

## NASO – ABSTINENCE TODAY

### NAZIR: ABSTAINING FROM THE PHYSICAL

*Parshas Naso* discusses the laws of the *nazir* (the “Nazirite”), who is commanded to avoid contamination with a corpse, as well as to abstain from consuming wine and grapes, and to let his hair grow long.

**Yosef** was given a blessing by his father Yaakov that he shall be “like a *Nazirite* to his brothers”; the *Gemara*<sup>1</sup> states that ever since he was separated from his brothers, he abstained from wine, just as a *nazir*. The *Maharsha*<sup>2</sup> debates whether or not he became an actual *nazir* or if he was merely abstaining from wine. The other brothers also did not drink wine ever since they sold Yosef, and the *Maharsha* states that this was just to practice behavior of a *nazir*, but not that they were actually becoming *nazirites*. As for Yosef, the simple understanding is that he became a *nazir*.

**Rashi** translates the word *nazir* with the term “*perishus*”, abstinence, for when Yosef became a “*nazir*” from his brothers, it meant that he separated himself from them. The *Targum Onkelos* adds that a *nazir* is “to Hashem”, in separating himself from contamination, wine, and from cutting his hair.

**Thus**, the essence of being a *nazir* is the trait of *perishus*, abstinence. First the *nazir* practices *perishus*, and this

leads him towards a higher level – *kedushah* (sanctity). That is what is meant by becoming a *nazir* “to Hashem”; the *Gemara* says that the word *nazir* is also from the word *nezer*, “crown”, for he is crowned and designated specially for Hashem.<sup>3</sup> But the main trait behind practicing *nezirus* is the trait of *perishus*/abstinence, in that a *nazir* practices *perishus*/abstinence by separating himself from materialism.

**The** *perishus* practiced by a *nazir* is the classic example of the entire concept of *perishus*. But it is also one of the rungs of the spiritual ladder of growth stated by Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair, which is explained in the *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*. The basis of growth is Torah, and this leads, in ascending order, to: *zehirus* (watchfulness), *zerizus* (alacrity), *nekiyus* (cleanliness), and *perishus*/abstinence.<sup>4</sup>

**The** trait of *perishus* is epitomized in the practice of *nezirus*. A *nazir* practices the total and absolute level of *perishus*, but a person must also practice *perishus* on a partial level, as part of his service to the Creator in his personal spiritual growth.

### ALTHOUGH “NEZIRUS” IS NOT PRACTICED TODAY, ITS LESSON IS STILL APPLICABLE TO ALL

**Most** of the Sages did not become

*nazirites*. There were only a few. We already mentioned Yosef *HaTzaddik* as being one example who, according to some, did become an actual *nazir*. The *Gemara* states that Avshalom<sup>5</sup> was a *nazir*, and this is derived from the fact that his long hair entangled him in a tree and caused his death. According to one opinion of the Sages, Shmuel *HaNavi* was also a *nazir*. The most famous *nazir* in history was Shimshon *HaGibor*.

**Tractate Nazir** discusses three kinds of *nezirus*: 1) a *stam nazir*, who becomes a *nazir* for 30 days; 2) a *nazir olam*, who must practice *nezirus* his entire life, and 3) *nezirus Shimshon*, who is also for the person’s entire life. The *Gemara* asks: What is the difference between *nazir olam* and *nezirus Shimshon*? The *Gemara* explains that a *nazir olam* may cut his hair when it feels too heavy upon him, whereas one practicing *nezirus Shimshon* may not.

**These** are all levels of being a *nazir*, and this kind of abstinence was only practiced by rare individuals throughout the generations. But most of our *tzaddikim* and Sages did not practice *nezirus*, certainly not in the active sense. However, they definitely were connected to the core of the behavior that lies behind *nezirus*.

*Nezirus* is not meant to be practiced by most [of *Klal Yisrael*], but the trait of *perishus*/abstinence, which is the very essence of *nezirus*, is certainly part of

1 *Shabbos 139a*

2 *ibid*

3 *Nazir 5a*

4 [The levels after that are *taharah*\purity, *chassidus*\piety, *anavah*\humility, *yiras cheit*\fear of sin, and *kedushah*\sanctity]

5 son of Dovid *HaMelech*, who eventually rebelled against his father and tried to kill him, who was punished and killed for his sins

one's *avodah*, as laid out in the *beraisa* of Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair as explained in the *sefer Mesillas Yescharim*. The trait of *perishus*/abstinence is one of the rungs of the ladder of growth which leads to *kedushah*, *ruach hakodesh*, and *techiyas hameisim*.

