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BRIS KODESH: GUARDING OUR “TEMIMUS” WITH HASHEM

These days, the days of “*Shovavim*”¹, are days to fix the damage done to one’s “*Bris Kodesh*” (the “Holy Covenant”). There are many facets to how to rectify the *Bris*. We will say one point, with the help of Hashem, which can apply to all of us.

The concept of a *bris*, a covenant, is when two people form a treaty with each other. They make a *bris* together to ensure that they will be loyal to each other, that they will remain connected with each other in loyalty.

Bris Kodesh implies two things. There is an outer layer to it, and an inner layer to it. The outer layer to *Bris Kodesh* is, that one is not allowed to *chas v’shalom* do the physical action of violating the *Bris*.² The inner aspect of *Bris Kodesh* is to keep the treaty of the *Bris* – to remain loyal to the one whom we made the treaty with.

There is a *bris* between Hashem and the Jewish people. Hashem said to Avraham, “*Walk before Me and be wholesome.*” This defines the *bris* – that we must remain with our *temimus*, our wholesome loyalty to Hashem. A baby is given a *bris* (circumcision) when he is just eight days old; he has no *daas* (awareness). This is to show that our *bris* (covenant) with Hashem represents how we must always have *temimus* (earnest, loyal relationship) with Hashem.

The concept of *temimus* is thus to simply go with Hashem’s will, even when we lack the understanding of our *daas* (logical mind).

‘THE DEPTH OF DAMAGING THE ‘BRIS

What does it mean to “damage the *bris*”? It is really a loss of a person’s *temimus* (earnestness, or loyalty) towards Hashem. When one

1 The weeks of Parshas Shemos through Parshas Mishpatim; the word “*Shovavim*” stands for Shemos, V’eira, Bo, Beshalach, Yisro and Mishpatim.

2 This is referring to the sin of spilling one’s sperm; the severity of this prohibition is brought in Shulchan Aruch: Even HaEzer, Siman 22.

foregoes his *temimus* with Hashem, that is essentially how he is led to damaging his *Bris* with Hashem.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* says that we all have an “*avodah temimah*”, a “wholesome service” to Hashem which we must perform. What is the meaning of ‘*avodah temimah*? The word “*temimah*” means can mean “perfect”, as we find that a *korbon* (sacrifice) has to be *tamim* (perfect, with no blemishes); but it can also mean like what we find by Yaakov Avinu, that he was an “*ish tam*”, a “wholesome man”. Yaakov epitomized the quality of **temimus** (wholesomeness) by constantly learning in the tents (“*yoishev ohalim*”); he was always “with” Hashem as he sat and learned in the tents of Torah.

When a person doesn’t have a relationship of **temimus** with Hashem, then he will only be connected to Hashem at certain times. His relationship with Hashem changes and fluctuates, depending on his situation. When his *daas* is working properly, he’ll get along with Hashem; but when his *daas* weakens, his relationship with Hashem suffers.

HOW TEMIMUS AFFECTS ONE’S TORAH LEARNING

Why indeed was Yaakov Avinu called an “*ish tam*”? If it’s because he was learning Torah all day, why does that show that he had **temimus**? After all, a person might be learning Torah all day, but only because he desires *daas* (knowledge), not **temimus** (an earnest relationship with Hashem). So how do we know that Yaakov is an *ish tam*, just because he “sat in the tents” of Torah all day?

The answer is that the reason that he went to go learn Torah in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever for 14 years, in order to prepare for living with his father-in-law, Lavan. That kind of learning showed that he had *temimus*. So **because** he was in *ish tam* in the first place, that was why he was able to be a *yoishev ohalim* and sit and learn Torah.

Thus, we see that having **temimus** (an earnest, loyal relationship with Hashem) is the root that enables a person to really learn Torah

properly. The quality of our Torah learning is thus affected according to how much **temimus** we have. By a *bris*, we say, “Just as you entered the *bris*, so will you enter Torah, *chuppah*, and good deeds.” The connection is that if a person makes sure to keep his *bris*, which is to maintain his **temimus** in his relationship with Hashem, he will come to merit Torah. The **temimus** that a person has will have a direct effect on his learning.

