

P A R T F I V E

BUILDING

A Sanctuary In The Heart

SELF CONTAINED MANUAL
FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

USING THE POWER OF SPEECH
TO ATTAIN CLOSENESS TO HASHEM

UNEDITED SPECIAL INTERNET EDITION

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Author's Preface

(Do **Not** Skip This Introduction)¹

1.

The style of this *sefer* uses two approaches: one thing we will be doing a lot is to constantly review each point many times, and the other thing we will be doing throughout this *sefer* is to always talk to Hashem about everything.

If your *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) comes and tells you that this is something new and thus incorrect to do, know that this is a foolish argument. The method here is not new, and it is found as well in the last will and testament of the author of *sefer Yesod V'Shoresh H'Avodah*.

2.

We will quote here some of his words²: “My beloved son, I am writing you all this so that you can place your hearts towards this lofty *avodah* (service). We should always have a *tefillah* (prayer) prepared on our lips – whether a long one, or a short one – to the Blessed Creator. From all the *mitzvos*, only *tefillah* is called *avodah*. Therefore, my beloved son, remember and do not forget this lofty *avodah*. The *tefillos* which you utter must always come from your heart, and then they will surely be accepted by Hashem. Such a *Tefillah* comes to the heart of a person who greatly loves Hashem. This is the main will of Hashem in the creation of man on this lowly world; remember, my beloved son, and do not forget this *avodah*, and then you will be one of the true servants of Hashem.”

He also writes³, “It was always on the tip of my tongue to constantly mention Hashem, and even when I would learn Torah or daven or do a *mitzvah*, I would say it openly and happily, these three words: “You are my Creator!” I would see these three words many times, again and again, from

*1 This chapter deals with the fundamental Avodah that the Rov frequently stresses: Hisbodedus (Jewish meditation). There are several places in which the Rov discusses this Avodah; it might be helpful to see those other sections and see which kind works best for you: Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Volume IV, Chapters 3-5; the derashah entitled “Heart of the Jewish Woman,” and most notably in his recent series given to women, “Getting To Know Your Individuality” (currently ongoing at 3 chapters, with another 7 chapters *iy”h* to follow.) The English translations of these sefarim\derashos are all available at www.bilvavi.net/englishtranslations.*

2 Tzavooh of Baal HeYesod V'Shoresh H'Avodah (11-12), printed in sefer Yesod V'Shoresh H'Avodah

3 ibid, 34

longing for Hashem. After saying these three words, I would say, “My Creator, I believe wholeheartedly that You created all the upper and lower worlds, endless universes, and I am accepting Your G-dliness upon me. Before I would do a mitzvah, I would also say these words...”

3.

We do not mean here that we need to simply copy what the author of *Yesod HaShoresh V'Avodah* did.

First of all, only he could practice such a thing, because he was on a very exalted level. We do not compare to him.

Also – and this is the main reason – when a person talks to Hashem, it has to come from within himself, and to copy someone else is being superficial, and it is almost pointless. Every person has to speak from his individuality – what a person says has to be from his own language, and every person must also speak to Hashem from his heart, from his true inner desires, and not from his intellect. When a person just says what's on his *mind* to Hashem, but he's not talking from his *heart*, it is almost pointless. A person has to use his own original feelings for this, and not copy other people.

This is the basis of the entire method of this sefer – everything must come from within your own feelings, and not from copying others.

This point should be absorbed well, and it is the inner point of this whole sefer. ***Don't just “copy” what the author is writing here*** – use your own language to speak to Hashem; I have only written here how to talk to Hashem so that reader can learn how to avoid certain mistakes when talking to Hashem. Please bear in mind this point and don't forget it. Without remembering this point, there will be almost no gain from this sefer.

4.

In order to talk to Hashem, we must mention another introductory point, which we will be discussing a lot in this sefer.

One has to know that it is usually impossible to *immediately* begin talking to Hashem. First, a person needs to sit in solitude with himself, and arrange his thoughts properly. (Arranging one's thoughts applies to every topic in this sefer, and it is a matter which also requires explanation. Without crystallizing our thoughts, a person's way will lack foundation. These chapters, however, are not about how we can arrange our thoughts, but on the point of how we can talk to Hashem).

After one arranges his thoughts, he can then speak out detail after detail in his life to Hashem. But before a person does this, one needs to first build up his self properly, and this is done by being alone⁴. Without building the self, a person might only be involved the whole time with matters that are outside himself, and he will not be experiencing himself.

(The truth is that Hashem is actually part of a person, because our soul is called a “piece of Hashem.” However, if a person doesn’t feel this, he views Hashem as a force outside himself).

Many times throughout this sefer, we will mention how one must arrange his thoughts and then speak to Hashem. However, we usually will not go into how to do this, because it would take too long to explain. But the reader should know that one must always arrange his thoughts properly before talking to Hashem, and only after that should he speak out everything. (On a higher level, it’s possible for a person to talk to Hashem directly even without preparing the thoughts beforehand. But this level can only come after many years, and even in this, not all situations are the same.)

That is the general rule – but for every rule, there are some exceptions to the rule. This can be, for example, when a person has a situation in which he cries out to Hashem out of a particularly painful situation that arouses him, and he doesn’t have much time to think beforehand about what he will say to Hashem. This is called *tzaakah*, (crying out), and in these situations, it is actually better not to think, and one should instead immediately daven to Hashem (The source for this is the possuk in Eichah (2:18), “*Their hearts cried out to Hashem.*”).

These matters are very subtle and refined, and a person has to really know his situation well to consider if maybe this is indeed the case (that he doesn’t need to think at all, and that he just needs to daven and cry to Hashem). For this, a person needs to know his soul well, and he also needs to know well what his specific situation. If one is truly seeking Hashem, he will arrive at the truth, for it is written, “*Hashem will not hold back good from those who walk wholeheartedly.*”⁵

5.

Another thing the reader should know is that this sefer does not bring a person to the ultimate goal of being a true *oived Hashem* (servant of Hashem) unless one uses his inner world. Let us explain what we mean.

⁴ This is called the power of “*levad*”; see *Getting To Know Your Self* by this author.

⁵ *Tehillim* 84: 12

A person has a soul, and the soul is covered with “garments” – which are our actions, our emotions, and our thoughts.⁶ First a person needs to work with the garments over his soul and perfect them; one needs to perfect his actions, his emotions, and his thoughts.

After this, a person can then enter more inward – to the soul itself. This is the inner *d'veykus* (connection) one can have with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* – it is a *d'veykus* that is above our thoughts.⁷

This *sefer* mainly deals with the level of someone who is still working with the “garments” of his soul – not with the soul itself; after perfecting our “garments” of the soul, there is a more inner work to do, and this is how we reach our very soul. However, this higher stage is only meant for certain individuals to work on.⁸

6.

Many times throughout this *sefer*, we will be making use of a quality called *temimus* (simplicity, or wholeheartedness).

Many people think that *temimus* means that you're not smart or unlearned. When a person has been used to learning for many years, he is used to deep analysis and taking matters apart intellectually, and thus he might view *temimus* as something to be frowned upon (see the introduction to *Mesillas Yesharim*). But the truth is that true *temimus* – not imaginary or temporary *temimus*, but real *temimus* – is something which is an awesome quality to have when it comes to serving Hashem, like it is written, “*And you shall be wholehearted with Hashem.*”⁹ It is a very exalted quality to have, and it is actually very hard to attain, because most learned people do not have *temimus*.

⁶ The actions are the outermost garment of the soul, and they cover over the emotions. The emotions cover over the thoughts, and the thoughts cover over the essence of the soul. By penetrating the garments, we can arrive at the core of our soul. We need to first perfect our actions, which is our most external garment of the soul. Then we need to perfect our emotions, and then we need to perfect our thoughts. When we perfect our thoughts, we have bypassed all the garments of the soul, and it is then that our very soul can be reached. This is explained in “Getting To Know Your Self.”

⁷ In other words, it cannot be reached by “thinking” about it.

⁸ In the Hebrew version of this *sefer*, the author writes that some of these matters are mentioned in the last two sections of the *sefer* (which have not been translated in English, due to its high level content), but that these matters can only be understood by rare individuals. Editor's Note: In *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Sukkos* (page 101) the author writes that there are two parts to *Hisbodedus*: an external stage, and a later, internal stage. The first stage of *Hisbodedus*, which is the external stage, is for one to silence his five soul garments: the actions, the speech, the feelings, the thoughts, and the will. The later, internal stage of *hisbodedus* is to feel alone with Hashem, and this is the stage in which one can reach his inner self. The author writes that in our times, there is almost no one who totally reaches his inner self, as all the five soul garments must be silenced in order to reach the self, and few can do this. But the more and more we silence our soul garments, the closer and closer we are to our inner self – and thus the more we learn how to silence our psyche (actions, speech, feelings, thoughts and will), the more and more we get in touch with our true self.

⁹ *Devorim* 18: 13

We need **both** to be analytical as well as to have *temimus*. When people are used to being analytical, though, they naturally disdain *temimus*. It is indeed hard for a person to both be analytical as well as to have *temimus* at the same time, because the two concepts contradict each other. However, this is the goal of this sefer – that a person should both be very learned and sharp, as well as to be very simple in his relationship with Hashem, relating to Him with childlike innocence.

7.

When a person doesn't have *temimus*, he will think that this sefer is for unlearned people, or that it is for people who were born with *temimus* as a natural part of their personality. But the truth is that real *temimus* comes from the depths of the soul, and it is a very deep intellectual awareness as well for anyone who believes in it. Real *temimus* is not foolish naiveté. The purpose of a Jew is two-fold: to become a *Talmid Chocho*m (Torah scholar) who can think sharply, balanced with the quality of a strong *temimus* with Hashem – “*as an infant upon its mothers lap.*”¹⁰

The quality of *temimus* was epitomized by Yaakov Avinu, who was called an *ish tam*, “a wholesome man.”¹¹

8.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* (chapter 18) describes how a person can have a false kind of piety, in which a person acts very piously and devout, but it's all because he is unlearned, and how such a person makes others think that being pious means to be foolish, which in turn makes people look at piety with disdain.

The same can be applied to the quality called *temimus*. When people act with *temimus* but they do not act in compliance with the Torah and they are unguided, they cause others who see them to think that *temimus* is a sign of fools. This results in a misconception toward *temimus*, which is really a holy quality by essence (when it is done with guidance). This is part of the plan of the *yetzer hora*, who seeks to distance people from the truth; it shows people that *temimus* must be something that only blundering fools must be into, and not for people learned in the Torah.

Don't fall into its argument. Build up your inner world. This is the two-fold mission you have: make sure you are rich in Torah knowledge, and learn the Torah very in-depth; but with this, make sure you also acquire for yourself a deep and stable kind of *temimus* wholeheartedness with your Creator.

¹⁰ *Tehillim* 131: 2

¹¹ *Beraishis* 25: 27

This is the goal of this sefer: to bring a person close to his Creator using a holy kind of *temimus* - the power to have wholehearted simplicity towards Hashem – and not to act with foolish naiveté, which is a base kind of *temimus* that stems from the animalistic part of the soul (the *nefesh habehamis*).