So although *nezirus* is not meant to be practiced by most people and it is not of practical relevance, its very idea, *perishus* (abstinence) is definitely a part of our personal *avodah*.

## ABSTAINING FROM THE FORBIDDEN

What defines *perishus*? When one commits any of the 365 prohibitions of the Torah or any of the Rabbinic prohibitions, this is worse than a lack of *perishus* since it is a violation of that which the Torah and the Sages have forbidden. So where does *perishus* come in? *Perishus* is about keeping a distance from that which is forbidden. The Sages forbade the *nazir* from eating grapes, so that he will stay away from wine. Only wine is forbidden by the Torah to a *nazir*, but by keeping a distance from grapes, he further avoids the wine.

There are two examples of *perishus*. One example is when a person keeps a distance from the "forbidden", and another example is where a person keeps a distance from materialism.

The first kind of *perishus* is to keep a distance from the forbidden. The Sages forbade certain actions so that one will not come to violate that which is already forbidden; that is the first kind of *perishus*, making something forbid-

den in order to avoid doing the forbidden.

The second kind of *perishus* is to avoid materialism. What is the idea of this kind of *perishus*? It is because man is made of a body and soul, and his main task is to lessen the physical body's hold on him and to increase the power of the soul. By connecting to materialism, the physicality of the body is given further expression, which increases the hold of the body upon the person. In order to avoid awakening the body's physicality and to increase the soul's power, one needs to abstain from materialism, even if the materialism in question is totally permitted, in order that he shouldn't awaken the physicality of the body.

This was practiced by the "*kat perushim*", the "group of abstainers", mentioned in *Chazal*. These were people who separated themselves from material matters. Those who became *nazirites* practiced this on the absolute level, but there were also those who did not take upon themselves *nezirus* yet still practiced abstinence from materialism to some level.

## ABSTINENCE FROM SOCIETY

There were two types of this kind of abstinence that was practiced. One way how this was practiced was to separate oneself from society. This is written about in *sefer HaMaspik L'Oivdei Hashem*, written by Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam, who explained that our *Avos* chose to be shepherds because they preferred to be away from society. One kind of *perishus* is separating from

society and civilization, and going into seclusion in deserts and fields.

This was also accomplished by those who would fulfill the teaching of *Chazal*, "Become exiled to a place of Torah." If a person leaves his environment in order to go to a place of Torah, it is like going into exile and it is a form of *perishus*.

However, in our generation, this matter is not so simple. There was a well-known discussion between the Chazon Ish and the Satmar Rav, centering around the words of the Rambam, that if a person lives in an environment which is spiritually harmful, he should go to live in the desert. If so, why don't we go live in the desert today, since the environment around is so impure? The Chazon Ish responded to this that in our today, going to a "place of Torah" [the yeshivos] is considered like leaving civilization and going into the desert.

(Nowadays, however, it is very hard to define what a true "place of Torah" is. In any case, most of our leaders did not actually practice *perishus* through physical seclusion – rather, they dwelled within society and civilization.)

## ABSTINENCE WITHIN SOCIETY

But there is a second kind of *perishus*/abstinence, as explained by Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam (in *Sefer HaMaspik*) and in *Chovos HaLevovos*. One abstains not by separating from society, but one abstains even as he is amongst society. This can be accomplished either through doing certain acts of abstinence, or it can be accom-

plished on an inward level. Both can be done while living in society amongst others.<sup>6</sup>

**Acting** with abstinence is a refined, subtle matter. The *Mesillas Yescharim* explains that there are prohibitions of the Torah which are applicable to all people, and there are other matters which are “Sanctify yourself with that which is permissible to you”, which are not the same with each person. *Perishus* is possible after a person recognizes his current spiritual level, and after he becomes aware of it, he abstains from certain behaviors, anything which he knows will further attach him to This World. He abstains in that amount, and not more than that. This is based on the dispute in the *Gemara* if a *nazir* is called a saint or a sinner<sup>7</sup>, and also because the *Gemara*<sup>8</sup> says that it is forbidden to cause pain to oneself. On one hand, a *nazir* is called a saint, but on the other hand, he is called a sinner.

**When** is the *nazir* a saint, and when he is a sinner? If he pains himself by abstaining from certain matters and it is within his level to handle, he is called a “saint”. Even in this case, there is some aspect of sin, as *Tosafos* explains in Tractate *Taanis*, regarding one who fasts on Shabbos over a bad dream). But if he pains himself by abstaining and it is not within his level to abstain, he is abstaining more than necessary, and in this regard, he is a sinner.

