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Secular Therapies Involving Imagination Can't Work For Us

We have explained in the last chapter about our mental power to imagine, which we can improve by comparing and seeing the contrasts in information. To practice this, one can take two items that are holy (such as *esrogim*) and see how they are different. We can also check our previous thoughts.

That was the general description of what we need to do.

The secular world uses imagination attempts to heal themselves from previous stressful experiences. They use imagination to go back into the past experience, and imagine various things to be able to deal with the trauma. But they teach people to imagine things which are false, and in this way they heal their stressful experience. This is not the way of the Torah.

There is a Torah way to use our imagination and heal ourselves from a past traumatic experience, but it differs greatly from the secular approach. Unfortunately, in our generation, even *b'nei Torah* have fallen into such secular therapies. Let us see the Torah way in how to use imagination to heal our stress.

True Imagination: Strong Concentration On Something Holy

The first point in this is that if someone wants to develop his power of imagination properly, a person needs to be able to have a strong ability to imagine. This means that he is able **to strongly concentrate on one picture, for a long time**; and in addition, it has to be a **holy** kind of picture. The imagination has to have its limits, or else it creates an imbalance in the person. Imagination is only constructive when it is used within its proper limits, and that is why these two conditions are necessary for it to work.

To develop the imagination, a person needs to picture something holy, and then he needs to stick to that picture in his mind.

An example of this is to imagine the Four Letter Name of Hashem, and to linger with the image of it for a while.

However, one should not spend a whole day on this; just try focusing on the holy picture for some time, and the more you get used to this, you acquire a stronger amount of holy imagination.

Anyone who doesn't have this ability does not know how to use the imagination properly. Today there are people attempting to guide other people on how to use their imagination, but these people themselves do not know how to use their own imagination properly in the way we have said here.

Healing Your Past Painful Experiences

Every person has gone through many hard experiences in his life. We have gone through many events which we remember – as well as events we don't remember. Our imagination can be used to heal our past events we remember, as well as even the events we don't remember (which we never got over). But it can only work for us if it is in line with all of the conditions approved of by the Torah.

First, we will discuss how we can use our imagination to solve past difficult experiences that we remember.

You won't through something very painful, and it bothers you a lot. Remember the event that was painful – but this time, relive it in a different way. This is done through your power of "*shoimer*" – to "protect" your memory – which can help you relive the past experience and then imagine something else this time.[\[1\]](#)

If we just go back into the past experience and think it over exactly as we remember it, then we gain nothing; what would be the point of that? We want to fix up the painful event we experienced, so we need to go back and make some changes to it. But we will not be trying to distort the experience. We are trying to change how we felt about that experience when we first went through it.

Go back to the past experience you remember, but with a different attitude this time. There are different ways how you can do this. Either you can simply look at it with a different attitude this time than how you viewed it until now, which will make you feel more positive about it. Or, you can go back to the past experience with *Emunah* that it was meant to be.

You are going back to the experience, but you are changing the *inner meaning* of the experience.

Don't Distort Any of the Details

However, the condition you need for this is that you have to relive all the details of the experience, exactly as they happened. Otherwise, it is just lying to yourself. You need to relive the exact experience *exactly* as it happened, in all its details; don't leave out even one detail from the experience in your mind. You are merely going back to that experience so that you can change your *attitude* about it.

If someone does not follow this rule and simply imagines the situation to be different, and he gets used to this on a regular basis – he literally ruins his soul! He gets used to the idea of distorting reality.

People want to know if such a practice is forbidden according to *Shulchan Aruch* and argue: "Where does it say in *Shulchan Aruch* you can't do this?" But even if it isn't forbidden, it ruins the entire soul!

If someone works on his imagination, though, in the way we have said here, than the more truthful he is, the more he will be able to tell the difference between what's in reality and what's just in his imagination. The more truthful he is, the more he will notice even subtle differences between what's real and what isn't.

When people relive the past experiences in their mind and distort the story so that they will be able to get over the experience, this gets a person used to making up reality, and it ruins his soul. The

secular methods use this kind of imagination to help people deal with their past trauma – to go back into the past and change the details of the event, so that the event won't be bothersome anymore in the person's memory. But this is not approved by the way of our holy Torah, as we said; and it causes problems.

The way of the holy Torah is as we said: to relive the past experience in full detail, but to go back to it with a different attitude. Don't distort the physical details – keep the event in your mind as it was, exactly. But view it with a new attitude – either by simply changing your attitude about the situation, or by reliving it with Emunah this time.

Using Imagination for Future Events

We have so far discussed how we can use imagination to deal with our past stressful experiences. Now we will discuss how we can use imagination to deal with future events we are scared of.

(We will note here that we are currently discussing the imagination of our brain/mind. There is also imagination in our heart, but we are not discussing this yet. Soon, we will get there, with the help of Hashem).

Every person has many things he wants – physical desires, as well as spiritual desires. Our various desires we have are very stressful to us, because there are many things we want which aren't coming to fruition. How can we deal with our unfulfilled wants? How can we be content when there are so many things we haven't accomplished yet which we would like to accomplish?