May Hashem merit us to reach the holy kind of *temimus*.

01 | Introduction

In this section, we will discuss the ways of how to serve Hashem, and it is an internal process of clarification of what Avodas Hashem is. However, one should not attempt to work on any of these matters immediately after reading about them. First a person should read about these matters a few times, and after you see the general picture of all that's going over here, you can then try to apply them practically; there is an order of what to work on first, and we will list them.

1. **Remembering Hashem throughout the day**, simply. This is not explained in this sefer; this sefer begins with the step after this, which is *emunah*.¹²
2. **Emunah**. We will explain how we work on this in the chapter about *emunah*.
3. **Tefillah**. We will explain how we work on this in the chapter about *tefillah*.
4. **Fear of Hashem**.
5. **Conditional love towards Hashem**, which we will explain about in the chapter "*Loving Hashem and Feeling His Love Toward Us*."
6. **A *ratzon* (will) to become close to Hashem**, which we will explain in the chapter entitled "*Fundamentals in Avodas Hashem*."
7. **Having a palpable sense of Hashem**, which will be discussed in the chapter about loving Hashem.
8. **Unconditional love towards Hashem**, which we will explain about in the chapter about loving Hashem.
9. **Working on our *middos***, which will be discussed in the chapter "*Talking to Hashem About Our Middos*".
10. **Lishmah**, which we will discuss in the chapter "*Fundamentals in Avodas Hashem*."

First one should read about these matters and give order to them, clarifying them internally. Only after that should one actually begin to *work* on any of these areas. The truth is that the order we have given is not concrete for everyone, and it depends on each person. It is only one of the ways to take. Therefore, the main thing is to first know these matters very well, and then ***one should ask advice from a true Talmid Chochom who can show him the proper way that is meant for him***. For this reason, we are not placing much emphasis on the order here we have given, but rather on the content inside these words. Although this sefer has been written according to this order, it is not the concrete order for everyone, as we said.

¹² This is described in the first volume of Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh.

02 | *Fundamentals In Avodas Hashem*

(The Need For Hisbodedus\Solitude)

1.

The Ramchal (in *sefer Derech Eitz Chaim*) writes as follows: “Those who are in control over their inclination did this and have taught others how to do it. A person, throughout the many years of his life, mostly thinks about his worldly matters; why can he not put his heart into one hour of thinking about thoughts such as: “What am I? Why did I come onto this world? What does the King of all kings, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, want from me? What will be with me in the end?”

“This is the greatest remedy that one can use to counter his evil inclination, and it is easy to implement and is very effective; it brings much gain. It is that a person should set aside every day one hour which is free from all thoughts, and just think about this and ask himself: “*What did the forefathers do, who had such an intense desire for Hashem? What did Moshe Rabbeinu do? What did Dovid Hamelech do, and all of the great leaders who came before us?*”

“...A person who never thinks about this will find it very difficult to reach perfection, while a person who does think about it is very close to perfection. It is the way of the wise to always think as they walk, and they do not forget about such thoughts. That is why they are successful. But every person should at least dedicate time for this, whether it is a small amount of time or a large amount, and think about this – and then he will be successful.”

2.

If a person really wants to serve Hashem in a true way, then he must realize what the Ramchal has said here. The Ramchal has written here that without an hour of reflection every day into thinking about one’s purpose in life, it will be too difficult to reach perfection. One should understand that this practice is the *basis* of everything he wants to work on. One needs at least an hour every day of reflection, and if he can do more, even better (the Chofetz Chaim did reflection for two hours every day, as is well known). But without at least one hour, it is too difficult to be successful in Avodas Hashem. The Ramchal writes that without this, it is impossible to defeat the *yetzer hora*, who is much stronger than us.

3.

This is a matter which one needs to clarify for himself. A person needs to ask himself if he is ready to reflect every day with this soul, for at least an hour. If you are ready to do this, that's very good, and now one can proceed to learn how to do it.

But if a person's isn't ready for this hour of daily reflection – either because he thinks he doesn't need to, or because he thinks that it's too hard for him to do (and usually, this is the reason), then this sefer is not meant for him. This is not an exaggeration. For one who understands why we need to have this daily reflection, the matter is very simple, but for one who doesn't do this hour of daily reflection, this seems like an absurd practice to do.

4.

How do we reflect, and what should we do during this time of reflection? This will be explained in the coming lines, in simple words, so that anyone who truly seeks Hashem can do it, using his abilities.

5.

The first thing a person needs for this is to designate a quiet place that is away from people (the reader should refer back to the preface and see what we mean), and then he should begin to talk to Hashem.

A person can begin to talk to Hashem by saying, “*Ribono shel Olam* (Master of the world), why have I decided to reflect for an hour? Because I know and believe that You created the world, and that You also created Me, and that You placed me on this world to fulfill a certain goal. What is that reason that you placed me on the world for? The reason is so that I should become close to You, as is stated in *Mesillas Yesharim* (chapter 1); the Ramchal has come to clarify why I live and why You created me, and what You want from me. The answer is so I can reach the true perfection, which is to cleave to You, and this is what Dovid Hamelech wrote, “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*” Now I am clear, because of the Ramchal's words, the reason why I live: to become close to You, to feel You, to live You, to cleave to You.”

6.

“But, *Ribono shel olam*, what is my problem? That now, when I speak with You, I remember my purpose, but during the rest of the day, I forget this. I am all day either learning Torah, *davening*, doing *chessed* or just in general taking care of my various responsibilities. Amidst all this, I forget why I am even living, what my purpose here on this earth is, what You put me here for.”

In this way a person should daven to Hashem that He have mercy on him and enable him to remember Him throughout the day. One can make reminders for himself for this, as well as to daven to Hashem every day anew that he be helped to remember his purpose more often throughout the day. He should practice this for a long time until he feels that there is never a half hour a day that passes by in which he doesn't remember his purpose on this world. If a person doesn't have this feeling yet, he needs to keep *davening* to Hashem and ask Him that He have mercy on him and help him remember his purpose.

If someone loses patience for this, he will come up with all kinds of excuses why he can't do this.

But if someone truly seeks Hashem, he will be very stubborn about this and try it for many days and weeks, reminding himself: "Why do I live? Why is Hashem keeping me alive this instant?" He should get used to saying every half hour of the day, "*Ribono shel olam*, I am remembering that my purpose on this world is to become close to You".

Try to say this verbally, and not just mentally, because verbalizing it affects your soul more. Someone who is prepared to be stubborn about this will be successful.

7.

After a person merits to get to the point of remembering throughout the day that he is living on this world to get close to Hashem, he can now proceed to the next step, which is to set aside for at least an hour a day that he will talk to Hashem; he can say, "*Ribono shel olam*, You have merited me that I am able to remember my purpose on this world, which is to become close to You. *Baruch Hashem*, this thought has settled in my mind, and a little bit in my heart. Now I want to know, *how do I reach my purpose? How do I merit closeness to You? Baruch Hashem*, the Ramchal explains to me the way to get close to You, which is through doing the *mitzvos*."

8.

"There are so many *mitzvos*! But Chazal have funneled all of them into three pillars, which the world stands upon: Torah, *avodah* (prayer), and *chessed*. *Ribono shel olam*, Torah learning is how to be attached to You, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes.

"As for *avodah*, we don't have *korbonos* (sacrifices) today, and in its place we have *tefillah* prayer, and that is how we get close to You. What is *tefillah*? Is it not closeness to You? Is talking to You not closeness to You?

"*Chessed* is also a way to get close to You, because when we do kindness we are being attached to Your ways, which is entirely kindness, and for this reason You created the world, so You can bestow

Your kindness upon Creation. *Ribono shel olam*, through these three *mitzvos* – Torah, *tefillah* and *chessed* – I am able to get close to You. But I must remember that these three *mitzvos* are the way to get close to You, and that I shouldn't forget You as I learn Torah, or when I daven, or when I am doing *chessed*. Because if I do any of these *mitzvos* and I forget You, then I am missing the purpose of it all. *Ribono shel olam*, I therefore want to remember as I do these *mitzvos* what their purpose is, even as I do them.

9.

“*Ribono shel olam*, I am accepting upon myself, *bli neder* (without a vow) that when I go to learn Torah, before I begin learning, I will try to remember to talk to You first and say to You, “I am going to now learn Torah, and why indeed am I going to learn Torah? (Besides for this a person also has to clarify for himself why he learns Torah, deep down in his heart. One cannot just say these words without feeling so in his heart. A person has to figure out what his heart really wants. If a person discovers that he has some desire in his heart for this, then he should verbalize it clearly that he feels this way. But the main point here is that one has to be speaking the truth.)

“Because I want to get close to You and be attached to You, and though learning Torah I can get close to You, please merit me that I achieve this.”

In middle of learning as well, one should say to Hashem, “I want to always remember why I am learning Torah. Once every half hour, I want to remind myself of my purpose. (After some time, you shouldn't have to try so hard to remember this, because it will become more ingrained in your memory to do it). I want this matter to become alive to me, that whenever I learn, I am learning in order to be close to You, and I will not give up if I forget that this is the purpose. I will try, *bli neder*, to remember this always. I am beseeching You, Hashem, that You help me, and that You remind me all the time about my purpose, until it becomes ingrained in my soul.”

10.

That was concerning learning Torah, but the same should be used for *davening*: “I want to remember that I am *davening* to become close to You. Therefore, right when I come to *shul*, instead of immediately *davening*, I will first speak to You and say that the purpose of my *davening* is to become close to You, and that You command me to daven to You so that I will speak to You and thereby become close to You, and therefore I am now *davening* to You so I can get close to You.

“As I *daven* as well, I also wish to be reminded of my purpose.”

11.

The same goes for doing *chessed*; before one does a *chessed*, he should first pause for a second and say, “*Ribono shel olam*, I am reminding myself that I am doing *chessed* so I can become close to You.”

12.

It is impossible to work all at once on what we have written here; Chazal state that “if you try to grab too much, you will not get anything.” We are only saying what the general style has to be; we need to work on this slowly and according to our capabilities. The basic idea of it is to get used to talking to Hashem before learning, *davening*, or doing a *chessed*, to say to Hashem, “I am doing this to become close to You.”

This practice has to be worked on for **a few years**, and every day one should think about this again and speak like this to Hashem. Don’t get scared off from all this repetition. Speak from your heart, from your feelings – and tell over to Hashem your successes, as well as your failures. Every day, say to Hashem, “I have accepted upon myself to do this, because it is my will to become close to You. If I can’t keep to what I have accepted upon myself, please help me that tomorrow I will be able to, and that I merit closeness to You.”

Never give up. Keep to this for a few years, and every day, thank Hashem for whatever you’re successful in, and implore Him about the future. Don’t become broken from any failures or from feeling unmotivated; this happens all the time. The Vilna Gaon writes that “a stubborn person is successful.”

13.

The point is for a person to get used to say verbally before he does anything – learning, *davening* or a *mitzvah* – that he is doing this to get closer to Hashem. It should be said with feeling: “I am doing this to become close to You.”