**The** only exception to this would be if someone abstains more than his current level because he is exercising *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice), the level reached by Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordaya, about whom Rebbi stated, “There are

those who acquire their share in the World To Come, in one hour.”

## MINIMAL ABSTINENCE FROM THE PHYSICAL

**But** in the normal order of things, *perishus* must be a minimal abstinence, according to one’s personal level. One should abstain by withholding himself from a little bit of physical enjoyment of this world, and this is how he practices *perishus*. Then he can go the next level.

**But** it must be emphasized that in order for a person to do this, he must really know what his level is. Much exertion is needed in order to know oneself very well, and what his true level is. It is impossible for a person to know exactly what his level is, just as it is impossible to determine the exact moment of midnight. But as much as can get to know his level, he should try abstaining a little bit from some materialism, slowly but fundamentally progressing.

**One’s** *avodah* is to keep abstaining a little bit more, until he can reach the level of *kedushah*/sanctity, where he can sanctify worldly pleasures because he is so connected to holiness, as explained in *Mesillas Yescharim*.

**In** the generation we live in, the world is filled with pursuing all kinds of materialism and lusts, to the point that it is difficult to know how to live a true and internal kind of life. One needs to settle his mind and determine how he can abstain, on his own level, from materialism. One should know

how much he needs to make use of materialism, and what he can say no to.

**This** will differ with each person, according to his own current level. It must be emphasized, once again, that one must abstain only according to the level he is at. If he abstains too little, he will not really grow that much. If he abstains too much, he will exhaust himself, because he will be acting way above his energies, and it will backfire on him. The results are often tragic. From abstaining too much, he will eventually rebel and then fall abysmally, in a way that could not have been ever imagined.

**By** practicing *perishus* through making small and slow progress, one begins the *avodah* of living a life of *perishus*, and it can be accomplished even while living amongst others. However, this is but the external level of *perishus*. The inner level of *perishus*, as explained in *Chovos HaLevovos*, is that a person can reach a level where he is amidst hundreds of people, yet he is still separated from them and from their behaviors. On a deeper level, he is inwardly attached to Hashem, to the root of his soul.

**A** person cannot reach inner abstinence, though, unless he first reaches external abstinence. He must first practice external abstinence, before he can get to the inner level.

**Until** now, we have briefly explained the levels of *perishus*/abstinence, as explained in the words of *Chazal* and by those who came after them, who explained this matter.

<sup>6</sup> See *Ma’or VaShemesh, Kedoshim; Ohel Elimelech* 81

<sup>7</sup> *Nedarim* 9b-10a, *Nazir* 4a

<sup>8</sup> *Tractate Bava Kamma: Chapter Eight*



## INTERNAL ABSTINENCE: LIVING INTERNALLY

**The** inner level of *perishus* is when one lives inwardly, recognizing that he has an inner world of his own. This is a subtle matter to understand, so let's explain it.

**There** is a misconception about this matter. Practicing *perishus* amongst people seems to be that even in the presence of other people, one doesn't have any feelings for them, because he is inwardly disconnected from them, so he doesn't care what happens to them. With such an attitude, he will no doubt become an anti-social person, cutting himself off emotionally from anyone around him. This is not the way of the Torah, whose ways are "ways of pleasantness".

**The** truth about *perishus* is totally different than the above attitude. It is, on one hand, to be around people and to be disconnected from the way they behave, from their world, from their lifestyles, and from their worldviews; and at the very same time, to feel connected to all others, in the very depths of the soul. That is true *ahavas Yisrael*, to recognize that at our root, all Jewish souls are one.

**The** following illustrates how a person can have *perishus* amongst others yet still have *ahavas Yisrael*. When a baby is born, it cannot speak or express itself. Slowly as time goes on, the parents become more and more connected to their child. Yet, the parents are not connected to their child's life. They love him, they think about him, they are connected to him, and they will care for him and exert themselves for him. But they are not found in the child's world.

**In** the same way, we can understand what internal *perishus* is. Without internal *perishus*, a person just lives life as it is, living in this world as it is, and that is how most people live. Some are more careful with observing *halachah*, and some less, but most people feel like they are connected to this world as it is. Even in those who learn Torah and strictly observe the *mitzvos*, they live the world as it is.