Thus, one’s **temimus** and one’s *bris* are two interrelated matters. When a person loses his **temimus** towards Hashem, he damages his *bris* with Hashem; and the same is true vice versa – if one damages his *bris*, it’s a reflection that he is missing **temimus** towards Hashem. When a person damages the *Bris Kodesh*, the main part of the damage is that he has lost his loyal connection with Hashem. The only reason why a person wouldn’t be careful not to damage his *bris* with Hashem is because he doesn’t care about having **temimus** towards Hashem.

LEARNING TORAH WITH TEMIMUS

This is the question one needs to ask himself: When a person is learning Torah, where are his first thoughts coming from? Are they coming from a desire for *daas* [which is to simply ‘know’ more Torah, for purely intellectual reasons, and nothing to do with wanting to connect to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*’s Torah) or do his thoughts of Torah stem from his **temimus**?

Our initial thoughts, when we learn Torah, are ideally supposed to be stemming from our place of **temimus** in our selves. [We can desire to know the Torah, of course, but the very initial desire for knowledge of Torah is supposed to come from our desire for **temimus**, not for *daas*. Because the Torah is not merely an intellectual pursuit; it is our relationship with Hashem.]

Klal Yisrael first said “*Naaseh*” (We will do) before they said “*Nishmah*” (We will hear), because in order to learn the Torah, we first had

to accept that we will fulfill the Torah. We had *temimus*, and through that, we were able to accept to the Torah. We do not first try to understand and then do; first, we decide that we will do, and then, we try to understand. So we see from here that our *temimus* has to come before our *daas*.

But when a person would rather just “know” the Torah and he doesn’t first decide that he will accept it, he is really forfeiting his relationship with Hashem through his learning of the Torah! This is called damaging the *bris*! The person is neglecting his relationship with Hashem through the Torah! He’s only interested in *daas* - he has lost his *temimus*. All he cares for is *daas*, not *temimus*...

GETTING BACK OUR TEMIMUS

The Ramban says that Avraham was punished that his descendants would have to endure the Egyptian exile, because he asked Hashem for a sign that they will inherit the land. We cannot understand Avraham Avinu, of course, but according to his level, there was some breach in his *temimus* with Hashem, and for this he was punished. In other words: when we lose our *temimus*, that is what invites the Egyptian exile. We rectified this sin when we left Egypt and received the Torah, when we said *Naaseh* before *Nishmah* – we got our *temimus* back.

In the weeks of *Shovavim*, it is a time to fix the sin of damaging the *bris*. There is a superficial layer and inner layer to everything that goes on, and the same is true with *Shovavim*. The superficial layer of *Shovavim* is to carry out the practical ways of improvement that we are advised to do so we can avoid damaging the *bris*, and some of these practices are brought in *Halacha* as well. Each person has his own respective methods in how to repair the sin, and they are all holy methods.

But the inner point of *Shovavim* is so that we should get back our *temimus* with Hashem.

The depth of the Egyptian exile was that they fell into the 49th Gate of Impurity, as the *Ohr HaChaim* writes; had they fallen into the *Shaar HaNun*, the 50th Gate of Impurity, they wouldn't have been able to come out of it. What exactly is the 50th Gate of Impurity? Why can't a person be redeemed from it if he falls into it? The 50th Gate of Impurity is when a person totally loses his **temimus** – when he has lost his entire earnest yearning to have a relationship with Hashem. That is the ultimate worst level a person can ever sink to.

By contrast, the 50th Gate of Holiness is when a person has complete **temimus**; however, even Moshe Rabbeinu didn't merit it. Moshe merited the 49th level of Understanding, but he wasn't granted the 50th Gate of Understanding. Why not? Because the 50th Gate of Understanding has nothing to do with understanding. The first 49 Gates of Understanding are all within the grasp of one's *daas*, but the 50th Gate of Understanding has nothing to do with *daas*, for it is above *daas*. It is all about *emunah***temimus**, which is a whole different plane than even the highest understandings of *daas*\human comprehension.

