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ARCHIVE Q&A

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בלבבי
משכן
אבנה

BILVAVI

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THREE LEVELS OF PRAYER

Previously, we explained that there are three levels of *tefillah*:

A prayer for personal needs, such as a livelihood, health, clothing, etc.

When a person recognizes that Hashem is the One Who withheld the object from him, and thus, He is the only address at which to seek anything, the *tefillah* becomes a means for instilling *emunah* in Divine Providence.

The highest level is when one's goal is intimacy with the Creator. This is the meaning of the *passuk*, "O that He would kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for His love is far more precious to me than wine i.e., than all the pleasures of this world and the next."¹

We will discuss this third level now. Of Moshe Rabbeinu, it says, "Mouth to mouth I speak with him, in a clear vision not containing allegories."² Furthermore, we find in the words of *Chazal*,³ "Whenever a Torah scholar sits and learns Torah by himself, Hashem sits opposite him and learns with him, as the *passuk* says,⁴ *no-chach pnei Hashem*, literally "opposite the face of Hashem." Likewise, on the verse,⁵ "Hashem is your shadow at your right side," *Chazal* taught,⁶ "What is the meaning of 'Hashem is your shadow'? Just as your shadow will laugh if you laugh, cry if you cry, and will mirror your sad or friendly countenance, so does Hashem respond to You in accord with the way you relate to Him."

If one uses his mouth to speak to the Creator, there is an element of, "Mouth to mouth I speak with him." Certainly, we cannot be on the level of Moshe Rabbeinu, because, "No prophet has arisen like Moshe,"⁷ but everyone has an aspect of Moshe Rabbeinu within, and through

1 Shir Hashirim 1:2

2 Bamidbar 12:8

3 Tana debei Eliyahu Rabbah 18

4 Eichah 2:19

5 Tehillim 121:5

6 Vayikra Rabbah 14:5

7 Devarim 34:10

that we can attain a small degree of such a level. It is accessible to each individual.

The very fact that a person can talk to the Creator is the greatest achievement of all. As we discussed at length, there are two kinds of speech: the way of crying out, which is speech that comes from distress; and speech that comes “as a man speaks to his friend” – simply and naturally. One senses that the Creator is nearby, and he speaks to Him. He has the simple feeling that Hashem is listening to his words, as if He has nothing else to do.

This level of prayer is reached in *Shemoneh Esrei*, which is recited quietly, in “*kol demamah dakah*, a subtle, quiet voice.”⁸ When one screams, he feels as if Hashem is far away, but in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we speak as if to a friend standing nearby.

This is the essence of what we have said until this point; we will now continue to develop this point.

ADVANCING IN STAGES TO THE INNER POINT OF THE SOUL

We know that when we daven, we do not start immediately with the *Shemonah Esreh*, but rather begin with *Birkos Hashachar*, progress to *Korbanos*, *Pesukei dezimra*, *Yotzer Ohr*, and the *Shema*. Only after all these preliminary stages do we come to the *Shemoneh Esrei*. What is behind this progression?

We normally feel as if we are separate from Hashem. Through *tefillah*, we can gradually overcome this sense of separateness and begin to feel that we really are conversing with the Creator.

Every stage of *tefillah* is an ascent. At first, we feel rather separate. As we progress, we feel closer to the Creator. And so, we come to feel closer and closer, until we finally arrive at the *Shemoneh Esrei*, the stage of “a man speaking to his friend.”

To illustrate: Imagine Reuven on one side of the street, and Shimon on the other side. Reuven shouts to Shimon to wait for him. Reuven’s strong desire to tell Shimon something prevents him from waiting until

8 Melachim I 19:12

Shimon comes over from his side of the street. He first screams to him to stop, so that Shimon will know he has something to tell him. As they come closer to each other and the distance between them shrinks, Reuven will still speak loudly enough so that Shimon can hear him, but he will gradually lower his voice. When they finally are next to each other, they can speak to each other softly and even whisper. This is the simple meaning of “as a person speaks to his friend.”

The lesson from this is that as you approach closer and closer to intimate connection with the Creator, the inner cry of your soul quiets down. You can then speak more softly, until you reach the condition of “*kol demamah dakah*, a subtle, quiet voice.”

You cannot immediately start with *Shemonah Esrei*, because, as the *sefarim hakedoshim* say, even a person who cleaves to the Creator all day reaches the highest level of attachment during *tefillah*, especially during *Shemoneh Esrei*. Even if a person remembers Hashem throughout the day, unless he is regularly talking to Hashem, he will generally be involved in other endeavors, even if they are as noble as Torah study. Since his head holds additional thoughts, his attachment to Hashem is not absolute, depending on his level.