Let your daily hour of reflection serve as the basis for the rest of the day. Remember what you said to Hashem then and let your day reflect that, going over the details you spoke out then. Accept upon yourself, *bli neder*, that you will seek to improve every day more and more; and beg Hashem for help with this, until you see a change. Usually, once you start getting used to this, it will become more natural to you – the more you talk to Hashem simply throughout the course of the day, the more natural it becomes to you, like a second nature.

14.

After a person finds himself remembering his purpose throughout the day – every half hour, he remembers his purpose – as well as before he learns or before he *davens* or before he does a *mitzvah*, that he is doing it to become closer to Hashem (and he davens to Hashem like this), he should then proceed to a higher level of closeness: the Ramchal writes that a person should do every act with the intention of becoming closer to Hashem.

This is a high level to be on, but each person should try to get close to this level as much as he can, according to his ability.

15.

In addition to an hour every day of reflection, one should talk with Hashem and say as follows: “*Ribono shel olam*, I know that my purpose in life is to be close to You. I have worked very long at this to remember this throughout the day. After this, I worked on remembering You as well before I learn, daven or do a mitzvah – that I’m doing it all to get close to You.

“Now, *Ribono shel olam*, I want to take this point and feel it more throughout the entire day. Firstly, I need that all of my thoughts should be about getting close to You (except for the actual time that I am thinking about Torah or about other things I need to take care of), as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes that one should do. This is what I want – that the whole goal of my life should be only about You, to be close to You, and that I should be able to remember this every second.

“In addition to this, I want to merit that my deeds should match this desire; that if what I am doing is to get close to You, let me carry out what I want to do, and if not, then don’t let me carry out what I want to do. I want to get used to examining my deeds, to see if I am doing them to become closer to You or not.”

Before you do any action, think: Is this getting me closer to Hashem, or not? If it is, say it verbally as well: “I am doing this to get closer to You.”

“*Ribono shel olam*, I can’t do all of this so fast. I need to do this slowly, and I will try to slowly fit this into my whole day – please merit me that I should indeed reach this.”

16.

A person has to get used to always doing something with thought beforehand. It can take many years to get used to this. Think if what you are doing is getting you closer to Hashem or not, and if it is bringing you closer to Hashem, do it with that intention and not for any other motivation. This is a hard avodah: to work on your *motivations* in doing the act. This point takes many years to work on,

and it must be done slowly and in steps. It is not only our mind and mouth that should be involved in what we do, but we have to get our heart to feel before we do it that we are doing it to serve Hashem.

17.

(This is a very fundamental point, and if it is ignored, it can make a person very mistaken throughout his entire Avodas Hashem: often a person wants to jump levels in his Avodas Hashem and he works on too many things at once. But this is impossible. Whatever point we work on needs to be thoroughly examined if it has become a heart matter to us, or if it just in our intellect and our mouth. If there is a point we know in our minds, but it hasn't yet become ingrained in our heart, then don't continue to work on that point – doing it will just be like trying to build something that floats on the air.

If a person feels that a certain area is still above him and that he hasn't acquired it yet, it is a sign that his heart hasn't acquired the matter yet.

This point, when ignored, causes many a downfall. People think that because they understand a concept intellectually, it must mean that they have acquired the concept. They don't know about the concept of the *heart* – that one's *heart* has to acquire the concept.

The truth is that it is impossible to put into writing what it means to understand something from your heart. It is difficult even to express it in person. A person can work on his Avodas Hashem for many years yet never even begin to understand what the “heart” is, and all his Avodas Hashem is actually just in his imagination. He never acquires any real growth, yet he's convinced that he has acquired much so far in Avodas Hashem. When you try to explain to him the mistake he's making, it's hard to explain it to him. Even worse, such a person isn't looking for another person to come and explain this to him, because he's confident that he is truly serving Hashem...

It is advisable for each person to seek a person who truly serves Hashem and ask him to examine his Avodas Hashem for him that it is being done with his heart, or if it's all just in his intellect – or in his imagination.

In addition to this, a person also must *daven* to Hashem and cry to Him that he be sent a person who can teach him the truth, and that he shouldn't be delusional in Avodas Hashem.

For all of our life, we need to daven for this – that Hashem should show us if we are perhaps making a mistake; and that if we are making a mistake, that Hashem should show us how we are mistaken.

If someone doesn't daven for this his whole life, he is for sure being misguided – and he has no one to teach him the truth.

This is a very, very fundamental point in Avodas Hashem. A person has to constantly suspect himself that maybe he's making a major mistake and that he doesn't know what his mistake is. One needs to daven to Hashem that he be shown his mistakes and what the truth is.)

18.

It is a very high level indeed for one to always be making sure that he is doing something to get closer to Hashem. But if a person really wants to be on this level, Hashem will help him get there, and he will receive abnormal strength to get there. It is the power of the soul – and it can help a person live such a life.

19.

The *Mishna* states that three things take a person out of this world: jealousy, desire and honor. In other words, these three *middos* take a person away from his inner world, from his desire to become close to Hashem. These *middos* take us away from our true desire and instead make a person desire things that are superficial and false – the desires for jealousy, for desire or for honor.

Our avodah is to turn our superficiality into the internal. Thus, we also need to check our heart: are we desiring to do this act because it is bringing us closer to Hashem, or for any of the other three desires? We have to keep refining our motivations more and more throughout our entire lifetime.

If a person discovers that his motivations are for any of these three bad *middos*, he has to root them out by reflecting into how bad they are, as well as by talking to Hashem about it. He has to daven a lot about this to Hashem. In addition, a person has to go against his nature and do actions that are the opposite of any of these three bad *middos*.

20.

After a person refines these *middos*, he has to uncover a deeper layer of these *middos*, and then he has to go back to work on them, with greater depth this time. This is ongoing throughout a person's life – he has to keep returning to his bad *middos* and refining them more and more. This is mainly an avodah for those who are truly seeking to serve Hashem, who are involved with matter of *mussar* and become very cognizant of their motivations.

If a person doesn't check his motivations, he is for sure living a life full of various ulterior motives and personal interests that aren't truthful. He's only in it for his own good.

We cannot reach this level perfectly, but we must try as much as we can to get closer to it. True Avodas Hashem requires a tremendous amount of self-introspection.

21.

A higher avodah than this is for a person to purify his heart – not just in what he does, but to take a good look at his very desires in life. He should probe deeper and deeper into his innermost desires, until he reaches the depth of his subconscious. This needs very specific guidance; hopefully we will be able to explain how to do it, if Hashem allows us to.¹³

22.

After a person reaches a level in which he has a great desire to always get closer to Hashem – and that this is what he mainly thinks about all day – it is now a good time to proceed to a higher level, described in *Mesillas Yesarim* (chapter 19): to act *lishmah*. For this, a person should see Chapters Seven and Eight, which deal with the subject of increasing our love for Hashem. Then a person should learn the chapter about *lishmah*.

This is just as we said until now, that before a person does something, he should try to think why he is doing it, and he should try as much as he can to do it *lishmah*. This is a great and arduous Avodah that takes a lifetime to work on, but each person should try to come as close as possible to this level.

23.

The truth is that *lishmah* is a much deeper concept than in the way we have described it. It is a matter of our soul – only our soul can act *lishmah*. Whatever we have mentioned about *lishmah* is only a way how to get there – *lishmah* is a far deeper level.

It is not really possible to explain in the logical sense how we can get to *lishmah*. It is a concept that transcends human thought, and it is an utter connection with Hashem – a total integration with Him. One has to daven greatly to Hashem all his life that he should merit *lishmah*, because it is a gift from Heaven, and it is not attainable through human effort.

The *Ohr HaChaim*¹⁴ describes *lishmah* in amazing way. He writes that *tzaddikim* know that the “kiss of death” (*misas neshikah*) from Hashem will make them die, yet they yearn for this “kiss of death” so much that they are willing to die and experience awesome closeness with Hashem.

24.

¹³ See *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. III, Section V: *Mussar*.

¹⁴ *parshas Achrei Mos*

Besides for an hour every day of *hisbodedus* and *cheshbon hanefesh*, one who searches for the truth should practice the custom they did in Kelm known as “*Asiri Kodesh*.” For every tenth day following Yom Kippur, the people in Kelm would set aside a day of self-introspection.

Each person can do practice this in his own way, but all people are the same in that we all need to have a day set aside in which there are no distractions. This is written as well in *Sefer Chareidim* – that once a week, a person should make for himself a mini Yom Kippur.

This is a practice which has proven very helpful to those who are truly seeking to serve Hashem. A person who does it acquires a great wealth. When someone is truly seeking Hashem in a truthful way, he won't make excuses to get out of this. He realizes how important this is and pursues it.

A day set aside for introspection can afford a person tremendous wealth in Avodas Hashem. It is a day in which a person can look at himself in a healthy way - not in a self-aggravating way. It is for a person to examine his soul and see where he's really holding, where his heart is at. *Gedolim* practiced this and testified to how helpful it was. If someone is only interested in “easy” Avodas Hashem, he runs away from this practice, but if someone wants the real thing – he should know to run after this avodah.

03 | *Talking to Hashem About Emunah*

1.

Is there a Jew who doesn't believe in Hashem? We cannot find such a Jew in the world. In the depths of every Jew's heart, *emunah* is there, and it's permanent. *Emunah* is hidden deep in our soul, in the innermost layers of our soul.

However, most people – even total believers, who keep the entire Torah and do all the *mitzvos* – do not even recognize this part of themselves.

Emunah is the very essence of our soul, and in that place in ourselves, there are no questions about Hashem.

This deep place in ourselves has no room for questions, and thus it requires no “avodah”. Whatever “avodah” we do is thus only involving the lower layers of our soul.

Our mission is that since we know that we have this deep part in ourselves that has no doubts about Hashem – clear, unshakable *emunah* – we must extend this deep internal awareness to the rest of our soul as well, all the way to even the most external part of ourselves.

2.

The best way to reach our *emunah* (albeit the most difficult) is to awaken the innermost point of one's soul. Upon reaching the innermost point of our soul, *emunah* is revealed forth from it, and it can extend to the other external layers of our self.

Because our innermost point is the deepest part of our self, it cannot be reached through what a person is used to. It is so hidden from us and it is covered over by so many barriers that a person doesn't even feel that it is there at all.

If a person doesn't feel his innermost point, how then can he ever hope to reveal it?

There is a way to reach it – through *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice). We see this from the story of Reb Eliezer ben Durdaya, who reached his essence by being ready to sacrifice everything to get there.

However, normally speaking, it is very difficult for a person to uncover *mesirus nefesh*. People only exercise *mesirus nefesh* in the rare circumstance of having to die over the three cardinal sins; such situations are Heaven-sent and do not often occur. No one has *mesirus nefesh* unless they feel major

pressure due to external circumstances - unless a person is on an exceptionally high spiritual level. Therefore, there is almost no one who is able to take the path of *mesirus nefesh* to reach his innermost point.

3.

The more recommended way to reach our *emunah* is to reflect deeply about *emunah*, with our minds. A person should think deeply as follows: There is only One who is in charge of everything in the universe – Hashem.

One should think about this first on an intellectual level, realizing how Hashem is indeed in charge of every small thing that goes on, that He watches everything that's going on (*hashgacha pratis* – Divine Providence).

4.

