Torah and he remains at the lower mode of thought, he is not connected yet to his learning. He might know how to make decisions with the options in front of him, but he isn't yet connected to the power of constant thought. Even if he thinks all the time, it's just that he's forcing his brain against its nature in order to think. The brain by nature isn't able to always think, so if anyone is attempting to always be in a constant frame of thinking, he's straining his mind beyond its limits. (The truth is that there is such a concept that one must strain his mind beyond its normal capacity to think, and this is the whole meaning of self-sacrifice for the Torah....but this is probably not the case of one who is straining his mind to think all the time.)

Constant thought can only come from being in the higher mode of thinking, which is connection to one's knowledge. It is not possible with the lower mode of thinking, in which the *Da'as* just decides of the information but doesn't connect to it.

If someone is at the lower mode of thought and he attempts to have constant thought, there are two possibilities that will happen: either he will greatly purify his mind, or he will fail miserably, because it is impossible for him at this point to have constant thought.

Constant thought is only possible when a person lives and feels what he sees. Constant thought comes natural to the higher mode of thought, in which the *Chochmah* really sees the information, the *Binah* reflects into it and the *Da'as* connects the person to the knowledge.

Without the higher *Da'as* of knowing how to connect to one's knowledge, constant thought is impossible, and when one attempts to have constant thought without higher *Da'as*, he kind of takes this ability prisoner. Such constant thought won't be of any help to him. Only when the constant thought is coming from a higher place in the mind can a person use it to always be connected to his learning.

The only way to really connect to one's Torah learning is through the higher mode of thought; this is how the Torah becomes a "*Torah Ohr*" – a "Torah of Light" to a person; one's Torah learning becomes natural to him when he makes use of his higher mode of thinking.

A person must "accept the burden of Torah," but it will only be a burden upon him when he is at the lower mode of thought. Once a person has the higher mode of thought, he connects to his learning, and it is no longer a burden upon him.

The Lower Da'as: Deciding Without Connecting

Until now we have discussed how lower and higher *Da'as* applies to our learning. Now we will try to broaden this concept to all areas of life, but the root of the matter stays the same; it's the same exact idea.

With the lower kind of *Da'as*, the power of decision, a person just decides, but the information is all on the outside of himself; the information isn't a part of him – it's not who he is. It's possible that a person learns Torah all day and is even a *posek* (a recognized authority who renders Halachic decisions to others), yet this isn't who he is; he is just being an intellectual with the Torah. He isn't connected to the Torah; he just knows it is as information, and he can even quote all the opinions – but it's not part of his essence.

But when a person has the higher *Da'as*, everything in his life is a part of who he is. It has become part of his very essence.

We can see this many times. A person at the lower mode of thought decides about things that are way above his level. He can listen, he can analyze, and he can weigh out all the information and decide about something beyond his comprehension. Why does a person act so mistakenly and decide about concepts that are above him? It is really because he's deciding about something he's not connected to anyway. He is deciding according to how he understands. Such a person thinks that he can decide on just about anything, unless he knows with certainty that he doesn't know something. In his mind, he is able to decide about anything he has learned about or touched upon.

But with the higher mode of thought, a person is able to take his decisions and actually connect to them. When he has to decide something, he doesn't just decide about it – he connects to his decision. As a result, he won't decide on something he doesn't understand. He will also realize that even things which he can understand he doesn't always understand fully, and thus he knows that he can't connect yet to his decisions.

If a person arrives at the decision from his connection to it, only then can his decision be coming from a true place in himself. It is a whole different kind of decision.

With the regular deciding that a person does using his lower *Da'as*, the person decides if he should do something or not. With the higher *Da'as*, there is also a decision involved, but the decision is more like a garment that covers over the connection. Here, the person decides if he should connect to the decision or not.