When a person comes to daven before Hashem, he detaches from everything around him in the world, and is totally devoted to speaking with Hashem. This detachment generally cannot come radically, but in gradual stages, as one would climb a ladder – one rung after another.

Thus, when one starts to daven, he cannot immediately shift from his ordinary state to that of *Shemoneh Esrei* with *deveikus*. There is a progression. Slowly, one feels more and more closeness to Hashem. If one wishes to jump right away to the *Shemonah Esrei*, he is seeking *kefitzas haderech* (a miraculous contraction of his path). In the physical world, we know that only very few *tzaddikim* earned this miracle; so too, we must know that there is generally no *kefitzas haderech* in spiritual growth!

Therefore, as a rule, you must proceed gradually. At first, you will speak to Hashem with a certain sense of being distant; then, you will feel closer and closer, until you reach an inner level of closeness to the Creator.

Certainly, every rule has an exception. There are days in which there is a stronger sense of distance, and there are days in which you feel closer, but in general, you must go one step at a time. You start with the surface level of the soul, the point furthest from the Creator, and then you dig deeper, level after level, until you reach the inner point of the heart that feels the Creator clearly.

In fact, one is not always privileged to reach this inner point. Sometimes, there are outer distractions and a person remains in the outer layers of his soul. But even when a person does have the privilege, the process is one of entering level after level, from “palace to palace” in the soul, until one reaches, as it were, Hashem’s Throne of Glory, on which “sits He Who dwells in the highest realms” – Hashem Himself.

You must be careful that your progress from one level to the next be done calmly, with no inner sense of pressure. When you push yourself to speak to Hashem, there is pressure, and understandably, you cannot feel free. Some people feel pressured to be calm. Inwardly they want to be calm, but since they are under pressure, they prevent themselves from achieving this. The pressure itself prevents them from feeling calmness.

When you know that you can only advance one step at a time, and are not pressured to immediately enter into the deepest level, you will naturally work in a structured and calm way, and will be able to gradually enter further inward, until reaching the level where you can have true speech with Hashem.

One who is unaware of these ideas thinks that he must immediately enter all the way within and speak to Hashem on that high level, and when he fails to do so, he feels pressured. In this way, he surely will not progress!

You must know that Hashem chose to make man this way. His will is that we should progress from level to level. All the worlds, including this one, are constructed in the form of different levels. Every step of the way must take time. Some steps require months and even years, and some minor steps allow one to enter more deeply each day. Ultimately, one can reach inner quiet and calmly speak to Hashem.

This was one idea, and it is relatively simple and easy to understand. We will now proceed to something more difficult.

STARTING THE AVODAH FROM THE POINT OF SEPARATION

There is a deep question found in the *sefarim hakedoshim*. We must first comment that this is a very subtle point, and you must toil to understand it well.

In the process of *avodah* we are discussing now, there has been an emphasis on inwardness. A person must be *penimi* (inward), not *chitzoni* (superficial), in order to reach deeper levels of the soul. The question is, when a person comes to speak to Hashem, he is apparently communicating with a Being outside of himself, namely, the Creator. If so, he is not involved with his inner essence, but with something external – the Creator!

If this is one's feeling, he will gradually lose touch with himself and become *chitzoni*, dealing with only external entities. Of course, this kind of *chitzoni* does not mean that one will start looking at store windows. Nevertheless, if one is not focused on his inner essence, but only on the Creator, he is apparently focused on something external.

This can be very dangerous. If one habitually speaks to Hashem as something outside himself, he may never know himself at all. He will always be involved with the Creator, but will himself disappear! You must know, then, how to take the concept of *tefillah* properly.

We will first explain the proper, inner essence of the matter, and then describe the nature of a person who has not been privileged to reach the desired state. A person who has been privileged to cleave to the Creator fulfills the *passuk*,⁹ "G-d is the rock of my heart and my portion forever." Hashem is inside his heart, in the true innermost point of the soul; there is nothing deeper in the person.

This applies to one who has reached the "fiftieth gate" of wisdom, as explained in the *sefarim hakedoshim*. He then feels that Hashem is part of his being, and when he speaks to Hashem, he senses that he is not speaking with a separate and external entity, but with his own deepest

9 Tehillim 73:26

essence. However, since one cannot attain this level without long and arduous work, when most people speak to the Creator, they do not feel that they are speaking to their own deepest essence, but to an external entity.