After a person contemplates this in his mind and is clear about – how only Hashem is running the world – he should then continue to the next step: to talk to himself words that are *emunah*-oriented. It is written, “*I believed, for I spoke.*” The great commentators of this *possuk* explained it to mean that through the power of “*I spoke*” – speaking about *emunah* – that is precisely how we instill in ourselves *emunah*: by speaking about the Creator!

A person should get used to always verbalizing to himself words that are *emunah*-oriented, all the time. This is the great rule of life – *emunah*.

Emunah is the life-sustaining energy of our life – it is the soul of man. Without *emunah*, life is nothing. And we need clear, strong *emunah*.

Because *emunah* is the main aspect of our life, a person always has to talk words of *emunah*. He should repeat to himself, both mentally and verbally: “Only Hashem runs the world. All of my life is essentially about Him. Whatever happens to me is all from Him, even when it seems to me that so-and-so was responsible.”

One should keep repeating to himself: “This or that person did not do it to me. It was Hashem Himself who did it. For all of my life, all I am involved with is Him.”

It is even better if a person talks these words directly with Hashem, and he can speak even in first-person: “I know, *Ribono shel olam*, that what that person did to me was all from You. I am confident that You love me and that You only did it for my good, because I know that all You do is good.”

In this way a person should get used to talking to Hashem his whole life, with simple words, like when you talk to a friend (and even more than how you talk to a friend). Constantly talk with

Hashem, and don't look to others for hope – know that only Hashem is the address for everything in your life.

This should all be from a recognition that the main part of life is *emunah*. The prophet Chabakuk summed up this generation's avodah as entirely *emunah* – as it is written, “*The righteous one shall live by his faith.*” (Makkos 24a). *Emunah* is the beginning – and end – of all life. It is the inner essence of everything, and it is an unlimited power.

5.

There are people who serve Hashem, and one day they make an internal self-examination and they discover that they still haven't ingrained *emunah* in their hearts yet. Then they get depressed from this and are in pain from their low spiritual level, falling into terrible hopelessness and despair.

This is not the correct way to react to the problem. If a person realizes that he has weak *emunah*, he should not fall into despair *chas v'shalom*, but he should instead set aside a short amount of time and talk about his frustrations with Hashem. He should speak to Hashem, as if Hashem is an old friend of his, and he should say:

“*Ribono shel olam*, I know You created me, and that You are keeping me alive every second. I know clearly that You are running the world, and that You do not overlook any detail. I also know that everything that comes upon me is from You, and that nothing else can cause anything to happen to me except You.

“But *Ribono shel olam*, my heart is bitter. I know this all only in my intellectual mind, but in my heart, I do not feel these truths. In my heart, I do not feel strong in my *emunah*; sometimes I have strong *emunah*, and sometimes I don't. For example, sometimes I lose my temper and get angry; if I would really feel that everything is from You as I am about to get angry, then I wouldn't lose my temper and get angry, because how can I *chas v'shalom* be angry at You?! So why do I get angry sometimes when I know that everything is all from You? It is because I only know about You with my intellectual mind, but I don't feel the truth in my heart. My heart is closed up and it doesn't feel clearly the *emunah* that my mind knows about.

“*Ribono shel olam*, I really want to believe in You strongly, but it's hard for me! I'm not succeeding at it. You are my Father! Open my **heart** to believe in You more....”

These are the kind of words a person should speak about with Hashem – each person according to how he's comfortable talking. A person should get used to talking to Hashem like this for weeks and months, and never give up, *chas v'shalom*.

6.

If someone wants to see immediate results from this, he's in for a disappointment. Success in this doesn't happen so fast. A person has to be patient in Avodas Hashem – and that includes being stubborn and persistent to continue!

Even if a person *davened* many, many times to reach his goal, he should never give up. It's a test from Hashem, to see if he really trusts in Him that He can answer him. And Hashem wants us to indeed feel confident in Him that He can answer us. If a person has that *bitachon*, he will definitely be answered.

This is tried and tested. There is no person who ever davened to Hashem that his *emunah* be strengthened who wasn't answered! Anyone who has done this saw a transformation in himself – that he became a more believing person in Hashem.

Our difficulty with this, however, is that Hashem created us with a nature to be anxious, and we like to see immediate results when we begin to work on ourselves. When people don't see results right away, they immediately give up – and this is a recipe for disaster. A person has to be stubborn when it comes to Avodas Hashem; someone who is persistent for years and doesn't slacken off from this will end up gaining tremendously.

7.

A person has to make sure he doesn't become down when he see that he is failing with this avodah.

Not only do people feel that their hearts are weak when it comes to *emunah*, but people also run into intellectual difficulties as well with matters of *emunah*.

For example, when tragedies or certain mind-boggling events happen, a person can't comprehend in his mind how such events are really all from Hashem, and his mind can't accept what's going on during these times. Then the person forgets about *emunah* in Hashem, and he forgets the purpose of his life, which is to always be involved with Hashem.

Don't become down at your failures in *emunah* when you encounter such incomprehensible events in your life. Realize instead that this is the way Avodas Hashem is – sometimes we remember *emunah*, and sometimes we forget *emunah*. If we forget *emunah*, as soon as we summon up our *emunah* back again and we remember that everything is from Hashem, now is the time to set aside a small amount of time and speak with Hashem. Say to Him:

“*Ribono shelo olam*, You know how much I want to really believe in You, and how much I yearn for You. But *Ribono shel olam*, You see how many failures I'm having at this. I'm forgetting my belief in You so many times. But I am not giving up from believing in You. If I ever have times when I forget

You, *chas v'shalom*, I will pull myself together and remember that I must have *emunah* in You, *bli neder*.

“I am begging You, *Ribono shel olam*, from the depths of my heart, that You take pity on me and ensure that I don't forget You, and that if I do forget, I am asking of You that it shouldn't last for so long, and that You awaken me immediately to remember You.”

This is the way how a person davens to Hashem – and each person should daven to Hashem in a language he's comfortable with.

8.

The way to talk to Hashem is to speak about **everything** that's on your heart to Hashem. Talk it out to Hashem – all your successes, as well as all your failings! Tell over everything to Him – every last doubtful feeling that's on your heart. Don't leave out a single detail about your life – tell Him **everything** that's bothering you, everything!

But remember to feel confident throughout that Hashem is listening to your every word and that He's so proud of You at reaching this attainment. He is filled with joy that there is a Jew yearning to strengthen his belief in Him, that there is someone in the world who is begging Him for this and feeling broken inside at this, continuously strengthening himself even after he fails in it.

If any Jew would really feel how much satisfaction he is giving to Hashem as he speaks to Him like this, it would be such a sublime pleasure to him that it would be even more enjoyable than Gan Eden!

9.

There are tremendous benefits in davening to Hashem that we should have *emunah*.

First of all, the very fact that a person is talking to Hashem about *emunah* already is very helpful and increases one's *emunah*. Davening to Hashem about *emunah* is no worse than when we talk about *emunah* – it accomplishes the same effect.

Secondly, when a person davens to Hashem for *emunah*, he awakens in himself a yearning for *emunah*, and that is another factor involved which also increases one's *emunah*.

Also, by continuously *davening* to Hashem and begging Him to have *emunah*, Hashem surely will answer the *tefillos*, and that will make any person into a firm believer of Hashem, as he sees that Hashem indeed answers his *tefillos*.

10.

There is an additional gain with all of this. By davening like this to Hashem, a person gets used to connecting every part of his daily life with Hashem.

For example, a person is learning Gemara, and he doesn't understand something and it bothers him. He can daven to Hashem about and believe that only Hashem can help him understand. After he merits the understanding, his *emunah* is strengthened, because he sees that only Hashem helped him understand.

Throughout the rest of the day as well, a person attaches the day to Hashem, always thinking about how he needs Hashem to help him with anything. He can daven to Hashem about every detail of his life, and make sure that *emunah* precedes everything. The *emunah* then fuels his *tefillah*.

In this way a person is attached to Hashem at all times. Anyone who does this will reach tremendously high spiritual levels.

11.

The matters here only apply to a Jew's soul – we are describing the power of a Jew's soul, which is *emunah*. *Emunah* is the life-force of a Jew. When a Jew understands these matters and practices them, he merits fulfillment and eternal achievements. It is important to review these words here at least twenty times, and to live by them. One has to make sure he never gives up.

The possible achievements that one can reach through practicing this are awesome.

12.

This kind of lifestyle is how a believing Jew lives – every day, every moment, he seeks to ingrain more *emunah* in his heart.

A person goes to the doctor. Before he goes in, he should talk to Hashem and say:

“*Ribono shel olam*, I know that only You can heal me, and I am only going to the doctor because You give permission to do so. Yet I know that only You can heal me, and not anyone in the world.”

And as a person is sitting with the doctor, he can talk to Hashem mentally: “*Ribono shel olam*, only You can heal me. This doctor is only Your messenger to heal me.”

You go to the furniture store to go buy a table. Don't just go to buy the table – go with Hashem to buy the table! Talk to Him throughout and say, “*Ribono shel olam*, I need a table for my house. Show me which table to buy.”

Let's say you are regretting your purchase. Say to Hashem, "I asked of You to help me buy the right table. Now I'm regretting the purchase and wishing I should've gotten a different model. But I know that this feeling is incorrect, because since it was Your will that I buy this table, then these feelings of regret I'm having are going against *emunah*. Please strengthen my *emunah* in You."

A person should keep talking like this to Hashem until he feels that his negative feelings have been quieted.

Let's say a person is waiting for the bus to come. The bus comes – and just drives right past him. He should pause and say:

"*Ribono shel olam*, I know that You want this bus to run according to how You want it to. I know that my negative feelings now are incorrect."

This is the way to live all the time – always speak with Hashem, saying how you know everything depends on Him alone. Say to Hashem that although you know this is your mind, you want to feel it in your heart. Ask Hashem to please help you feel the truth.

The main point of what we are saying should be absorbed. There are countless applications of this point. It doesn't depend on the situation you're in. It doesn't have to be one of the situations we gave. The point is to talk to Hashem about everything throughout the various disappointments of your day. Through practicing this more and more, a person can reach a very high level of *emunah* and attain a strong bond with Hashem.

13.

It is only through true *emunah* that we can ever possibly arrive at happiness.

People aren't happy when they feel like they're missing something. But if someone truly lives with *emunah*, there is no such thing as "Something is not good in my life", because he realizes that he isn't really missing a thing. Anything we have – and whatever happens to us – is all from Hashem, to the tee. It's all for our best, and it's all exactly what we each need. It's impossible to be sad when a person knows that he has everything he needs.

Without *emunah*, it appears to a person as if he's missing something he needs. But with *emunah*, a person realizes and feels that he has exactly what he needs – not less, and not more.

(This does not contradict the fact that we have to daven for what we are missing. Even when we daven, we are not supposed to tell Hashem, "I need this", but we are supposed to say, "*Ribono shel olam*, *if* I am indeed missing this in my life and I need it, please give it to me."

We are never supposed to *daven* to Hashem and tell Him that we for sure need something, because we don't know what's good for us. Understand this point very well. The only time we are supposed to *daven* to Hashem that we for sure need something is when we are *davening* to be saved from committing a sin, or when we are *davening* one of the *tefillos* which Chazal established through their *ruach hakodesh*.)