To give a simple example, if a person wants a hot cup of tea, first he tastes a little bit to see if it's too hot or not to drink. This seems like the basic kind of deciding, which is lower *Da'as*. But really, it is higher *Da'as*, because it is a decision if the person will connect to the decision or not. He's not deciding merely if he should do it or not – he's deciding if it's worth it for him to connect or not to what he has decided. It's a whole different kind of decision.

“My Hearts Tells Me So”

We can give many more examples of the concept.

Many times Rashi writes, “My heart tells this to me.” The Rambam writes, “It appears to me so.” With our great teachers like Rashi and the Rambam, they only said something if they felt connected to it. It wasn't a regular kind of decision.

Even more than this, it could be that a person's intellect tells him one thing, while the heart is saying something else entirely. A person's intellect might tell him that something is okay, but the heart feels that something just isn't right over here. This is a higher kind of decision – when one decides if he should connect or not to the knowledge.

When a person just decides using his lower *Da'as*, it's only an issue of well his decision makes sense or not. It's a decision and nothing more. But the higher *Da'as* is when a person decides from a higher place within himself; here, the whole issue is if I will connect myself to what I have decided, or not.

To give another example, it is possible that a person decides what the *Halacha* is, and he clarifies to himself if it is just a stringency or actual *Halacha* – and then he just doesn't act upon what he has learned. Such a person, if you ask him, "Why aren't you doing like you say?" he will be unable to answer why not. He tells other to do like what he decided, but he himself doesn't practice what he preaches. He lacks the ability to connect to his decisions.

In previous generations, it happened that when a great leader was in middle of writing a conclusion about a religious issue, the pen would shake as he were writing it, and then the leader would discontinue what he was writing. Later it was found that the truth was different from what he was about to write. This was because although the great figure had come to a decision, he found that in the end, he couldn't connect himself to what he was about to write down. This was the ability to be able to decide if he should connect or not to the decision.

Deciding To Connect

All of us go through countless decisions each day; are we simply deciding things, or are we connecting to our decisions as well? Usually people are just deciding and weighing out information, but to act upon it is a different story. We will give several examples of how we can see this.

A person wants to buy an apartment; he checks it out from all angles, considers the pros and cons of it, weighs all the information he has on it and then decides to buy it. But this kind of decision is still only the lower *Da'as*. Really, what he should do is to also imagine what it's like to live there, and then he might discover afterwards that it's not so simple to take the apartment.

This doesn't mean you have to always go against your initial decision. Even if the person ends up buying the apartment, the point is that he needs to think about possibilities that will bother him about it, and to know how to deal with those nuisances. The point is that you shouldn't just decide – you should also see what it's like for yourself when you think about connecting to what you have decided.

Some parents force their children to eat what they don't like, and their attitude is, "What's the difference if my child doesn't like this kind of food? This is what he has to eat, and it's healthy."

It is true somewhat that children must eat healthy food, and that no one should just give his children just what they love to eat. But in doing so, the parent is denying the child the power to connect to a decision.

People often feel that it's wrong to go after what you like, because they think this is considered gluttonous.

But really, what we desire is something to consider. Obviously we cannot indulge, but to a certain extent, what we like must play a role in our decisions. It is impossible to give an exact decision to how much we should give outlet we should give to what we desire, but it is a point that has to be brought up and considered. Usually, to give up on what we like takes away our inner peace, and we don't feel good inside when we deny ourselves what we desire, because when we suffocate our desires, we are acting way above our level.

Even more so, many times people disdain their very power to connect to what they decide (and thus they don't trust their own decisions), because they know that their will to connect comes from a place in themselves that hasn't been purified yet.

This is a truthful point, and we can compare this to someone who feels that he must only learn Torah in place "where his heart desires". Chazal^[2] indeed say that a person should learn Torah where he likes, but that doesn't mean that he should learn in the street if he feels like learning there. One's power to connect needs to come from the right place in the soul; it is not simply a desire.

Anyone who is capable of thinking at least a little knows that we can't listen to every inner feeling we have for something. If a person feels very strongly about something, it could be that he is mentally bribed, and the solution for this is to weigh out the information well and then decide. If his soul is more purified from personal interests, he will be able to come to a true decision, and he will be able to ignore his desire to connect to something.

