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## Tefillah - 103 Developing the Mind

### ***Why Do People Sin Intentionally?***

We ask Hashem in the blessing of **ולמלשינים** to break our enemies and humble those who “rebel against the Torah”. Those who rebel against the Torah are called *zeidim*. These are people who sin with a very specific agenda; they are intentionally rebellious.

We will try here to understand what motivates a person to sin intentionally and rebelliously against Hashem.

### ***Different Sins Damage Different Areas of The Soul***

The soul of man, generally speaking, is comprised of action, emotion, speech and thought. There are *mitzvos* we do with our physical actions. There are *mitzvos* we do with emotions, such as to have love and fear of Hashem. There are *mitzvos* we do with our thoughts, such as *Emunah* in Hashem.

Our *middos* (character traits) are the realm of our emotions, and they are also in our realm of speech. For example, jealousy and hatred, which are bad *middos*, are emotions. *Lashon hora* is an evil use of our speech.

When a person sins unintentionally, his actions have been damaged, but his emotions and thoughts are unaffected. But when a person sins intentionally, G-d forbid, he damages his entire soul, even the highest part of his soul, which are the thoughts.

The *mitzvah* of Torah learning involves our realm of thought; we think into our learning and try to understand what we learn. Those who really learn Torah are those who live the realm of thought.

We will focus here on what our power of holy thought (*machshavah*) is.

### ***Developing Our Minds***

Man is generally comprised of three areas: action, emotion and thought.

Animals can also think, and they can also do things intentionally with their thoughts. For example, the Gemara says that an ox gores intentionally.

When a person is young, his thoughts aren't developed. When a person matures, his thoughts become developed, and he begins to think. Yet, that doesn't mean he uses his thoughts that much.

An animal can also think, so it's very possible that a person lives his for 70 years and his level of thinking is on the level of an animal's thinking - even if he is a person who learns Torah and does mitzvos, and even if he "has in mind" to fulfill the mitzvos.

There are three general parts to our *avodah* on this world. The first part of our *avodah* is to do the **mitzvos**. The second part of our *avodah* is to fix our **middos**. The third part of our *avodah* is to learn **Torah**, which uses our power of thought.

What is holding back our power of thought from working properly? Our emotions can hamper our thoughts. When a person thinks about what he loves or what he hates, when he thinks about what he's happy about or what he's sad about, he is accessing his emotions, and this weakens his thoughts. (There are even people who spend their entire lives in either hatred or jealousy...)

### ***How Immature Middos Can Ruin The Mind***

When a person never fixes his *middos*, he remains immature his whole life. His thoughts are also undeveloped, because his unfixed *middos* will hamper his thoughts. Even if he learns Torah, he won't be able to think properly in Torah, because his bad *middos* will prevent him. This is the meaning of "If a person doesn't merit, the Torah becomes like poison to him."

A simple example of this is if a person learns Torah in order to argue with others, (*loimed al menas l'kanter*), of whom Chazal say it is better that had he not been born. But that is an extreme example of this. Even if a person doesn't get that extreme, his *middos* can still be very unfixed, and this will hamper the development of his thoughts. His thoughts will only be experienced through his *middos*, which are undeveloped. When such a person learns a piece of *Ramban* or a *Rashba*, even if he thinks into it, his thinking is limited in its understanding, because it has become constricted to his undeveloped *middos*.

But if a person works to purify his *middos*, his *middos* will stay in their proper place, and they won't get in the way of his mind. A person will then be able to free himself from his emotions and utilize the true potential of his power of thought.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner wrote that the entire praise of the previous generation was in their *sevara yeshara* (straight, logical thinking). If a person never fixes his *middos*, he won't reach *sevara yeshara*. For example, a *Dayan* is not allowed to take a bribe (*shochad*). Once he takes a bribe, his mind is affected, and he can't judge without being biased. His emotions will take over and weaken his thinking process.

All of the bad *middos* in the world are found inside a person's soul, and they remain there as long as a person doesn't work on his *middos*. When a person never works on his *middos*, not only will he have bad *middos*, but he won't be able to think properly when he learns Torah. His entire Torah learning remains on the level of *middos*\emotions, and he never enters the real world of thought that is the Torah.

### ***When Emotions Overtake The Mind***

When a person sins intentionally, *chas v'shalom*, it is really because his emotions have overtaken his mind.

How can it be that a person who keeps Torah and mitzvos - who was raised in a *frum* home and is fully aware that a certain action is prohibited by the Torah - can come to commit a sin intentionally? It is because his emotions overtake him. This happens when a person never worked to purify his *middos*.

How can it be that a person talks *lashon hora*, even though he clearly knows and is aware that it is prohibited by the Torah? It is because “he can’t hold himself back from talking” – meaning, he’s being ruled by his emotions.

Our power of thought is the greatest quality that mankind possesses, and it is what sets us apart from the other creations. This is the depth of why learning Torah is the greatest *mitzvah*; it is because learning Torah makes use of our realm of thought, which is the highest function of our soul.

But, it’s very possible that a person is learning Torah his whole life, yet he never accesses his true thoughts! It’s like his thoughts are locked up in a jail inside him.

The Rambam and others write that a person connects to the Creator through the power of thought. The Vilna Gaon writes that Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven using his power of thought. Our actions and speech are found on this world, but with our thoughts, we can ascend to the highest realms of spirituality.

But when a person never develops his *middos*, his thoughts remain on the level of mere **imagination**, and they are not real thought. His thinking will remain his whole life on the level of an animal’s thinking.

A true *Talmid Chochom* is someone who really uses his intellect when he learns Torah. Such a person is capable of thinking wherever he is.

### ***First Think About Hashem, Then Talk To Him, And Then You Can Fix Your Middos***

Why is it that people have a hard time thinking about Hashem and about connecting with Him? It is not just because people feel that “It’s a high *madreigah* to think thoughts of *d’veykus* with Hashem”. It is rather because most people have a hard time really using their intellect. A person’s real power of thought is kind of imprisoned inside himself, when he hasn’t yet worked to fix his *middos*.

Before a person attempts to fix his *middos*, he needs to first develop a yearning for Hashem and to talk to Him. But, even before this, a person has to always keep Hashem in front of himself, “*I place Hashem before me always*”, and this can only be done if a person develops his power of thought. In order to think of Hashem all the time, you need to develop your power of thought.

It’s not just because a person has sins that he has a hard time thinking about Hashem. The deeper reason is because he hasn’t fixed his *middos*, and therefore he can’t think properly.

### ***In Conclusion***

This is the meaning of “*zeidim*”, those who rebel against Hashem and His Torah. Those who rebel against Hashem and His Torah do so intentionally, and the only way these people can sin intentionally is because their emotions have overtaken their thoughts.

But those who really learn Torah properly are those who are using their true power of thought. When someone fixes his *middos*, his thoughts can then become developed. His thoughts are then being used to their potential, for he has released his thoughts from being imprisoned inside himself all these years, and now he will have the power to truly connect to Hashem.