14.

How do we acquire our happiness?

Whenever a person goes through any pain or frustration, he should say to Hashem: “*Ribono shel olam*, who gave me this pain? You, *Ribono shel olam*. Is it good for me or is it bad for me? It's definitely good for me! If You did it, then it is always good, because anything You do is pure good.

“But, *Ribono shel olam*, I can't understand how indeed it's good for me, and I don't feel this way either. I am feeling pain. In my mind, I can tell myself that it's all for the best, because You only do good...but my feelings don't feel that way! My feelings are incorrect. Please help me feel that it is indeed good for me to go through this.”

Keep talking to Hashem like this for a long time until you feel how the situation was indeed for your good. Keep talking to Hashem like this until you feel calmed inside.

There are others who need a different approach than *tefillah* to Hashem, and they instead need to just repeat the words: “*Ribono shel olam*, I know that this situation is for my good.” Keep saying this until you feel how it's true. (See the Preface).

The point of all of this to absorb just this main point: that in whatever pain or frustration we go through, we should talk to Hashem, and we should start with words of *emunah*: “I know it is from You, Hashem.”

This can work either by *davening* to Hashem or by just repeating these words to yourself again and again. Keep *davening* talking like this until you feel calm, believing, and happy inside.

Only in this way can a person ever become truly happy. When we remove our pain and frustrations, we return to our natural state of the soul, which is to be happy. The nature of the soul is to be happy, but when people feel like they're missing something they need, their natural happiness is held back. When we remove those negative feelings – through *emunah*, as we have said – then nothing will hold back the natural happiness of our soul.

15.

There are many people who have a hard time being happy, because they are always plagued with negative thoughts such as: “I’m suffering in my life because I’m being punished for my sins.” They are bombarded by thoughts of self-guilt and self-contained anger at themselves for making mistakes in life. They bring on their own suffering in this way.

A person who acts like this is making two mistakes.

1) Hashem created two possibilities for mankind: either to choose to do the mitzvos and receive reward, or to *chas v’shalom* choose sin and then receive punishment. Now, if the punishment would be something which we can consider to be evil, then this is very troubling: how can it be that Hashem, who is completely good, created evil? It must be that in essence, even a punishment from Hashem is inherently good. It is just that we have the free choice to cling to the wrong decisions. Thus, a punishment by essence is good, and it is just that we are told not to sin, and we are given the choice to choose between a *mitzvah* and a sin. Yet our minds cannot comprehend this; how can it be that a punishment from Hashem is in essence good??

For this, we need *emunah*. We need *emunah* to really believe that everything is good – even a punishment. This is a very deep and subtle point; it is of course prohibited to commit a sin, but if a person did commit a sin, he has to feel that the suffering which results from it is really good for him!

2) There is another approach to explain this concept: there are two abilities we have, *yediah* (knowledge of the facts) and *bechirah* (free will). *Bechirah* seems to imply that there is such a thing as evil, since we have to “choose” between “good” and “evil.” But there is a higher understanding, called “*yediah*” – to “know” the truth, which is essentially when a person recognizes that there is no such choice, because the truth obligates him to choose good. From the higher perspective, *yediah*, a person is able to see how really everything is good, and thus even a punishment can be good.

04 | *Why We Daven*

1.

Why do we *daven*? Is it so that we can get our physical needs? Is it so that we can get our spiritual needs? Or is it so that we can strengthen our *emunah*?

Although it is true that we can get our physical needs, our spiritual needs, and more *emunah* by davening, there is still a deeper meaning to our *davening*. It is the whole purpose of why we *daven* – and even in this, there is depth within depth.

2.

What is the inner meaning to our *davening*? The *Mesillas Yesharim* (chapter 19) writes that upon reflection, one can see how all of life is meant to be spent with Hashem.

For all our life, we are partners with Hashem – not just partners every here and there like with friends, but partners for life. The way life is supposed to look is that we live with Hashem, as if He’s right in front of us – and thus, we can talk to Him in first person.

This closeness comes to us through *tefillah*. By getting used to always talking to Hashem about everything – big or small – a person is able to really feel that Hashem is next to him, at all times.

3.

Thus, the purpose of *davening* is not to get our needs, not even to get our spiritual needs. It is not even so that we should get *emunah*. The purpose of our *davening* is so that we can actually **talk to Hashem**, to feel that Hashem is next to us like a friend!

These words are written as well by the Chazon Ish¹⁵, “Prayer is a lofty service, in which one can picture vividly how Hashem is listening to his words.” This is the main purpose of *tefillah*: to reach the recognition that Hashem is actually next to us, “*nochach*” (opposite us), for we live with Him, every second.

¹⁵ Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish, Vol I, Letter 23

4.

The Chazon Ish¹⁶ elaborates on this even more: “I know of one piece of advice that can apply to every person. The existence of Hashem is everywhere and constant, but He is hidden from those who are caught up in the flow of life. Anyone has the ability to direct his heart for Heaven. Anyone who wants to escape falsehood can picture vividly that Hashem is here. Through one’s thoughts, he can connect to the One Above, and “*Hashem is close to all who call out to Him.*” (He is not close to us simply because we are asking things of Him when we daven, but rather from the mere fact that we *davening* to Him, we draw ourselves closer to Him). This gives satisfaction to the Creator (because this is not an intellectual matter, but a soul matter – that the soul can sense the Creator actually next to it)....

“How amazing this is, that a person has the ability to pour out all his worries before the Master of the world as if he talks to a friend, and Hashem nourishes him like how a father caresses his child.”

5.

Understand that the entire concept and purpose of *tefillah* is to live with the Creator, to feel Him next to you – and to be able to speak to Him just as when you speak to a friend next to you. When you talk to Hashem, you are able to feel toward Him that He is your trusted friend, whose only interest is to be a good listener and help you.

This is written by both the Ramchal (*Mesillas Yesharim*) and the Chazon Ish – that when we talk to Hashem, it can feel like talking to a friend.

This is the true way to *daven*.

If a person davens to Hashem and even believes sincerely that Hashem can help him – but he doesn’t feel as if he’s talking to a friend who is next to him, he’s missing the whole point of *davening*. In order to really *daven*, a person needs to open up his soul. He needs to have a real feeling that he is talking with the best friend he can ever have – Hashem; and this should not be in his imagination, but a real feeling. It is pleasant to speak with Him – and when a person truly feels this way, he is *davening* in the right way.

6.

Now we will try to explain how one can indeed feel that Hashem is next to him, *nochach* – so that when one *davens*, he will be able to feel as if he’s talking to a trusted friend.

¹⁶ Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish, Vol. IV, Letter 2

If a person is disconnected from Hashem throughout the rest of the day, and it is only during *davening* that he speaks to Hashem – during *Shacharis*, *Mincha* and *Maariv* – he will never be able to feel that *davening* is like talking to a friend. The essence of *tefillah* is really to talk to Hashem all day, as one of the Sages said¹⁷: “If only a person would pray all day.”

Is it really possible to pray all day? No, we don’t daven *Shemoneh Esrei* all day. But what the Sages meant was that our entire day has to reflect the *possuk*, “*And I am prayer.*” In other words – we need to talk to Hashem all the time throughout the day. (Someone who is on a higher spiritual level talks to Hashem all the time mentally, and then there is an ever higher level, *d’veykus*, in which one is actually feels connected to Him all the time, without even having to think about this).

For example, a person wakes up in the morning. He can immediately begin to speak to Hashem and say, “*Ribono shel olam*, You woke me up, and I am getting up to serve You, to come close to You, to give You a *nachas ruach*. Please merit me that my day should be spent properly, that I should serve You the entire day.”

Then, as he’s walking to shul, he can say, “*Ribono shel olam*, please merit me that I should be able to concentrate during *davening*, that I should feel You next to me, and that distracting thoughts shouldn’t enter my head when I *daven*.”

After he leaves shul, he can say, “*Ribono shel olam*, please ensure that I don’t see anything forbidden on the street as I walk, and that I should get to where I have to on time, without being rushed.”

A person sits down to learn, and he can say, “*Ribono shel olam*, I am going to learn Your holy Torah so I can come close to You and give You a *nachas ruach*. Please merit me that I should be able to learn properly, without distractions, and that I should merit to understand what I learn.”

In middle of learning, when one comes across a difficulty and he can’t come to an answer, he can say, “*Ribono shel olam*, I know that it depends on You if I will understand what I learn or not. Please merit me that I should understand your holy Torah.” (The Chazon Ish would practice this too).

The point is that before anything, talk to Hashem about it and ask Him for help. Talk to Him no less than how you talk to a friend. Don’t forget about this as the day goes on – keep remembering this point.

At first, this will be difficult, and a person will keep forgetting to do it. But as you get used to it, it becomes second nature, and slowly you will be able to naturally talk to Hashem throughout the day.

¹⁷ *Berachos 31a*

This is a very fundamental point in how we become closer to Hashem. Be very stubborn to work on this – be willing to pay any price for it. Work on it in steps, patiently. But don't forget it. If someone truly seeks Hashem, he will be shown the way to get there.

7.

There is another fundamental point about *tefillah*: one should pour out everything that's on his heart to Hashem, even his failings. Tell Hashem about all your difficulties, all your doubts, all your frustrations. Include Hashem in every part of your life! Don't be embarrassed.

It is hard to express this point more than what we have said, but the main thing is to absorb one point: include Hashem in everything in your life – every thought, every feeling, anything you went through in your life. Do this all from a simple, natural way how you talk to a friend – like when you want to tell a friend about all that's going on in your life.

This point needs to be absorbed very well – without it, the main part of one's bond with Hashem will be missing.

(We do not mean to say that only talking to Hashem counts and that thinking about Him in solitude is pointless, because a person has to also feel "alone with Hashem" as well, even without talking to Him. But that is the first part of one's avodah. Eventually, one has to talk to Hashem about everything in his life. This is the constant two-step process: first, be in solitude and feel alone with Hashem. You don't have to talk to Him yet in this first stage. Then, talk to Him – about everything going on in your life.

There are some exceptions to this rule. Some people need to think about Hashem and talk to Him at the same time, instead of going through it as a two-stage process. If someone is searching for the truth, he will be shown what the proper path for him to take is. Refer back to the Preface for this).

There is also a higher way to *daven* than what we have described until now: instead of davening for so many things, a person can *daven* for the one, innermost point of everything – to reach a close connection with Hashem. This is a very deep matter, however, and we will not discuss it here.

8.

Another fundamental point about *tefillah* is that it's possible that a person is very close to Hashem, yet he's making mistakes in his Avodas Hashem – and there is no one pointing out to him his mistakes.

Therefore, a person should always daven and beg Hashem that he be shown his mistakes, and what he has to fix. A person has to keep *davening* for this, from the depths of his soul, and he should always feel that he's making some mistake which he doesn't know about, and that he needs Hashem

to show him the truth. If a person doesn't daven for this, he might go his whole life mistaken, *chas v'shalom* – and the errors he's making will be very grave.