This is all true, and it is commendable to do so. We cannot base our lives on what we want and what we like, or else we will destroy ourselves. But this can also cause us to ignore our power to connect when really we should.

The more materialistic a person is, the more personal desires are going on inside him. If a person is on that level, then he needs to decide more than to learn how to connect. But if he has purified his soul more of personal interests, then his decisions will mainly about if he wants to connect or not to the decision.

Deciding And Then Connecting To Your Decision

It is indeed a difficulty that a person needs to solve: If he does have a will to act upon his decision,

does this come from the right place in his soul?

Obviously, a person should not decide simply because he wants to connect to what he has thought about. That would be a recipe for failure. What then is the solution?

Let us repeat and stress again that if a person hasn't yet cleansed his soul of personal interests, then he cannot even decide properly on a basic level, and he definitely will act incorrectly in trying to connect to his decisions.

A person needs a pure heart in order to connect to what he decides; if he has purified his heart, then his will to connect to what he decides is coming from the right place in himself. Without purifying the heart, a person is in danger if he acts upon his decisions; he will live life based on whatever he feels, and he might come to transgress the whole Torah with the excuse of, "This is how I feel."

When a person comes up with two possible options about something and he is trying to decide what to do, he needs to figure out if his will to act upon whatever he decides comes from a pure place in his soul or not. There are people who murder others because they feel, "The world is a better place without this person." That's how such people feel...

When we go based upon our feelings without weighing out the information - in other words, when we let our feelings run our decisions - then there will be a sure disaster to our minds.

The question is, how do we reveal our power to connect to decisions, while making sure that this is truly coming from what we have decided? There are two possible methods how we can do this.

One way is that after deciding, only then allow your emotions to play a role. This doesn't mean yet that you shouldn't do it if your heart doesn't want to connect to the decision, because in the end of the day, you have decided if you should do it or not. What we will come out with is as follows.

If you decided not to do something, then just because your heart feels that you want to connect to the decision, it is not a reason for you to listen to your heart. You have decided no, and that's final; don't allow your heart to tell you otherwise. But if you decided to do something, you can let your heart connect to what you want to do, and see what you feel about it.

But there is a danger to this method, and that is because there might still exist personal interests in you which will hamper your ability to decide properly. Even if your decision is correct, your heart's

desire to connect to the decision may be coming from the wrong place in your soul which has some personal interests that are impure. Your mind can know very well what the truth is, but the problem is that the way you are connected to it is coming from an unclean place in the soul.

There is a second possible method, and that is when you see two possible options in front of you. For example, you are not sure if you should live here or there, or you are not sure if you should learn in one yeshiva or a different yeshiva. Let's say you weigh each option and you see that they are both equal options to consider. What should you do now? Now, you should allow your heart to connect. See where your heart's feelings are pulling you towards, and based upon what you feel, you can now truly decide.

There is a problem in this method as well, because a person has a *yetzer hora* (evil inclination), and it resides in our heart. The *Chovos HaLevovos*^[B] writes that the *yetzer hora* is enmeshed in our heart and advises us falsely from our own heart.

Here, we have a subtle inner work to do. We need to try and discern if what our heart is telling us comes from a pure place within that is free from personal interests, or not. But even if our motives are coming from this unrefined place in our soul, the results would not be so catastrophic, because it also came from our power to decide, and that gives it credibility. The more we refine our souls and free ourselves from personal interests, the more we can decide based on what our heart is telling us (after the initial basic decision, which was the first step in the process).

For example, someone might keep many stringencies in *Halacha* that are not required, but he's doing it all for the sake of pride and honor. He might even ask questions to a Halachic authority and always do what he is told, but it's all because he is haughty and seeks attention from others. Such a person connects to information, but his will to connect comes from an impure place in the soul. Even the answers he gets from the person he is asking may be coming from just the lower *Da'as* of the person, and not from the higher *Da'as*.