One of the solutions is to use our imagination. Let's say a person very badly wants to get married, and he hasn't found the right one yet. How can he deal with the frustration? He can imagine that he is married, that he's living in a house with someone. Or, let's say someone wishes he could learn in a certain yeshiva; he can imagine that he's learning in that yeshiva, vividly picturing in his mind what it would be like to learn there. (We will see when and how this can work).

Our Rabbis even write about this power – when a person imagines very vividly and strongly that he wants a certain thing, he can actually make that thing come to him! This is called the power of *hamshachah* (pulling), and it can be accessed through the imagination.

However, there are conditions for this to work: *emunah* (faith in Hashem) and *tefillah* (prayer).

When a person wants something very badly, he can get it through having *Emunah*, and he should also *daven* a lot about it. When a person already has *Emunah*, and he *davens* for what he wants, he can **then** utilize his imagination on top of that; he can imagine, very strongly, that he wants it so badly (because he is indeed *davening* for it, which shows that he really wants it). If he really wants it, he davens for it – and if he has *emunah* together with this, then what he wants can gravitate toward him.

Also, this only works for someone who has developed his imagination, someone who differentiates between imagination and intellect^[2]. Such a person realizes that imagination is not reality, and he's not confused between what's really happening with what's just in his imagination; he is aware that when he imagines something, it's not really happening.

Such a person is able to use imagination to actually attain what he wants. How is this working?

He believes that he is **drawing** what he wants **closer** to himself, but he doesn't think he's actually **getting** it. He isn't being deluded by his imagination that he's really getting what he wants through his imagination. Instead, his attitude is that he's merely **drawing it closer** to himself, because he wants it. Since that is intention, what he wants will gravitate toward him, and eventually he will get it.

This power to “draw” things you want closer to you **only** works when someone already has the two other conditions we mentioned – *Emunah*, and *Tefillah*.

But if someone is at the lower level of imagination – which means that he hasn’t developed his imagination yet, and his head is swimming around all day in imaginative thoughts – then this can’t work. Why? It is because a person at this level thinks that he can actually get things just because he imagines them. Such a person will only “get” it in his mind, but he doesn’t get it in reality.

Most people in the world are living in their imagination, and thus they haven’t yet developed the true kind of imagination which we are discussing. Therefore they don’t get what they want just by imagining about it. Most people are thinking that imagination will make it happen, and that is why it never works.

So imagination can only make something come to you only if you have *Emunah* and you daven about it. If those two conditions are met, one can then imagine strongly about how much he wants it, and then it can come to him. However, as we said, most people haven’t accessed their true power of imagination, and therefore only a few rare individuals are able to get what they want through imagination.

A Second Approach: Using Bitachon With Imagination

There is another method of how we can use imagination concerning the future. When a person is imagining something about the future, he can use imagination together with a different power of the soul: *Bitachon* – a calming feeling faith in Hashem.

What is *Bitachon*? There is a difference of opinion about this between the *Chovos HaLevovos* and the *Alshich*.

Chovos HaLevovos maintains that everything that Hashem does is good, and therefore, one has to always believe that he is getting exactly what is supposed to come to him. If he doesn’t get what he wants, then that means it wasn’t supposed to come to him. The view of the *Alshich* is that a person can get things he wants very badly by imagining it, and then he can draw it closer to him. This can happen just from having *Bitachon* alone that he will get it.

This differs from what we spoke about before. Before, we spoke about how a person can draw things closer to himself through imagination (which requires both *Emunah* and *Tefillah* in order to make it happen). Now, we are discussing how something can come to you **just** through *Bitachon*. Imagination is a factor here of course, but here the imagination isn’t what is drawing what you want closer to you. Here, one’s *Bitachon* itself is what can draw what he wants closer.

This second method involves these two factors: *Bitachon*, together with imagination.

Why the Secular Methods of Imagination Can’t Work For Our Soul

What is happening in the secular methods of imagination therapy? They are essentially viewing imagination as a way to get everything, with no other factors involved. It can never work, because imagination isn’t everything. It is a power in our soul that must be built on two other forces in our soul – our *Emunah*, and our *seichel* (intellect).^[3] If we have *Emunah* and we have also developed our intellect (being aware that imagination isn’t really happening), then upon that, we can use imagination. But without those other two factors, imagination is useless. The secular methods are just using imagination, without *Emunah* and without a developed intellect.

In Conclusion

So far, we have only discussed how imagination can be used to get things that a person wants. In the next chapter, with the help of Hashem, we will discuss how to use imagination as a way to calm ourselves down about our unfulfilled wants.

[1] See Gra to Yeshayahu 11:1, who lists shoimer as one of the seventy forces of the soul. For more on the power of shoimer, see [Getting To Know Your Thoughts, Chapter Five](#).

[2] This is the subject of another series of the Rov, “Getting To Know Your Thoughts” (Da Es Machshavosocha). The way to uproot imagination from our thought is discussed in [Chapter 17 of that sefer \(Weakening Imagination Through Self-Awareness\)](#). [1]

[3] See also [Getting To Know Your Thoughts, Chapter 18 - “How To Use Holy Imagination”](#). [2]

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Links

[1] <https://bilvavi.net/english/forty-8-ways-acquire-torah-017-weakening-imagination>

[2] <https://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-thoughts-018imagination-used-holiness>