The Torah was only given to us when we said “*Naaseh*” before we said “*Nishmah*” – when we first have **temimus** before anything else.

SHEMIRAS HABRIS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

There is no generation that has as many difficulties when it comes to keeping the *Bris Kodesh* as in today's generation.

But, for every difficulty, Hashem creates an equally powerful force that is good which can counter all the evil. The Ramban says that we are already in the 50th Gate of Impurity, and that there is no way to get out of it – unless we have the power of Torah, which can take us out of even the lowest levels. The power of Torah can take us out our current exile, which is the 50th Gate of Impurity.

We are in the 50th Gate of Impurity! This is what our early Rabbis have already written about. But, to counter this, we also have the pow-

er now to tap into the 50th Gate of Holiness, which has appeared on the scene now to assist us in our immense struggles. The “50th Gate of Holiness” is really the power of *temimus*!

We have to first be concerned about *temimus* in the Torah, before we are concerned with “knowing” the Torah - just as Klal Yisrael first said “*Naaseh*” before they said “*Nishmah*”.

We have to return to the way we were when we received the Torah at Har Sinai, our pure state, which was when we had *temimus*. Without returning to our *temimus*, our *bris* with Hashem will remain damaged.

Today’s generation has it the hardest when it comes to *Bris Kodesh*, because we are living amidst the 50th Gate of Impurity, the lowest possible level. The previous generations did not go through what we are going through when it comes to this. It is not only the amount of difficulties that have grown with this; the very kinds of difficulties we go through with this have never been faced before by the previous generations. The only way to uproot this impurity is through accessing our power to have *temimus*.

People are sitting and trying to come up with all kinds of logical solutions of how to solve the problems today we face with guarding the *Bris Kodesh*. But the truth is: we can’t make any logical calculations to solve it! There’s no logic to it. The problems we face today to our holiness defy all logic; we cannot solve them with our human logic at all. It is a problem that cannot be solved through using the power of our *daas*. The only way to solve it is if we use the power that is above *daas*: our *temimus*.

The words here are matters that are rooted in the very roots of Creation. May Hashem merit us to understand the depth of our difficult test we face; and to understand the depth behind the solution to our difficulties; and that we should merit to come to our perfection on this world.

QUESTION The topic of shemiras haBris [guarding the Holy Covenant – safeguarding one’s personal holiness] is very difficult in our generation. The closer I become to Hashem and the more I learn Torah, the stronger my evil inclination seems to become. So how is it possible to completely guard the Bris? Even if a week goes by [without sinning in this area], the next week I am suddenly attacked [by my yetzer hora in this area]. My mind begins to go crazy [with all kinds of lustful thoughts] even as I’m in middle of learning Torah. What do I do about this?

ANSWER This generation is the most unbridled kind of society in all of history. Besides for all of the forbidden deeds and sights that fill the world in every corner, the fact is that there are tools of technology which cause tumah (*defilement*) and they are found in every place. These tools are the very primal root of tumah. Therefore, even if a person doesn’t see, hear, smell, speak, or touch anything forbidden, [he is still negatively affected, for] the very air of the world is still filled with tumah. It is the “50th gate of defilement” [the most depraved level possible]. The Other Side of Evil is at work, from all directions. That is the “50th gate of defilement”, where tumah penetrates from all of the surroundings.

In previous generations, the main kind of evil was in the area of inappropriate sights, as Chazal state, “The eyes and heart are the two tools of sin”, and “The evil inclination does not take hold except in what the eyes see.” The Gemara says that if a person said the name of the harlot “Rachav”, he would immediately become defiled. But in this generation, our very being here on this world means that we are in place of the worst level of defilement, which is making itself known to us from all directions, with nothing stopping it. The more spiritually refined one is - the more that one reveals his neshamah – the more he can sense how just being here on this world, and in this generation especially, is a state of terrible spiritual suffering. For it is then that “you see an upside-down world”, where all holiness has been overturned, completely and in a terribly disturbing manner.