Our mission is to fuse our higher *Da'as* with our lower *Da'as* – we must learn how to become more connected to our decisions. Our connections to the decision must come after we have the initial decision.

Connection Is Not Based On Feelings, But On Da'as

Now we will try to explain in more simple terms what higher *Da'as* is.

There are also two different ways of connecting to others; one is through a “feeling” of love for another person, and one is through *Da'as*. Love itself is an emotion, while *Da'as* is something that

comes from our mind. These are two different kinds of connections to others – either through our feelings, or through our mind.

This *sefer* is not about *middos* and emotions – it is about our mind. When we speak about having a connection through our *Da'as*, we are not speaking about the emotion of love, but about an entirely different kind of connection -- a connection of our mind.

Most people do not know what connection of the mind is. People usually think that in order to have a connection to something, it must be an emotional kind of connection. For example, a person tastes something to see if he likes it or not, and if he likes it, he eats it.

The *Da'as* we are discussing is not an emotion – it is a force of our mind. It can be sensed as well by the emotions, but what we are describing here is the actual *Da'as* itself, not the emotional aspect of it.

We will give an example to explain the concept.

When a person becomes engaged to get married, he feels a certain love in his heart. If he wouldn't feel this love, he wouldn't want to get married. What are his thoughts when he is engaged to be married? He is bound up with love toward his future spouse. Is this a feeling or a thought? It is both. This is the connection of the mind – the higher *Da'as*, which is the power to connect.

What usually happens by most people, when they feel love, is that their *Da'as* is limited to the actual emotions. But if someone lives in the world of thought, his *Da'as* is the source of the connection – not his emotion of love. *Da'as* can create a feeling of love as well that can be felt through the emotions, but here the source of the connection is the *Da'as*.

In the words of the Ramchal^[4], this is called “intellect that has a longing to know.” The Vilna Gaon describes it as “desire of the intellect.” It is a kind of connection that comes from one's mind. “*And my eyes and my heart were there all those days.*”^[5]

Only *Da'as* is a real connection to another person; we will explain why. Let's say a person thinks he loves someone else; if it is a love that creates fantasies in his mind about that person, then the love is a mere emotion. It is not a love which will cause a real connection to the other person. But when a person uses *Da'as* (the higher kind of *Da'as*, which is the ability to connect), he is using his mind to connect.

When a person has a child, he has a feeling of love for his child. Why does he feel a love? It is because his feelings – which is love, in this case – are connected to what he is thinking. When a feeling is connected to the thoughts, the feeling becomes real. He doesn't love his child merely because he has feelings of love to him, but because he is aware of his real thoughts – the thoughts which are coming from his higher *Da'as*.

The emotion of love here is not the reason for the love; the emotion of love is only like a garment over the actual love. The actual love is the connection itself, which is through one's *Da'as*. Only *Da'as* connects two things together. This is a thought that one can sense; it is not just a natural emotion of love that one feels. It is a connection through one's power of thought – a connection through *Da'as*.

Such a connection is only experienced by one who considers his thoughts to be palpable. If one doesn't consider his thoughts to be that real, then all he can feel is his emotions, and he only knows how to connect to others through his emotions. But when the thoughts are real to a person, he can feel his thoughts, and he knows how to connect to others using his thoughts.

When a person is still at the level in which his *Da'as* is limited to his emotions, if you ask him if he likes a certain food and he answers yes, he might be answering from his *Da'as*, but it is a *Da'as* limited by the emotions. He isn't answering from his *Da'as*, but from a *Da'as* that has passed through the emotions; it is just that his *Da'as* is aware of what he has felt.

The Heart's Desire

Chazal say that a person should only learn “what his heart desires.”

If you ask a person, “What do you want to learn?” and he answers “I want to learn the entire *Tehillim* all day”, why does he desire so? Such a person feels that way because he lacks a will power to use his *Da'as* and intellect, and all he has is just a little bit of emotions.