Hashem wants us to always feel that we depend on Him, and that we cannot trust ourselves at all. We need Hashem all the time to show us what the truth is. If a person never thinks that perhaps he's making a mistake, his whole life will be a haughty kind of life – his whole life will all be one giant mistake.

We have to daven to Hashem and beg Him that we be shown the truth, that we be shown our mistakes, that we be shown how we can work on ourselves and what it is exactly that we need to work on. The problem is that there are some areas in which a person thinks he's acting 100% correct – “This is how it's done.” But the more a person matures in his spirituality, the more he understands that there is no such thing as relying on oneself, and that he has to search himself inside about he's acting in everything. A mature person realizes that he has to always daven to Hashem that perhaps he's making a mistake in his Avodas Hashem, and that Hashem should show him the light.

This point, when not realized, holds back many people from truly growing in their Avodas Hashem. One has to be very careful about this and make sure he realizes it.

05 | *Talking to Hashem About Teshuvah*

1.

Rabbeinu Yonah¹⁸ writes: “Know that anyone who sins in a happenstance manner, due to a strengthening of one’s passions and a loss of self-control, firstly, he has to regret what he did, and reflect with his heart on his sin...but if someone is always on an improper path, and his sins overtake him each day and he is always repeating his behavior, the first thing such a person must do is to leave his evil ways and thoughts.”

2.

In these words, Rabbeinu Yonah is telling us how to act in the superficial sense: don’t sin. But there is also an inner point contained in his words – let us explain.

There are some people whose deeds are connected with Hashem, and there are just some points in their life that are missing connection to Hashem. Their self-improvement is to work on those areas in their life that are missing connection to Hashem.

But there are some people, who even though they keep Torah and do all the mitzvos, they are still missing the inner meaning behind Torah and mitzvos. They don’t act upon love for Hashem and aren’t joyful as they should be; there is no feeling of any relationship to Hashem in their life; they do not feel that Hashem is our Father in Heaven, and that we can have a father-son relationship with Him. Such people are not living their lives properly at all. They are disconnected from the true meaning of life, from the purpose we are created for.

For such a person to improve, taking another *chrumra* (stringency) is not enough to be considered *Teshuvah*. He has to change his entire attitude toward life. He must leave the superficial kind of life he is living and connect with the One who created this world. If someone doesn’t feel a love for Hashem burning within him – if he doesn’t feel yearnings for his Father – this is a definite sign that the way he is living his life is totally wrong.

3.

This is a point which many people forget and are thus mistaken about.

¹⁸ *Shaarei Teshuvah* 1: 11

When a person decides to do *Teshuvah*, and especially in Elul and *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, he thinks into the way he is living his life and examines his deeds. He usually finds that he needs improvement in *shemiras halashon* (guarding his tongue from evil speech), *bittul Torah* (wasting Torah study time), he has to concentrate better in his davening and when he makes a *berachah*, etc.

What does he do? He takes on various resolutions in all of these things, so he can improve all these areas.

We can see that most of the time, these resolutions don't last for long. Even if they do last for a while, they do not produce a truly growing person.

Where is the root of the problem?

It's exactly what we started out saying. People are doing the first kind of *Teshuvah* that Rabbeinu Yonah mentioned, which is to avoid sins that come happenstance. But really, people often need the second kind of *Teshuvah* – they need to get back onto the proper, good path.

4.

Let us elaborate.

The two kinds of *Teshuvah* which Rabbeinu Yonah mentions are totally different. One who sins only happenstance doesn't need to change his whole life; it is enough for him to accept upon himself that he will avoid those sins which he stumbles in. But if someone in general isn't living in the right way, he has to change his whole way of life, and after he gets back onto the right path in life, he can then fix up his sins.

If we reflect on our situation, our shortcomings which we find in ourselves do not have to do with the sin itself. It is really because we don't feel the inner meaning behind what a sin is. This is all because we aren't on the right path in general.

There is another reason why our resolutions often don't last. Chazal say that the evil inclination gets stronger each day, and if not for Hashem's help, a person cannot overpower it.¹⁹ When does Hashem help a person? He only helps a person when the person is found with Him and lives with Him, connected to Him. Only then does Hashem help him.

We must understand that a person does not have the strength to keep his resolutions. It is way above what a human being can do. Only when a person is connected to Hashem in every time and situation can he be helped – at all times, and in every situation. The further away a person is from

¹⁹ *Sukkah 52a*

Hashem, the less help he gets from Hashem. When a person isn't connected to the inner meaning of life – Hashem – he will have no chance in keeping his resolutions.

5.

There will definitely be people who will read these words and not understand it. They will react, “Are we far from Hashem?! We learn ten hours a day and do all the mitzvos properly. Aren't we attached to Hashem already from Torah and mitzvos? What else connects a person to Hashem other than Torah and mitzvos?!”

But if someone has this question, it shows how far he is from what it means to love Hashem, from the inner meaning of life...from Hashem. They do not understand that there is a more inner world than the kind of world they are living in. They think that a Jew is only “Torah and mitzvos”, and they aren't aware that their *chiyus* (vitality) in life is superficial. Such a question shows that they aren't really getting any life from the Torah and the mitzvos!

6.

What does it mean to get an inner kind of vitality? What does it mean to have connection with Hashem?

There are two layers to this.

The first layer of this is that a person has to recognize that he is living in Hashem's world, and that everything as we know it belongs to Hashem. For example, look at a pen. Think how it belongs to Hashem. He created it. Look at your hand too and realize that Hashem created it. Your soul, which is the life-force in you that makes your body work, was also made by Hashem, and it too belongs to Hashem.

This is just food for thought, but when you think about it, you can see that the entire universe is calling out the Creator. A person should reflect into this a lot, until he naturally develops an outlook at everything from this recognition – that he is only a creation of Hashem. This attitude has to envelope a person in every part of his life, 24/7.

7.

The second layer of this, which is higher than the first, is to realize the inner point of life – that Hashem is our Father, and we are His children. A person has to look at everything in life with this father-son relationship – a relationship that involves love and a desire for closeness. Just like a son wants to speak with his father and be with him, so should a person feel the same way towards Hashem. (Unfortunately, some people don't even feel closeness with their own fathers, and Hashem

should have mercy on them, because they will not be helped by the words here). In whatever action a person does, he has to feel how “my Father” is asking me to do this.

In short, all of life is really the mitzvah of “honoring your Father” – our Father in Heaven. We need to view every situation of life like this. To live life on such a level is the whole depth of *Teshuvah*. (How we actually acquire this outlook on life is something else, which we will explain later.)

8.

Teshuvah means “to return.” To where are we returning? To Hashem!

The main point of *Teshuvah* is not to leave sin, but rather because sin distances a person from closeness to Hashem, a person has to do *Teshuvah* so he can remove the barriers between him and Hashem, which got created from the sin. But even if a person manages to leave the sin, that still doesn’t mean he has become close to Hashem. He might be avoiding every sin, but he still doesn’t have a deep connection with Hashem.

A person has to create a deep, internal bond with Hashem, like a father-son relationship. That is the essence of *Teshuvah*. If a person just leaves his sins but he doesn’t develop this bond, he is missing the whole point of *Teshuvah*.

This is written as well in the words of Rabbeinu Yonah: “His heart should understand that it is evil and bitter to abandon Hashem.” That is the main part of *Teshuvah*!

9.

The Gemara states that if one does *Teshuvah* out of *yirah* (fear), his intentional sins do not get transformed into merits, but into unintentional sins; if he did *Teshuvah* out of *ahavah* (love of Hashem), then his intentional sins become transformed into merits.

Here we see that doing *Teshuvah* from fear of Hashem alone isn’t enough to break the barrier that separates between one and the Creator; it doesn’t erase the sin, and it merely becomes like an unintentional sin. It is only when a person does *Teshuvah* out of love for Hashem that his sin is erased and it becomes a merit for him. Only such *Teshuvah* removes the barriers between him and Hashem.

10.

What does it mean to do *Teshuvah* out of love for Hashem? It means like how a son loves his father.

The true *Teshuvah* is that a person leaves his sins because he wants to be close to his Father. The first thing a person must do is to realize that he is dealing with his Father, and that each sin distances him from his bond with his Father.

Many people struggle with this point. They do not feel how a sin distances one from having a bond with Hashem. They know about it intellectually, but they do not feel it.

The root of the problem is really that such people never even once felt a true connection with Hashem in their life. Thus they do not realize how a sin is so damaging to one's relationship with Hashem; they don't have the bond to begin with.

If a person is still at this level, he has to form a relationship with Hashem – before he begins to do *Teshuvah* on his sins. The way to do this will be explained soon.

11.

When a person comes to the clear recognition that sin ruins one's bond with Hashem, and he reflects into this, he can find different ways how this feeling gets expressed.

12.

We will open up our words here with a physical parable – how a father and son relate. Through this parable, we will learn about what it means for a Jew to have a relationship with his Father in heaven.

When a son rebels against his father, there are four factors that are included in his act of rebellion. 1) By rebelling, he has lost a loving connection with his father. 2) The son is ashamed in front of his father and can't look in his face, because of what he has done to him. 3) The son feels lowly inside that he has fallen so low and angered his father. 4) The son has pain, because he knows that his father is pained at his behaviors.

13.

The same goes for one's relationship with Hashem. When a Jew commits a sin, there are four parts to what he must now do.

1) He has to feel that he has weakened – and perhaps disconnected totally – his loving relationship with Hashem. This was explained before.

2) He is ashamed to look Hashem in the face. This is a little different than the parable of a father and son, because by a regular father and son, the son is only ashamed when he's in front of his father. But in our relationship with Hashem, a person is constantly in front of Hashem, and Hashem always sees him; thus, a person has to always feel ashamed in front of Hashem. (This is a point which

many people struggle with, because they do not constantly see Hashem. The first thing they must work on is to feel that Hashem sees them every second. Only after this can one feel a constant shame in front of Hashem).

This is mentioned explicitly by Rabbeinu Yonah, who writes: “The sixth part of *Teshuvah* is shame, as it is written, “*I am ashamed and humiliated, for I have borne the disgrace of my youth.*” A person is very ashamed to sin in front of people, because they will humiliate him for his sins. How can a person then not be ashamed from the Creator? It is only because Hashem is far from his understanding, and that is why he is afraid of humans, but not from Hashem.”

14.

3) A person has to feel lowly inside: How can I have been so brazen to disgrace Hashem and to rebel against His will?

This is also expressed by Rabbeinu Yonah, who writes, “One must have pain and think how evil it is to rebel against his Creator...that he did not remember his Creator who made him from nothing, and he forgot His kindnesses done to him...and how his heart could have the audacity to anger Him.”

15.

4) A person also needs to feel pain that Hashem also feels pain at His son who has distanced himself. This is really *tza'ar hashechinah* – the “pain of the *Shechinah*.” It is already explained by Chazal and the *sefarim hakedoshim* about how a Jew must feel the pain of the *Shechinah*.

16.

This last point itself has three parts to it as well:

1) Pain over the fact that his son has distanced himself from Him, and that Hashem misses His child, since He can't be with him due to the child's sins that have separated the bond.