**But** if someone cares about his soul and he searches for spiritual growth, for truth, for closeness to Hashem, he develops an inner world of his own. In his external behavior, he will behave like everyone else, except for some minor external differences, such as learning more Torah and fulfilling more *mitzvos*, which would earn him the title of "*masmid*", but this is all external behavior. Inwardly, a person can slowly distance himself from the people found on this world, from their lifestyles, opinions, and ways of thinking. What interests most people will usually not interest him, and the same is true vice versa. This internal separation from others is not only meant to be practiced by those who strictly observe Torah and *mitzvos* when they need to separate themselves from the lifestyles and opinions of those who do not keep the Torah, who regard the forbidden as permissible.

**Rather**, this separation is necessary even from those who strictly observe Torah and *mitzvos*, when they are attached to This World and are very interested in the news and events of the world, and who feel "out of it" if they do not listen to the news and don't follow everything that goes on in the world today....

## THE BALANCE BETWEEN SEPARATION FROM SOCIETY AND CONNECTION TO OTHERS

**The** *Gemara* says that "one's mind should mix with others". One needs to get along with others and pleasantly mix with them.

**But** we can compare this to a father and a grandfather sitting by the Shabbos table and observing their young children. The father and grandfather are interested in getting to know all of their children and grandchildren, and they will ask them questions and the children will answer them. Perhaps they also get *nachas* from them. But they are not really that interested in the child's life.

**They** are not found in their world and are not connected to that place. Rather, they are found their own lives (and in fact, it is pitiful if they would become connected to the world of their children and grandchildren).

**A** true inward kind of life is to relate to others with "ways of pleasantness", to feel connected to others, to get along with others, and, to some extent, to be interested in the welfare of others. But being interested in others and inquiring about what's going in their life should not be about feeling interested in others' lives. Rather, it is about inquiring about their well-being and to want good for them. Since that is what others may need, one should do so, to show care and concern for others by showing an interest in their lives. It is an act of *chesed* and it is *ahavas Yisrael*.

**It** is for the same reason that a father and mother must show an interest in their child when he is throwing

a ball, and to look interested in his ball. Although the parents don't care about the ball, they need to show an interest in his ball, because that is what the child needs in order to feel cared about. Understandably, the love of parents for their child should go deeper than this, according to the abilities that Hashem has bestowed upon them.

## BECOMING MORE INWARD

If internal *perishus* (inward separation from others' lives) is not preceded with external *perishus* (external seclusion from others), it is very likely that practicing internal *perishus* will lead to delusion. However, to remain at the level of external *perishus* alone is like a body without a soul. The main aspect of *perishus* is to develop a rich, internal world in oneself.

The more a person is immersed in Torah study, not superficially but in the depths of his soul, the more one reaches into his soul and reveals his unique share in his world, he is connected to his *pnimiyus* (inner world), and even more so, to the root of his soul's light, Hashem.

It as the *Chovos HaLevovos* describes, that the pious individual [who practices internal *perishus*] can be on a level where even as he is amongst people, he is inwardly connected and attached with Hashem. That is the highest level, and it only comes at the end.

But way before that, a person must build his inner world of Torah, his inner world of deep self-recognition, of inner work with his soul and all its parts.

Slowly but surely, as he does this, his inner world will expand, beginning with a small opening and eventually becoming filled with much *daas* (inner knowledge). He will have an inner expansiveness to live in, his own private inner estate. This is called living a life of true *perishus*.

## PRACTICING INNER PERISHUS/ ABSTINENCE TODAY

This way of living, of internal *perishus*, is possible even when a person lives within society, in the world we recognize and know. Anyone can find a quiet place to go to where he can practice some separation from society today.

Understandably, one should not go to places that are lowly and impure. One should try to look for the most refined place he knows of. Although even the best places today are gruff compared to what it used to be like in the earlier generations, one should still find quiet and refined places in the world to go to, where he can build his own inner world and feel separate from the world around him. He can live in his own internal world.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* said: "He mourns in his heart, but there is joy on his face". In other words, one can live with alternating modes. He can have a place in himself where his own inner world is, and he can have a place in himself for others. Living life in this way is not the same thing as being a *nazir*, who had to avoid becoming contaminated to a corpse, avoid wine and grapes, and to refrain from cutting his hair. But it is still the very same perspective and attitude of living like a *nazir*.