To learn what the heart desires means that one has to learn what his *Da'as* desires, not for a person to follow his natural emotions. The natural emotions of a person usually don't want to learn Torah, and are inclined to take an easy and comfortable path. With emotions, a person just follows what's interesting to him, and that is what he desires.

To learn where your heart desires means to feel what your *Da'as* wants. It is a *Da'as* that can be felt – a *Da'as* of the heart. Just like a person knows if he wants to eat something when it's cold or hot, so can a person know what's good for him or not, when he uses this palpable kind of *Da'as*.

Connection Requires Purity of Heart

Anyone can feel the idea of using his *Da'as* to connect.

For example, when a person learns in the Gemara about a certain argument, he is able to use his *Da'as* to figure out which opinion he is more connected to.

We should emphasize that this does not mean for a person to figure out which opinion in the Gemara is truer, G-d forbid. No one can argue with the Gemara. It is just about how connected one feels to a certain opinion in the Gemara.

If a person is dealing with something that he is at the same level on, he can decide on it. This is the time to use lower *Da'as*. But if a person is dealing with something he is not able to decide upon, due to his inferiority, then he must make use of the higher kind of *Da'as* – he must decide if he will connect or not to the information.

This ability exists by every person, and it has already been revealed to some extent by all of us, and by every person this differs.

An Inner Kind of Life Is Based On Higher Da'as

We have given many examples of the concept, but the point must be clear: lower *Da'as* is when we weigh out the information and decide, and higher *Da'as* is to connect to the information.

When a person learns Gemara and he sees the many opinions of the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, and he sees how it's all true even though there are many disagreements going on, then everything he sees in front of him is good to connect to. When a person has such an attitude, he doesn't need to sift out any bad information, because all he sees is good information; he realizes how it is all true. But if a person is learning Gemara and there is some information he comes across which doesn't seem true, he has to decide if he should connect to it or not.

This is the ideal kind of life we should live – connecting to what we decide. It is not enough to be able to make decisions. If a person just makes decisions and we don't connect to them, he is a person who just lives with his cold calculations. Sometimes we do need to listen to just our intellect and not to our feelings, but it is impossible to live based just on intellect. A person can be smart, intellectually gifted and very bright – but that alone isn't enough to be considered life. Our life is about being connected –

to connect to our decisions.

When a person uses his *Da'as* to connect, his whole learning and his whole life in general will change. He will find himself reviewing his many decisions he has made while learning the Gemara, because since he is connected to his decisions, it is always going through his mind. This is an inner kind of connection to the Torah that comes from within oneself.

When a person is connected to his learning, either he will see that he is always reviewing it (*Chochmah*), or he will find that he is constantly reflecting into it (*Binah*). A person will discover himself reviewing the Gemara either verbally or mentally when he becomes connected to his learning.

With the higher *Da'as*, a person is constantly reviewing his *Chochmah*, and he is always thinking into his *Binah*, again and again.

One who is still at the lower mode of thought will find reviewing what he has learned to be very bland, because of its simplicity. He knows he must review the material, but he finds it too hard to go over it simply. He will only review it if he reflects on it and thinks into it a lot, or if he decides (using his lower *Da'as*) that he needs to review because he has to remember it. But such review won't come from his essence - it is just a superficial kind of decision to review.

But with higher *Da'as*, a person's whole learning will change. He will always find new satisfaction in his learning, whether he is having thoughts of *Chochmah* or thoughts of *Binah*. He is connected to what he learns in a very simple sense. By using the higher *Da'as*, a person connects to his knowledge and builds up a way to live by. Such a person can be considered to be alive.

[\[1\]](#) *Avodah Zarah 19a*

[\[2\]](#) *Avodah Zarah 19a*

[\[3\]](#) *Sha'ar 5, Perak 5*

[\[4\]](#) *Introduction to Derech Hashem*

[\[5\]](#) *Melachim I, 9: 3*

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