2) Since Hashem created this universe in order to bestow good upon all of Creation, by sinning, Hashem has to punish him and He can't (so to speak) bestow the good He wanted to bestow. A father has great pain when he can't be good to his child.

3) It is written, “*Everything created in My Name was created in My honor.*” The purpose of creation is to reveal the glory of Hashem in the world, as explained in *sefer Daas Tevunos*. Thus, when a person sins and conceals the glory of Hashem from being revealed upon the world, the purpose of creation has been held back, and this causes great pain to the *Shechinah*.

17.

Most people, upon reading the words up until now, will feel that these four levels are very far from us. Most people do not feel any of these four levels in their life, and some people feel a little bit of it in their life.

What is the root of the problem?

Rabbeinu Yonah has already answered it: “How can a person not be ashamed in front of Hashem? It is only because Hashem is far from his understanding.” When a person doesn’t feel ashamed in front of Hashem, it is really because he is far from Hashem to begin with. His Avodah is to begin a relationship with Hashem.

How can a person do it? Can it be done through Torah and mitzvos alone? We can all see that we have been learning Torah for many years and have been doing all the mitzvos, yet we are still far from Hashem!

The solution will soon be explained.

18.

It is now upon us to figure out what is the proper way to doing real *Teshuvah* – how to feel that Hashem is our Father and we are His child. First, we need to think: what is what drives us to do *Teshuvah*?

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: “The level of *Teshuvah* depends on the amount of bitterness and pain that one expresses over his sins. This is repentance which comes from a purity of the soul and clean mind. Such pain comes from the purity of the Heavenly soul.”

Here it is explained that the true *Teshuvah* one can do is only when one is being motivated by his soul. To feel closeness to Hashem is only through one’s soul, and only the soul can recognize its Creator and feel love toward Him, like how a son feels love to his father. It is thus upon us to understand how one can reach a level in which his soul is awakening him to *Teshuvah*.

19.

A person is made up of a body and a soul, and the body conceals the soul. If a person wants to reveal his soul, he needs to remove the barriers of the body that conceal it. How can a person do this? There are several ways.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: “A person can reach shame when he sits in solitude and reflects on the greatness of Hashem, and how evil it is to rebel against Him, and by remembering always that Hashem sees his actions and inspects his innards, and views his thoughts.”

In his words are contained three ways how we can get through to our soul: by sitting in solitude, by thinking about the greatness of Hashem, and by remembering always that Hashem sees what we do.

Let us explain each way.

20.

The soul is like a *kol demamah dakah*, a “soft, subtle voice.” The body, by contrast, is like a “great, noisy voice.” The body and its desires are very strong and are felt easily, while the soul’s desires are deep and subtle, not easily felt.

Therefore, if a person’s body is always at the fore of things, a person can’t reach his soul, which is a “soft, subtle voice.” A person needs to bring himself into a state in which he hears an inner voice.

The first step in doing this is *hisbodedus* (solitude). Many great leaders of previous generations practiced it, and the Chofetz Chaim practiced it for two hours a day. (We are not advising here that everyone do *hisbodedus* for two hours a day). When a person has *hisbodedus*, he has an inner silence, and through that it is easier to get through to his soul and leave his noisy bodily state. He can leave the noise of the body and enter into the soft, subtle voice of the soul.

Hisbodedus cannot be done in a pressurized way. A person has to be calm and relaxed for it; if not, the body still has a hold on the person, and a person will not be able to reach his inner world. It is recommended for this to do it outside your house, faraway from people. A quiet surrounding can give a person an inner calm.

21.

What should a person do during this time of solitude?

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: “To think about the greatness of Hashem.” This is a general term; let us explain it more in detail.

A person has to think and remember that he is limited, while Hashem is unlimited. First, a person should look around at the world and see, “*How great are Your actions, Hashem.*” After this, a person should see himself as only a small part of the world, and how the world is thousands of times greater than his eyes can see. Then, a person can reflect that there are even more planets and stars which he

cannot see, and he begins to realize how small of a speck he is in comparison to Hashem. Eventually, a person will feel how big Hashem is, in comparison to how small he is.

Then a person can reflect that he is only small in terms of his physical body, but he has a G-dly soul, which is a “*portion of Hashem*.” Since the soul is a piece of Hashem, it cannot be small. Now a person can feel a need to connect to his own soul and come out of his tininess, and to connect to Hashem, who is endless. Slowly more and more, a person can awaken a desire to reveal his soul.

22.

The last point which Rabbeinu Yonah writes is that a person should reflect that Hashem sees all that he does. Let us elaborate on this point as well.

A person should think that Hashem is actually found right next to him, for “*His glory fills the entire world*.” Just like there is a floor underneath you and a table to sit by, so is Hashem next to you as real as can be, and His presence is even more real than anything else you see. Think about this for many hours, until you begin to actually feel it.

When a person hasn’t yet reached his soul, he won’t come to do proper *Teshuvah*. Only when a person feels his soul can he feel closeness with Hashem, and when one feels that closeness, he is bothered by a sin and feels how it distances him from Hashem. He will be awakened to feel shame and the pain of the *Shechinah*, which are natural feelings of the soul.

23.

To feel closeness with Hashem is not just about leaving our sins. It is a concept which must envelope every aspect in our life. Whatever we do, we should feel that we are doing it because this is the will of our Father, and when we merit this awareness, all our life is spent on the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av* – honoring our Father.

06 | *Asking Hashem for Yiras Shomayim*

There are altogether five levels in how much *yirah* (fear of Heaven) a person is able to reach:

1. *Yiras HaOnesh* – fear of being punished, either on this world or in Gehinnom.
2. *Yiras HaKavod* – fear of not getting honored properly in the next world.
3. *Yiras HaShleimus* – fear of not reaching perfection, due to one's sins.

These three levels of *yirah* are written about in *Mesillas Yescharim*, chapters 2-4.

The next two levels of *yirah* are described in *Mesillas Yescharim*, chapter 25:

4. *Yiras HaRomemus* (fear of Hashem's exaltedness).
5. *Yiras Cheit* (fear of sin).

We will mainly explain *yiras ha'onesh*, fear of punishment.

The main method used to acquire *yiras ha'onesh* is through imagining the punishment of Gehinnom, and is written about in the works of Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt"l*, who founded the *Mussar* (self-discipline) movement, as well as by his students. However, there are three points which need to be emphasized here.

1. If a person is trying to work on he can fear Gehinnom, he should remember Who created Gehinnom, and who He is delivering the punishments (as well as keeping these souls alive every second): Hashem! Be afraid of Hashem, not of the punishment. This point was emphasized by Reb Chatzkel Levenstein *zt"l*.
2. Besides for picturing Gehinnom, a person needs to daven to Hashem a lot that he should really acquire this fear. It is not enough just to work hard on it – one needs *tefillah* as well to reach it.
3. Always remember that it is Hashem's will that we should fear punishment, and that this is not by chance. (This is explained in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*). Hashem wants us to have *yiras haonesh*, as well as *yiras haromemus* and *yiras cheit*.

When you are working hard to acquire *yiras haonesh*, remember that this is what Hashem wants – He wants us to work hard to acquire it. *Yiras haonesh* helps stabilize our Avodas Hashem. If we wouldn't have *yiras haonesh*, our Avodas Hashem will not last, and it will not build us.

A lot more can be said about this, and hopefully with the help of Hashem we will speak more about it.

07 | *Loving Hashem and Feeling His Love Toward Us - Part 1*

1.

Everything we do should be to give pleasure to Hashem

The first thing to know about everything we are about to say is that all of it is to give a *nachas ruach* (pleasure) to our Creator. If, G-d forbid, these words are not a source of pleasure to Hashem, then it is our hope that these words shouldn't be here.

If these words are pleasing to Hashem, we also need to be careful not to mix in other things that are not desirable by Hashem. Therefore it is always incumbent upon us to only do His will, and nullify anything else that does not fit what He wants.

This is the secret to success in anything; if bad becomes mixed up good, it is difficult for the good to remain, and thus our intentions here must be pure. Only something totally pure can last.

Of course, every person has downfalls and times in which he becomes immersed in self-worry, and he is not doing his actions for the sake of Heaven. But still, we must strive to always want to do His will, and this is the basis for everything. If a person should experience any failure with these matters, he should try to return to the inner point of it all, which is to do actions that bring a *nachas ruach* to our Creator.

The first thing necessary for this is that a person should pray that if he is indeed bringing pleasure to Hashem, then what he is doing should last, and if he isn't, it should not last. Additionally, a person should pray that any feelings that he might have that are not for the sake of giving pleasure to Hashem should become erased from his thoughts, and that he should only have desires which are for the sake of bringing pleasure to Hashem. Additionally, before any action a person does, he should think and feel this, and even say it with his mouth to Hashem: that all his actions should be for the sake of getting close to Hashem, and that if he should experience any deterrent to him getting close, it should be nullified, and his eyes should be awakened to the proper way.

We need to keep to these conditions before doing anything, at all times.

2.

Purifying our motives

We need to know: if people come to gather together, for what reason are they gathered? When a group comes together for something, it is normally impossible to say something to them that will be applicable to everyone, because everyone is on a different level; everyone needs individual guidance.

If we want to say things that are wise, we need to guide everyone individually, rather than give a public address.

However, the group of people here are gathered to hear the truth. The reason for our gathering here is to gather together all the different hearts who want truth, to come together and draw out from all our hearts the true desire to come close to the Creator and give pleasure to Him. Everyone in this gathering has that truthful point in his heart, and everyone's desire for this, when added together, becomes a fire.

Therefore, in every gathering of people there has to be a common goal: to search for the truth; to search for Hashem. By this, everyone can receive the unified goal, and together we can all find the truth. The proper way to go about this is to prepare ourselves by doing it for the sake of Heaven: to search for the truth, for Hashem. If that is the motivation, then we can reach the goal with even more purity. The purer our desires are for it, the more we will merit to understand how we can come close to Hashem.

3.

We need to become a pure vessel to receive Hashem's assistance

To explain this: the soul is a Godly creation, and it wants to do the will of its Creator. There is an adage, "It is our will to do Your will, but the yeast in the dough is holding us back." The true will of a person is give pleasure to Hashem, but the yeast – the "I" in a person, the external factor of a person, wants its own desires. So we need to remove those external desires, and awaken the point of truth in us, the part in us that says that it is "our will to do Your will."

By everyone preparing themselves to hear these words for the sake of Heaven, all of the pure desires of this gathering are in unison, and we can then have assistance from Heaven to reach the truth. If our desires are a mixture of good and bad – ulterior motives mixed with Heavenly motives – there is no way to receive pure sustenance, for the sustenance (*ohr*) can only enter a vessel (*kli*), and if the vessel is impure, then the sustenance that goes into it will also be impure.

4.

Every Jew has a unique soul

Another important point to be made is that every Jew is unique in his soul. Reuven is unique in one area that Shimon isn't. If a person works alone, then everyone has his own ability, alone. But when two people join together, their abilities come together, and they can give to each other's abilities. In this way, everyone can receive another person's unique ability, and use it to serve Hashem.

But in order to join properly with another, it must be done for the sake of Heaven. If there are impure motives, then the bad part of the mix cannot sustain any connection, just as the connection

of the wicked is not a connection. Only a truthful desire can unite people. A connection with some bad in it is not a true connection and will not last. It will not be strong, and it cannot produce anything.