There are, then, two forms of *avodah*. In one method, the individual is working with himself, and in the other method, he is working with the Creator. In other words, at first, there is generally a feeling of separation. After that, you must go out of yourself toward the Creator, then return to yourself, then go back to the Creator, then return to yourself, and so on, continuously.

At first, you must recognize yourself. If there is no personality, who is it that is talking to Hashem? Therefore, you must first recognize clearly that there is an “I” who is coming to speak to Hashem. “I give thanks to You, Hashem,” implies that there is first an “I”; then, it is possible to give thanks “to You.” *(There is a higher level, in which the “I” [ani] changes to nothingness [ayin], but at first, in order to have “to You,” there must be an “I.”)*

Before speaking to the Creator, you must start from a simple level. When you come to speak in order to instill the basic faith that there is a Creator, do not rush to say, “Master of the world, I know that You exist, and I also know that You created the world.”

Before speaking to Hashem, you must clarify on your own that the world has a Creator. Contemplate and think, “Is it necessary to accept that the world has a Creator? Maybe not, G-d forbid? But, then, how did these things come to be on their own?” You should work with this point and clarify it on your own, until it is absolutely clear. Only after that may you come before Hashem and say to Him, “Master of the world, I have thought and contemplated, and I understand that there is a Creator. I know that You exist.” This is a subtle point that must be grasped. There are tens, perhaps hundreds of delusional people walking around who have lost touch with this truth. They always speak to the Creator, but there is no person there. They don’t live their own lives, and there is a disconnection between the one worshipping and the One being worshipped. If they fall into this error, they can lose touch with the whole process of *avodah* that we have been discussing.

THREE STAGES – THOUGHT, SPEECH, AND ACTION

We must mention another point so that the ideas will be clear and structured.

In general, we say that there are three garments on the soul: thought, speech, and action. In order to speak to Hashem, you do not need action. You must, of course, fulfill the 613 *mitzvos*, but no action is needed when you come to speak to the Creator.

But in order to speak to Hashem, you must first have thought. If thought does not precede the speech, then, it is, G-d forbid, without any *daas*.

Let us now consider how to attain the proper speech. A person might think for a second, or ten seconds, or twenty seconds, and then start talking right away. He first talks to himself, and then he talks to the Creator.

This method is akin to producing a miscarriage. Every level and every world must be properly developed. If there is no sound process of thought before one comes to speak, you will fall too quickly from the world of thought to the world of speech. If your thought is too weak, the speech upon which it is based will not be sound, and the entire structure will be as if built in the air.

What is the proper kind of thought? First of all, you must know that there is a Creator. You will start thinking about this. Don't say anything yet, but think, "Who created the world? There must be a Creator, etc." Contemplate this (*each person according to the time needed*) until the intellect clearly recognizes that there is a Creator.

In the second stage, take this idea, and speak about it to yourself: "It is clear to me that there is a Creator, because if not, where did the moon come from? From where are the stars? From where are people?" and so on. Only in the third stage may you approach Hashem and speak to Him.

In other words, there must be three phases. The first phase is real contemplation: spending a long time contemplating the matter well (*we will now use the example of Divine Providence*). The second phase is that after the contemplation, you begin to speak to yourself, such as saying, "The world has a Master, He controls the palace, and I see His Divine Providence." The third

phase is where you speak to Hashem and say, “Master of the world, I have clarified for myself that there is a Creator, that You exist, that You control the palace, that every detail happens through You,” and so on.

If you jump immediately to the third phase, you will fail. Even if you only skip over the first phase, the phase of thought, and jump right away to the second phase, that of speech with yourself, it will still be difficult for the efforts to have any lasting value.

CLARIFYING THE WILL

These are three of the phases, but in truth, there is an additional phase, a deeper one, which comes first, and that is the *ratzon* (the underlying will).

You might begin to clarify that there is a Creator. Essentially, why do you care if there is a Creator or not? What motivates you to clarify this? The fear of *Gehinnom*, a lack of inner satisfaction, or perhaps the desire to succeed? What pushes you?

Whenever someone thinks about something, there must be a cause that makes him think. If a person is approached and requested to ponder the current events of a certain city in a distant land, he will certainly answer, “That does not interest me. I don’t live in that country, and I don’t know the people who live there.” Even if he doesn’t have time constraints, he will not agree to think about those matters because he has no interest in them. For there to be interest, there must be a certain *ratzon* (will, desire) concerning the matter.

When a person begins to clarify to himself that there is a Creator, he must first consider why he wants to clarify this. If we would go on the street and turn to people and ask if they know there is a Creator, most would surely answer, “I don’t care if there is or isn’t! What difference is it to me? I’m fine!”