If a person cannot relate to a life of *perishus* at all, he cannot become truly and completely connected to the Torah and to Hashem. He may be somewhat connected, and he will certainly receive reward for this, but if one searches for an internal and truthful life, he must know that practicing external *perishus*, and mainly inward *perishus*, is the way of living that was practiced by our forefathers, throughout the generations.

External *perishus*, such as taking to the deserts and secluded fields, was only practiced by individuals, such as the prophets. But the practice of *perishus* within society, as well as internal *perishus*, was practiced by all great people throughout the generations. They all had an inner world inside of themselves which elevated them above their surroundings, yet at the same time, they all related to those around them with pleasantness; love for the Jewish people, and with bestowing good upon others.

## IN CONCLUSION

May Hashem help us all separate as much as we can from materialism and from This World; we cannot become loners from society, who live apart from civilization (may Heaven help them), but even as we are within society, we can abstain from the world, each of us on our own level, until the time of the redemption, when the world will be improved and we will be able to fully live in it. In the time being, where This World is still here and it remains the way it is, each person can still find his own internal world, where one can connect himself to his own soul, to the Torah, and to the Creator.

## Q&amp;A

**TEMIMUS – CHILDLIKE INNOCENCE**

**QUESTION:** What causes a person to lose his temimus (childlike innocence)? And how can he get it back?

**ANSWER:** It is because as a person goes through life, he keeps encountering things that are the opposite of temimus, and he becomes very, very affected from it. One should find the best possible environment that's protected from the outside world (as much as possible) and then value the temimus that he finds there, and he should become connected to it, deeply, and gradually he will ignite his temimus again. Also, when a person cries, the power of shedding tears can bring him back to his childhood state and awaken his temimus again. After exposing his temimus again, he then needs to allow himself to deeply connect himself, to his temimus.

**TEMIMUS VS. P'SHITUS**

**QUESTION 1)** The Rav mentioned in a derashah ("Living A Life of Neshamah") that the level called p'shitus is higher than temimus. What is the difference between these two levels of simple faith in Hashem? Is temimus a level where one's "I" walks earnestly and simply with Hashem, where one is aware that "I don't want to sin because that is not my true will", and "I don't ask questions on Hashem's conduct" – it is self-nullification to Hashem but it involves our "I" – whereas p'shitus is when a person is divested of the "I" altogether, the place in the soul (or perhaps above the soul) where there is no "I" at all?

**ANSWER:** P'shitus is the level of hiskalelus, being integrated with Hashem, in which one becomes "included" in the Creator, as it were. In contrast, temimus is to "Be wholesome with Hashem", it is when one's "I" walks with Hashem (so you were right in your assumption of what "temimus" is), it is to move after one's root.

**QUESTION**

2) Is p'shitus the same thing as bittul, nullifying the "I"? Or is it even higher than bittul?

**ANSWER:**

When one moves towards bittul, he is moving towards p'shitus. When one reaches bittul, that is p'shitus. Understand that there is a difference between bittul, nullifying oneself, with one who is already batel, already nullified.

**QUESTION:** Which sefarim discuss p'shitus? Can a person work on the level of p'shitus at whatever level he is at, or is this a high level which most people cannot reach?

**ANSWER:** I don't know of a sefer that discusses it openly. It is a matter which 'sparks forth' from the words of Raboteinu (lit. "our rabbis", meaning the Sages and the holy books), it is like a spark, like the rays of the sun, and when Mashiach comes, this spark will shine the afternoon sun.

Some people are already born with this "spark", and it is upon them to expand it further. But for most people, this power is hidden from them, and they can reach it either through ascending to higher levels until they can touch upon this "spark", p'shitus, or, they can reach it through mesirus nefesh (giving up their will for Hashem).

**WHAT PREVENTS US FROM TEMIMUS?**

**QUESTION** Are there things today we are doing which prevent us from having temimus?

**ANSWER:** A: All that we see with our physical eyes can take away our temimus. For example, you see your house, and you naturally think that some contractor built it. You get used to thinking that people do everything in this world. When a person reads and hears the news all the time and he keeps hearing/reading the opinions of others people, how each person understands things, and this makes us think that people are in charge of this world. It is the opposite of emunah which is to believe that Hashem runs the world, and the only thing which we can do is to use our power of free will. All of the news outlets – secular media, Jewish newspapers, and even the most Chareidi newspapers contain outright heresy. They all are indicating that people run the world. The more a person lives a life of temimus, the more he views the world through different lenses. He is aware that whenever a person does something, he is merely a messenger of Hashem. But when we get used to reading [or hearing] the news on a set basis, we get used to thinking that people run this world which is the opposite of a temimus kind of life. If someone can hear the news all the time and tell himself that Hashem is running the world even after all that he hears, then it would be a point open for discussion. But if a person regularly listens to the news, he probably

isn't reacting that way, and it gets a person used to heresy on a regular basis!