Practically speaking: 1) It is recommended that a person should minimize, as much as he can, how much he looks at the physical world – even to refrain from looking at things that are not forbidden to look at. A person can make an exception with this when it comes to looking at things that calm the soul. This is a matter that is different with each person, depending on what level he is on.

One should be very careful not to act above his actual level, though, because that will only backfire.

2) One should become attached to an inner kind of thought, mainly a thought of Torah or an insight of avodas Hashem.

3) The more a person penetrates into his inner world, the more his soul becomes enveloped by the inner world, and he will be less found on the outside world. This is the proper way of life which a person needs to direct his life towards.

4) When one feels that he is burning with a desire to commit an act of sin, or whenever he feels like his mind is being overtaken [by lustful thoughts], he should immerse himself in cold water. If this cannot be done, he should at least wash himself with cold water [to cool off his passion right now]. This is way to weaken the yetzer hora when it gets strong. One should also review holy verses, enthusiastically.

5) When one is amidst a moment of weakness and he feels powerless to his lustful inclinations, he should try to focus his vision on an on any nondescript point. If possible, he should focus on a letter of Torah [any of the letters of the Aleph Beis]. This is the inner way to remove one's thinking from any bothersome thoughts, in order to come out of a "scattered" state of mind. Certainly it is better if a person can get his mind busy with Torah thoughts, but if this is unrealistic for the person, one should at least divert his mind to think about anything else – that's also good.

6) There is also a piece of advice that is meant for individuals to practice: to be willing to sacrifice one's life in order to sanctify Hashem's Name, amidst the intensity of the difficult temptation. On a specific level, this means that one should be willing to die, rather than think the sinful thoughts. On a more general level, it means that one should be willing to give up one's life for Hashem (*mesirus nefesh*). And if one finds himself at the climax of temptation, he should cry out to Hashem, intensely, from the depths of his heart, and beg the Creator that he should be prevented from committing the sin.

QUESTION If one suffers from improper thoughts and physical desires for men, and he wants to come out of this problem with all of his being, what should he do? Does he just need to be stubborn in trying to overcome the urges, and daven to Hashem for help? Or is he in the category of an emotionally ill person

who is in a very severe situation, and it will not be enough for him if he just tries to change himself and daven?

The Rav has spoken about this subject in-depth in one of the shiurim, where the Rav mentioned that there are three general reasons for this sin: Conceit, a desire to take pleasure for oneself, and a desire to alter the nature which Hashem has made. Is there an avodah upon a person who has physical desires for men, to clarify his soul and identify if his desires are coming from any of the above three reasons?

ANSWER Everything in Creation has a root in holiness, where it nurses its vitality from. The same thing applies to this subject.

[In terms of Kaballah, the inner dimension of the Torah]: The root of this matter [men desiring physical intimacy with other men] is in the “Upper Partzufim”, particularly “Atik” and “Erech Anpin”, where there is entirely a “masculine” dimension, with no traces of the “feminine”. These spiritual lights are really the roots of the illumination of Mashiach, which become revealed in the final generations, and it is the completion of the illumination of the shaar HaNun d’kedushah, the “50th Gate” in the side of holiness.

The above concept also manifests in the side of evil. For every force of holiness, there is a corresponding force in the side of evil, to counter it. So there is also a “50th gate” in the side of evil, which is referred to as the “acts of Sodom” [in Sodom the people were rampant in homose*uality], the idea of the “masculine without the feminine.”

This particular evil is revealed more intensely in this generation.

On a simple level, one who has a desire to commit the acts of Sodom [the sin of homose*uality] is a soul-reincarnation of a soul from the generation of Sodom.

On a deeper level, though, this is actually the general level of our current generation. In our generation, there is also the “50th gate” in the side of holiness which counters this, and it is becoming more and more revealed. When it will be complete, Mashiach will come. But, as the revelation of the 50th gate of holiness intensifies, the revelation of the 50th gate of defilement also intensifies, and that is why this evil [of homose*uality] is also becoming more intensified. In the side of holiness, this idea manifests as the power of oneness (*echad*), where there is

no concept of “two”, for there is only “one”. This is the idea of the “masculine without the feminine”, in the side of holiness. But in the side of evil, this idea manifests as the acts of Sodom [homose*uality].