You must clarify for yourself why indeed you are not one of those people who don’t care, and why you do want to know about the Creator. Is the only reason because your father told you about this? Or perhaps you’re just afraid of *Gehinnom*, or you want *Gan Eden*, or you don’t find satisfaction in this world? What moves you to want to go through this?

There is tremendous depth to the concept of the *ratzon* (which is in the sub-

conscious). Yet even if you have not attained the awareness of *why* you want to clarify this, it must be clear to you that you really *want* to clarify it.

There are many people who begin to get involved in all kinds of endeavors, and they may maintain interest for two weeks, or a month, or two months, but they eventually quit. They started a task, saw that it was not as easy as they had thought, and then quit. Why did they quit? Because their *ratzon* was not strong enough. They perhaps wanted to make money, thinking it would be easy, but when it became clear that it requires more effort than presumed, they simply gave up. Their level of *ratzon* did not have the power to impel them to progress in the face of such difficulties.

In order to truly serve the Creator, you must really want to. After you find that you really want to, you must contemplate properly. After contemplation, you must speak to yourself, and only after that, can you speak to the Creator.

(Here we must again emphasize: you must first gain a general picture of the material presented in this book, and only then apply your knowledge. Only with the Creator do we find, “Guard” and “Remember” in the same statement.” We humans, on the other hand, need to pause between one section and the next, for it’s simply impossible to say everything all at once. The big picture will become clear at the end, after we explain everything, with Hashem’s help. But at first, you must know clearly what the first phase is, what the second is, the third, and the fourth. If it’s not clear, there will be confusion.)

In conclusion, there must first be a real *ratzon*. Once there is this real *ratzon*, there must be a process of thought, during which one contemplates for a long time that there is a Creator; after that stage, that He is nearby; after that stage, that there is Divine Providence; and so on. After thinking, you must discuss these things with yourself. Only after that, you will advance to the last phase – speaking with the Creator.

Do not jump right away to the phase of speaking to Hashem. Even if you have already spent half a year working on a particular concept, you must still spend the first few minutes of each session going through the process of thought.

There are rare exceptions: There are times when a person is in pain. His whole being screams out, and he pours his heart out before Hashem. This

is not unhealthy, but you must know what the normal process should be, and what the exception to the rule is.

We have given an overview of spiritual growth. It has been a brief discussion, but it is very fundamental, and any error in these details can generate inner confusion, *chas veshalom*, and distance a person from his true world.

May Hashem assist us in making these ideas perfectly clear and accepted in your heart.



בחנויות בארץ עכשיו

DVEYKUS OF JEWS & DVEYKUS OF GOYIM

QUESTION:

1) What's the difference between the closeness to Hashem that a Jew can reach versus the closeness to Hashem that a goy can reach?

ANSWER:

This is a lengthy topic and there are many other responses we gave on the topic (*printed in sefer Shaal Libi*). In general, the difference is that the Jewish people can reach Hashem both through Yeish and Ayin together, while the goyim can only have an experience of being close to Hashem through either Yeish alone or through Ayin alone, but without the integration. This means that a Jew is able to come to the level where he feels Hashem in every last detail, and he can also come to a revelation of the simplicity of Hashem's Presence, with yichuda ilaah and yichuda tataah together – becoming aware of Hashem as He is unified in the upper world, as well as becoming aware of how Hashem is unified even with this lower world.

QUESTION

2) In the future when everyone will completely recognize Hashem with complete d'veykus, will there still be a difference between a Jew's recognition of Hashem versus a goy's recognition of Hashem?

ANSWER

Yes.

QUESTION

3) The Leshem says that in the future, everyone will go back to the way it was before the sin, when both Jewish and gentile souls were all contained in Adam HaRishon's soul and there was no differentiation yet. It seems that in the future there will not be a difference between Jew and gentile and that we will all be on the same level.

ANSWER

While it's true that every soul of Jew and gentile was contained within Adam's soul, there were still levels of superiority within his soul. There was the head part of his soul, the heart part of his soul, and the heels of his soul, etc. [Thus the Jewish souls were contained in the higher parts of his soul, and the gentile souls were contained in the lowest part of his soul, so even at that point of integration the Jewish souls were still superior to the goyim].

HOW DO I KNOW HASHEM LOVES ME?

QUESTION:

I have gone through so much challenges and suffering in my life and I am continuing to go through so much. I might know that it's all from Hashem and that it's all for my good, but how do I know that Hashem still loves me?