**EXAMPLES OF TEMIMUS**

**QUESTION** Can the Rav give a few examples of how we can feel like a "tamim" towards Hashem and realize that He's in control of everything?

**ANSWER:** We are in a world being dominated by attacks from all kinds of forces, such as Islamic extremists, wicked people who are constantly contemplating ways of how to kill. If one tries to think logically of what causes terrorism, either he'll conclude that it's Arabs from Syria or from Iran, or from some other place in the world. But you can realize that they are all messengers of Hashem, and Hashem is using them to carry out His will – it is really not possible to handle them using our puny human logic. Hashem is leading them, and this is above the understanding of our human intellect.

The wisest people in the world perhaps can wonder of how to deal with them, but do they know what's enabling them to act? No, because it is Hashem Himself who is letting them act. The wise people in the world can try to think and think of what to do about them, but Hashem lets them act as He wills, and all of their rationalizations are for naught.

A person can see that all that he does understand is but a drop of understanding in the incomprehensible. We don't even understand the tiniest detail of Hashem's ways. Reb Noach of Kobrin zt"l said that without emunah, it's not possible to leave the house, and with emunah, one can conquer everything. Most people though are leaving their homes each day without emunah, out of immaturity towards life. But when a person has true understanding, and he thinks, he can see how the entire world is being led by Hashem, and that we have no comprehension of anything, and we can't predict even the next moment. So how do we survive in this world? Only through using the depth of the power temimus!

**ROOT OF ALL MIDDOS IS TEMIMUS**

**QUESTION** Is temimus my essence, or is it one of our middos?

**ANSWER:** It is a middah, but it is not just one of the middos; it is the root of all the middos. The Torah is called "Toras Hashem

Temimah” – it is perfect because it contains everything. So too, temimus is the root power of all the powers in our soul, because it can lead us to everything else.

## WOMEN & GETTING TO KNOW YOUR THOUGHT

QUESTION: I am a woman who is learning the Rav’s series Getting To Know Your Thoughts, which talks about how men can develop their analytical abilities and Torah study. The Rav explains how a person needs to reach the inner source of thought. How can a woman reach this since women don’t learn Torah in-depth like men do?

ANSWER: Women mainly need to become connected with simple faith in Hashem, which includes peshitus (simplicity), temimus (earnestness) and emunah (faith in Hashem). That is how women gain deep, inner understanding.

There are some women who are exceptions, who are able to think analytically like men can. For them, it’s different. In any case, each woman has to figure out what her personal capabilities are when it comes to this.

## HAKARAH, D’VEYKUS, T’MIMUS

QUESTION: Hakarah, D’veykus, T’mimus ? ? ?

ANSWER: D’veykus, T’mimus

If a person has a soul root in “Asiyah” (action) does he also need to serve Hashem with this concept of hakarah/recognition?

A: You’re asking a very good question. The closer a person is to Asiyah/action, certainly he does more practical action and work. But even in the world of action that we live on, we can see that even people who are very action-oriented are able to act according to their unique strengths. Even goyim are able to figure out what they’re unique in and what’s appropriate for them to do personally. They find work and jobs based on understanding what their personal strengths are, from recognizing themselves properly. In contrast to this, others will run from one job to another, and they can’t stay put. So even in the world of practical action, there is a need to recognize oneself properly, in order to be successful. Understandably, the more spiritual a person is, the more he uses his power of recognition not only when it comes to practical action, but for higher purposes. But even in the world of total practical action, we can see how some people can manage a house better and be organized, while others don’t know the first thing about

managing a house. The ability of recognition can be used on many different levels, whether in the spiritual or in the world of practical action. In either case, one can know clearly where he stands.

Q: The purpose of serving Hashem is d’veykus, “To cling to Him”, and this seems to be when one feels Hashem’s light, when he feels that bond. It seems to be an emotional thing. It doesn’t sound like a “recognition”...