The “50th gate” [both in the side of holiness and in the side of defilement] is above nature. Nature is represented by the number 7, and when we multiply 7 by 7, the result is 49 [corresponding to the “49 gates” of the spiritual dimension which are all within nature]. After 49 is 50, corresponding to the “50th gate”, which is represented by the number that is “above nature” – the number 8. Therefore, this particular evil [homose*uality] goes above normal human nature.

When one recognizes that this desire is not natural at all, and that it is rather a result of unnatural forces which envelope the generation as a whole, and the individual specifically, this achieves a *havdalah* (*separation*) and *hachnaah* (*subjugation*) of the self from the forces of evil, for one is recognizing that this desire is not part of his intrinsic being – as you have pointed out in your question. However, it does not enable one to totally separate from this evil. For since it is unnatural, it will not be enough for a person to do the usual form of *avodah* [in order to overcome this sin]. Rather, it requires one to illuminate the spiritual light of the “50th gate” of holiness, which will banish the 50th gate of defilement. The concept of the 50th gate of holiness is all about *achdus* (*unifying*), or *echad* (*oneness*). The more a person connects to simple “oneness”, to that degree will this evil be removed from the person.

Besides this, though, since this is an evil which clings to the soul in an unnatural way, it requires one to use the light of *mesirus nefesh* (*sacrificing oneself*) in order to uproot it. This concept is mentioned in Tractate Avodah Zarah regarding heretical thoughts: One who is connected to heretical thoughts becomes so attached to the evil that he must die in order to detach from it. Meaning, he must be willing to die, rather than be heretical. Anything which becomes very attached to one’s soul is considered to be in the category of heresy [which one will need to “die”, i.e. be willing to die, rather than become further connected to the sin]. There is nothing which becomes so attached to a person as much as this particular evil [of homose*uality], which is the desire for “oneness” in the side of evil – a “oneness” that exists only in the realm of imagination.

Going further, there is an *avodah* described in the *sefarim hakedoshim*, to

reach the level of “ayin”, to become “like nothing” [to negate one’s sense of self], and this is very relevant to this topic. Specifically, there is a level of ayin that applies to each of the spiritual realms, and to any spiritual level a person may be on.

QUESTION It seems that all of the parts of a person’s body are needed for various functions and to maintain one’s existence. For example, the eyes, mouth, the feet, the liver, and etc. are all needed for various functions, except for one part of the body, however, which does not seem to upkeep one’s physical existence. A man’s private part, which is called the “Yesod” (*“the foundation”*), does not serve to upkeep one’s personal existence, and instead, its entire function is to enable the survival of mankind in general [through procreation]. Does this make sense? Is this a physical manifestation and a logical outcome that results from the importance and the holiness that is represented by this part of the body, the Yesod/Foundation?

ANSWER Correct! This part of a man’s body, as it is well-known, is called Kol, “Everything”, because it connects a person to “everything”, to the collectiveness of everything. This has several implications:

(1) It connects a person to the collectiveness of his own self [it connects him to the entirety of his being]. As an illustration, each droplet of human seed contains a microscopic image of the person himself. This is because the entire person’s being is contained in each droplet of human seed.

(2) This is the part of a man’s body which connects him to his spouse. Each of the spouse are a “half a body” before they unify through marriage, and together through the union of marriage, they become “everything”, they become part of a collectiveness. This is hinted to in the word “kallah”, a newlywed bride [which contains the root letters of the word kol/everything].

(3) It connects a person to the chain of the future generations that will come from him, and it upkeeps the existence of mankind in general [through procreation, which is the function of this part of the body].

(4) All of Creation is designed to reflect the creation of the human being. In this part of the body, there is the power to become a creator of worlds - the power to formulate the world and to formulate man – which is the all-inclusiveness of