ANSWER:

It would be worthwhile for you to sit down and write everything that's going good in your life, all the good parts of your life. Then think into it, about what Hashem has given you. Think about it, then verbalize it. Then, start thanking Hashem for each detail. From then onward, your avodah is to have emunah without understanding how everything that happens to you is all for your good. We can partially see and understand how certain things were for our good, but there will always be parts of our life in which we cannot see and understand how they are for our good too. In order to 'digest' that everything that happened to you is for your own good, it won't help if you try to understand it intellectually. You need to strengthen and internalize the emunah, the belief, that everything Hashem does is good!

LOVE OF HASHEM & LOVE OF ONE'S SELF

QUESTION:

Do we need to first love Hashem in order to be someach b'chelko?

ANSWER:

We must first believe in Hashem, before we work on trying to love Hashem. A person can believe that all that Hashem does is good, and from that, a person is someach b'chelko.

There are people who are naturally happy with themselves, because they have a very pleasant nature that is drawn towards calmness and pleasantness; these are people who were born with a dominant element of water in their souls (*which is the root of pleasure*). There are only a few people who are like this, but they do exist. As for those of us who do not possess this nature, we need either the paths described in the earlier chapters (*of the series on Hisbodedus*), or we need to use our power of emunah in order to reach our someiach b'chelko.

QUESTIONS ON MESIRUS NEFESH

QUESTION:

(1) What are the conditions for “mesirus nefesh”, when it comes to (a) avodas Hashem, (b) recognizing our soul, (c) learning Torah, and (d) doing mitzvos? Through mesirus nefesh a person receives siyata d'shmaya (*Heavenly assistance*) to skip levels. What is the simple meaning of mesirus nefesh? Does it mean that I have to be mentally willing to be killed al kiddush Hashem over something? Does it mean that I have to spend a lot of energy on something?

(2) The Rav has said that the avodah of our generation is mesirus nefesh. Is this referring to mesirus nefesh in avodas Hashem, in doing mitzvos, or in learning Torah? Or in all of them?

(3) I have heard from the Rav many times that the way of mesirus nefesh is only for individuals. If so, what is the Rav's intention that the avodah of mesirus nefesh is for this entire generation?

(4) In the sefer "Bilvavi" (Part 6), the Rav explains that the soul's power of "lishmah" (*acting for the sake of Heaven*) is the same power as mesirus nefesh, because it is the power to go above the "I" and act from a place in the soul that is higher than the "I". However, I once asked the Rav how a person is able to reach the "Yechidah" part of the soul through Torah study, and the Rav responded to me that it is reached through learning Torah with mesirus nefesh and lishmah. Did the Rav mean that they are two separate things? Or are they one and the same?

ANSWER:

1) Mesirus nefesh in avodas Hashem means that a person works on an area which he finds personally difficult to work on, and he perseveres in that area, through self-sacrifice to succeed, no matter what comes his way. Mesirus nefesh should not be used when one is trying to recognize the soul, because one needs calm and quiet reflection in order to slowly recognize and understand the soul [hence trying to have "mesirus nefesh" in order to understand his soul would only deter him from reaching it]. Mesirus nefesh in learning Torah is that a person learns above his natural physical capabilities, and with mental exertion, until he exhausts his mind over it. Mesirus nefesh in doing mitzvos is that a person takes one mitzvah and does it as perfectly as possible, on his own level, according to the halachah, and with love and awe of Hashem, and with the conviction that he will never give up this mitzvah under any circumstance.

2) In this generation, there is a spiritual illumination of the ability to act with "mesirus nefesh", which is called the "light of Mashiach", the light of Dovid HaMelech, who is called a "stillborn", with no life support of his own, whose entire life source stems from acting on the level of mesirus nefesh.

3) In essence, the way of mesirus nefesh is applicable only to individuals. However, as mentioned above, since we are currently in a time period where the “light of Mashiach” is shining strongly, the light of mesirus nefesh is also present, and it exists in order to aid us in contending with the evil of the “50th Gate of Defilement” that is rampant today. The only way to spiritually survive the “50th Gate of Defilement” is through mesirus nefesh.

4) Lishmah and mesirus nefesh bear the same root. However, there are two ways to nullify the “I”. One way is to do it from within oneself, and this is called lishmah, which applies to the proper intention that one needs to have in Torah learning. This is experienced through the faculty of thought: learning Torah with the intention of lishmah [for the sake of Hashem]. There is also a way to nullify oneself through external means, through action, which is accessed through exerting oneself in Torah beyond one’s natural physical abilities, through losing sleep over one’s Torah learning, through physical frugality, etc.



בחנויות בארץ עכשיו