A: Here is an example from the physical world to help us understand something about a spiritual concept. A person has a baby. He loves the baby, hugs him, etc. The baby though has nothing unique about him. He doesn’t even express anything towards the parents. Yet they still love him and show affection towards him. They are connected to him. The baby gets bigger and slowly he makes expressions, and we begin to see the child’s personality. When the parents now love him and hug him, it’s the same hug as before, but before when they hugged him, they didn’t recognize him, and now when they hug him, they recognize their child better. They loved him strongly right when he was born, even before they recognized his personality, but their love for their child grows stronger with the more the child develops. They recognize him better, and they feel a deeper connection to their child. The more we recognize, the more we connect.

Now here’s a more spiritual example. Two people are learning Torah. One of them learns 7 pages of Gemara a day and reviews it too. He’s connected to his learning. Another person learns Torah by clarifying each thing he learns, becoming clear about each matter, beginning from the psukim in the Torah about the matter all the way down to the halachah l’maaseh. These 2 people are both connected to their Torah learning, but whose connection is stronger? The one who’s clearer about his learning. The one who is learning 7 pages of Gemara has a desire to learn Torah, and that certainly connects him to his learning, but his connection isn’t yet subtle because he hasn’t yet become clear about what he learns. The one whose clearer about what he has learned will feel a subtler connection to his Torah learning.

Q: So what’s the purpose to reach – d’veykus in Hashem, or hakarah of Hashem?

A: Very good question! Now that we just explained that hakarah brings d’veykus, you are asking what the goal is, hakarah or d’veykus.

Right now you are viewing hakarah as some external form of connecting to Hashem and you are viewing d’veykus as something else, and therefore you are asking right now if the main thing is d’veykus or hakarah.

Q: That’s because I understand d’veykus to be more of an emotional bond with Hashem, to feel Hashem as real, to feel that I’m walking with Hashem because I’m connected with Him, as the Baal HaTanya says, that d’veykus to Hashem is by davening where we can understand that d’veykus is an emotional bond with Hashem, the service of the heart.

A: You are viewing d’veykus as another step to hakarah, as if we can connect to Hashem either through hakarah or through emotion. They are both in the heart. The outer layer of the heart is emotion, and the inner layer of the heart is daas, not just emotion, but daas, and daas is rooted in the intellect. The intellect extends to the emotions. We have our intellectual abilities of chochmah and binah, and we also have daas. One of the big differences is that chochmah and binah are completely intellectual, they are called mochin (the brain) whereas daas is identified as hargashah, emotion (though we do find that daas is also sometimes called mochin). Daas begins from the mochin, the intellect, but it reaches the heart, where it becomes hargashah, emotion. Daas is rooted in mochin (the brainy abilities), which is its root, while its outer layer is hargashah, feeling. According to the teachings of Chabad, daas is to think constantly of Hashem, which means that daas is either a feeling or a focused thought. In the system of Chabad teachings, it’s clear that daas is not a feeling but a thought. Right now we are talking about connecting to Hashem. There is a connection to Him through feeling, “In the house of G-d we shall go with feeling”, but the d’veykus itself is either an emotion alone or a connection of daas, the mind, in combination with hargashah, feeling. These are three stages.

Compare it to a child’s stages of growth. First a child doesn’t know anything, then he develops his feelings, and finally, he develops his thinking. The first stage is tmimus (earnestness, not knowing anything), the second stage is hargashah (feeling) and the last stage is mochin (intellect). So too, in our connection to Hashem, there is a way to connect to Him through tmimus, which is actually a very deep connection to Him. There is also a way of connecting to Him through hargashah, feeling, and there is also a way of



connecting to Him through mochin, intellect. But with feeling alone, there is just reactivity, and the reactivity soon diminishes, it doesn't last. You can't hold on to an emotional state constantly. The emotion goes away at some point. Sometimes you feel inspired, and later the inspiration wanes, like a fire that dies down. The fire leaps up and later the fire shrinks. Connecting to Hashem through tmimus is a deep, deep connection that comes from the root of the soul. Connecting to Hashem by way of the mochin is the second-to-strongest connection, while connecting to Hashem through feelings is the third-to-strongest connection. A small child when he begins to get older, he loses his tmimus. He gains emotion and he hasn't yet developed his mind. He is found at an immature level.

Thus, feelings are merely a pathway, a bridge (regesh/emotion is from the word geresht/bridge), in order to get to a greater goal. If someone builds his life based on emotion and feeling alone, or mainly on emotion/feeling, his life is based on a shaky, unstable foundation, on reactive feelings that are temporary which lose their strength. Reactiveness is not an inner connection to something, only to the outer level of something. An emotional reaction of amazement to something does not absorb the matter, it only gets the outer layer of the matter. If a person sees a new thing, he is amazed at it, but once he gets used to it, it's no longer new and he loses the amazement. But if a person clarifies what something is, he becomes connected to it intrinsically, and he doesn't care if it's old or new, he's connected to it. Being in awe of something is an external connection to the thing. If the emotions serve as a pathway to connect the person to the inner layer of something, then it has served its purpose. But if we base our entire path on emotion, our path will be shaky and unstable.

The subtlest and deepest thing to feel is when one can feel the subtlety of the wisdom of something – when he can feel that which he knows.

So, to review and be clear: We can certainly use emotions to connect to Hashem, but this is not the purpose, it is only a means to a greater end. We can't base our avodah on it. We can use emotions as a way to get to recognition, but we cannot base everything entirely on emotion. We can't rely on our feelings.

Q: The Baal Shem Tov said that after all

that he did, he is leaving it all behind and now he is serving Hashem with pashtus (simply). It sounds like hakarah (recognition) is only a means to a greater end, because after all that he recognized, he realized that he should act simply. What did he mean?

A: Recognition (hakarrah) is only one step, as you said. The deeper place to get to in the soul is when a person becomes a tamim, earnest. The greatest quality is tmimus.

Q: So is that what the Baal Shem Tov meant (that tmimus is the greatest level to come to)?

A: Correct. There is a level beyond hakarah (recognition), and that is when the nature of our soul is revealed, the yearning of the soul to do the will of the Creator. That is the depth of the soul's power of tmimus, earnest simplicity, beyond all calculative thinking and beyond even recognition (and certainly it's beyond the emotions).

Q: So then why should we try to aim for hakarah?

A: Because you need to build the entire inner structure of the soul. A person has to build his deeds, his emotions, and his power of recognition, and he also needs to build his power of p'shitus (simplicity) which is also called emunah or tmimus. A person has to build all of these powers. If one builds only part of these, that is where he is found and limited to. If one builds all of these, then he will be found at whatever power his "soul root" is rooted in. But when a person has the complete inner structure, he develops also his tmimus which is above every quality: "Be simple with Hashem your G-d."

Q: Why can't we define hakarah as tmimus?

A: First of all, your question is very good. The final goal is to come to the level of tmimus. However, we cannot base our avodah on tmimus. We cannot start our avodah by aiming for tmimus. By most people, their tmimus is very blocked from them. By a very small percentage of people, that is not the case, but for most people, tmimus was only in their childhood (some were more earnest when they were children, and some were less, but all children have the childlike innocence of tmimus), and at a later stage when they got older and matured, their tmimus became covered over. If we want to build our entire approach based on tmimus, this would be most difficult.

We have abilities that are more revealed

and activated, which we can use in order to get to that place. All of us have emotions that are activated, for example, and with some it is more and with some it is less, but all of us can clearly see our emotions. Our emotions are therefore revealed and activated (on varying levels). And our thinking abilities are also active. So we can use these activated abilities in order to reach a more hidden place in ourselves. That is why we explained here that the main thing is not avodah, rather the main thing is to go from one recognition to another – to use our revealed, activated abilities, such as our actions, feelings, and recognition, which we are conscious of. If you take a person at the middle of his life and ask him "Do you identify your tmimus and how you use it?", some people will take a long time thinking if they can identify their tmimus at all. And even if they do identify how it still exists in them, they are using it very minimally, and therefore it is very hard for a person to base his entire approach on using his power of tmimus.

There is also another reason why we can't develop everything based on tmimus. It takes many years for the ability of tmimus to affect our every aspect. We would just be trying to build up our tmimus, and the rest of our soul will remain unbalanced. It is the abilities of mochin and hakarah which keep us organized and functional, at any level we are on. But the ability of tmimus – which a person only has a small percentage of that he's consciously using – is not going to build a person, if he doesn't build up his power of recognition. He will become dysfunctional, because he can't be guided by his tmimus. It is only when a person reaches tmimus at the end of all of his avodah that he can find the innermost point of life. But it is impossible for a person to begin serving Hashem based on tmimus.

It is possible for him to set aside time to reveal forth his power of tmimus, but to base his entire avodah on his tmimus is very dangerous. Whereas if we base our avodah on mochin and hakarah, this is the ideal design that we can build upon. Is it the final goal to arrive at? No. Just as you figured out. The goal is tmimus! But our approach has to be that we are going from one hakarah to the next, because that is the fundamental structure which we can build everything upon.