It is not easy to find people that do everything together for the sake of Heaven, but we must look for them. It is not quantity that we need, but quality. At all times, one must remember that he should be doing the action for the sake of Heaven.

Many times we forget to have this in mind, but any small reminder to do it for the sake of Heaven has a lot of value. Eventually, a person will train himself not to be upset from his failures, and remind himself and others to do things for the sake of Heaven; Hashem will have mercy and awaken him when he does so, since has a great desire in spite of all his failures. When a person truly searches for Hashem, Hashem will not abandon him, and he will surely draw him close, and He will merit him to do it for the sake of Heaven, which is the heart's pure desire.

5.

Praying that everything should be done for the sake of Heaven

It is proper that each individual pray many times that he merit to doing everything for the sake of Heaven, and that everyone as a whole should act for the sake of Heaven. No prayer comes back unanswered, and if a person prays that he do things for the sake of Heaven, then surely his prayer will not go unanswered.

However, we don't always actually see this. Therefore a person shouldn't be discouraged if he sees that his prayers aren't being answered right away. He should believe that they were surely accepted, but that it isn't openly recognizable. He should continue to pray for a long time and not give up. Eventually, he is guaranteed to actually see progress: his heart and desires will act for the sake of Heaven.

The truth is that such a prayer should constantly be on one's lips. Even if a person merits to do actions purely for the sake of Heaven, there is always a higher level to be reached, a level that is still purer than the current one. One has to always pray that his motives become even more pure, and he needs to constantly pray for this.

Most people find it difficult to serve Hashem on their own, and they find it necessary to join with another; "Each friend will help each other." However, one must be cautious that the union will be for the sake of Heaven, and not for personal reasons. Those involved with each other need to speak this over with each other, that their constant desire is to join together only for the sake of Heaven.

6.

Praying to find those to join with

To find a gathering of those who truly have fear of Hashem is not an easy thing at all, in our generation. However, one shouldn't despair from this, G-d forbid; rather, a person should believe in Hashem, who is running the world with His attribute of truth. Anyone who searches for the truth is helped by Hashem.

Therefore, a person needs to beseech Hashem that he will merit to join a group or have a friend that wants to find the truth.

A person shouldn't feel guaranteed that his prayers will be answered right away, but this shouldn't cause one to despair. He should continue to pray more and more until Hashem helps him. One shouldn't care if this takes years! This is the way of someone who serves Hashem: he doesn't despair of working hard in how he beseeches Hashem, even if it takes many years, even if he doesn't see any changes! He trusts in Hashem that He hears his prayers, and eventually his prayers will be heard, and he will become close to Hashem.

The truth is that there are many ways how Hashem can draw a person close to him. Therefore, the main point of one's prayers should be that Hashem draw him close.

The way how he will get there – through a teacher, a group, or a friend – can only be attained through prayer. But the main point is to pray that he will come close to Hashem!

7.

Anything we do is a means to get close to Hashem

We have to know what our priorities are, and what is only second to most important.

Therefore, we need to know that the foundation of everything – our greatest priority - is that we should become close to Hashem.

We need to remember this at all times, and this should be what we desire our whole life: to come closer and closer. We need to remember that anything else is only a *way* to reach our purpose, a way to get close to Hashem.

The main thing is always to pray that we truly get close to Hashem. We need to also pray for the details it entails, such as *how* to get close, but we must not get caught up in the details.

Anyone who truly searches for Hashem will not be left empty-handed....

8.

It's hard being alone...

The Talmud says (Bava Basra 16b), "Either a friend or death." A person's soul needs companionship, and he needs to include others in his life; it can be his friends, or even just having others in his life. The point is that the soul cannot stand remaining alone. This is the way a person is made; *"It is not good for man to be alone."* (Beraishis 2: 19). A man needs a companion who will take part in his life.

However, this is not the only reason why one needs a friend. The main reason why one needs a friend is because *"A friend helps his friend, and says to his brother, 'Be strong.'"* (Yeshayahu 41:6)

A person finds it difficult to tackle life's problems by himself. Life is full of difficulties, whether in material things or in spiritual matters. A person needs a lot of strength to withstand life's tribulations. It is very hard for a person to shoulder everything alone, and only when he has a partner who strengthens him and doesn't let him get affected by his life, he can withstand the difficulties.

It is very difficult to withstand anything, though unless a person has a *true* friend.

9.

It is difficult to find a true friend

Here we come to a big problem. It is very hard to find a true friend, a friend who will cater to one's personal needs, and especially necessary is a friend who is loyal, in all times of one's life. If one doesn't have such a friend, the Sages say that it is death, G-d forbid. What is the solution for such a person? Can he live his life as if he's dead? It is impossible to live like this.

What is the solution? Firstly, one needs to pray a lot for assistance and not give up. Even if it seems that his prayers aren't being answered, they will surely be answered, and eventually a person will be able to actually see it.

But until a person's prayers get answered, what should a person do in the meantime?

10.

The only true friend is Hashem

The answer to this is a great secret to anyone who doesn't know it, and it is very simple to someone who knows it. The great secret is that Hashem Himself is the true companion that a person can have!

This doesn't mean that a person doesn't need friends. But the true friend is Hashem! "*Your friend and the friend of your father, do not abandon*" (Shabbos 31a). Rashi explains that that the "friend of your father" is Hashem.

Why is this a big secret? It is a secret because we know that Hashem is the Great King, whom it is supposedly impossible to come close to, the King who is on High, whom no one seems to have a connection or friendship with. He is the King who dwells in the most exalted place, where no one can reach. So if He can't be reached, how can one become His friend? How can a person form a friendship with a friend that he will never see even once? Such thoughts come to anyone who begins to mature, unless one was told beforehand that such thoughts are a mistake. It is a mistake that causes one to lose his focus on his purpose on this world.

Our purpose is to be close to Hashem, to be very close; to be a friend with Hashem and feel His fatherliness toward us. Hashem is our friend in everything, and there is no friend like Him in the whole world. There is no friend that can be so close to a friend as the perfect friend – Hashem.

One who hasn't merited this friendship thinks that this an exaggeration - nice thoughts which aren't practical, and just feelings; he thinks that someone who thinks like this is deluded by his imagination and fooling himself that he feels Hashem in his life. He is positive that one cannot feel Hashem. But the truth is that it is an awesome friendship, a friendship which is so deep that no brother or friend on this world can compare to it. A person who feels Hashem in his heart is so wrapped up in Hashem's love, and goes with Hashem wherever he goes, and in every place he is he can feel Hashem with him. ("*His Glory fills the entire world.*")

One must know that if he hasn't yet merited to feel this way, he is experiencing death on this world. Even if he has everything good, if he is missing this, he is missing the main thing -- a bond with Hashem, a true bond. He is only experiencing mere sparks of love, and he doesn't realize that he could be living in a world full of love, a life that is never lonely; one always has a partner with him, a true partner – Hashem!

One who decides to believe this and strive to live in this world of love has the whole world in his hands. We will now explain how to enter this state of total love with Hashem.

11.

Why Hashem is better than any other friend

Before a person begins to work on how to feel his love for Hashem and Hashem's love toward him, he must first look at the words of the Talmud, "What you don't want your friend to do to you, don't do to him – this is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary." Rashi explains that "friend" here means Hashem! Hashem Himself, in all His honor, is your friend and your father's friend; it's awesome. The Talmud is telling us that Hashem is your friend, a true friend whom there is none like.

We usually think of Hashem as being the King of the universe, Creator of the universe, etc. We relate to Hashem as if He is so separated from us that we can't ever grasp Him.

It is indeed true that He is our King. But there is another way to relate to Hashem, another way to go about Him; He is your "friend", and we can have a relationship with Him.

This is a totally different approach than the first approach; it is the soul's connection with Hashem. Just like a person enjoys sitting with his friends and talking to them, so can a person enjoy Hashem's company. Hashem is always available to talk to. He is not like other friends who can't always be with us; He is with us at any time.

12.

*The evil inclination convinces a person
that one can't have a relationship with Hashem*

A person has to turn over all his thoughts to think about Hashem. One shouldn't just relate to Hashem as if He is far away, sitting in Heaven, applying the verse, "*Who among us can ascend to Heaven?*" or "*Who can see me and live?*" He shouldn't think, "What do I have to do with Hashem?" This is a nonsense that the evil inclination puts in, that we can't be close to Hashem.

A Jew who is living a true lifestyle lives with Hashem in his heart at all times; Hashem is his friend. Anyone who tastes of this friendship can feel clearly that there is no friendship like it in the world. There is nothing more reliable than this friendship, and there is nothing more pleasant than sitting in Hashem's company. Hashem is the true companion to a person, the true beloved friend that we have.

13.

*All the evil inclination wants is so that
we shouldn't have a relationship with Hashem*

Hashem created the evil inclination in order to test us. The evil inclination enters in our mind all kinds of thoughts and mentalities that aren't good. He turns dark into light and light into dark. It tells us in our thoughts, what kind of talk is this – getting close to Hashem?! Being friends with Hashem?! Hashem is so awesome and cannot be reached; you are friends with Him?!

The *yetzer hora* has many such accusations. It just wants one thing: that a Jew shouldn't be close to Hashem or be a friend with Him. This is everything that the evil inclination stands for.

14.

Praying to merit this relationship

One who searches for the truth is not swayed by the evil inclination's arguments. He prays to Hashem that he be shown the truth, and cries to Hashem as well for it. He wonders if it is really possible to have a relationship with Hashem, or if he is just hearing parables and doesn't feel it in his heart. He cries to Hashem that he be shown the truth, and he even visits the leaders of the generation and asks them: Is it really possible to feel Hashem in my heart? Is it really possible to have a bond with Him? Is it real or is it just imagined? Is this the way a Jew lives, or is it just a new idea?

If one prays to Hashem to be shown the truth, and cries out to Him very much, Hashem will help him find someone who is true in his service to Hashem who will tell him that there is nothing simpler than it. All of the great people in all generations lived like this, and there is no fact simpler than this -- that a Jew must be close to Hashem and be a friend to Him.

15.

The various arguments of the evil inclination

Hashem put the evil inclination in us who tries to sway us from the truth. The evil inclination comes up with many arguments and doesn't stop. He finds excuses why one should remove himself from the truth. A Jew who keeps the Torah and does mitzvos, and does his utmost to serve Hashem, and looks for how he can serve Hashem and be close to Him and love Him, and how he can feel Hashem's love toward him – will be attacked by the evil inclination's arguments.

His first argument will be: "First attain true awe of Hashem, which should come first, as it says *"The beginning of wisdom is awe of Hashem."* He claims that one first needs to learn how to have true awe of Him before he embarks on loving Him, and that he should first truly fear punishment before anything else. The evil inclination tells this to someone his whole life, that he is not yet in awe of Hashem so he can't love Him yet. In this way a person unfortunately dies without ever having any love of Hashem.

We have seen Jews like this, who never loved Hashem their entire lives, because of the above argument.

Our generation is weak, and therefore the Steipler Gaon *zt"l* writes that a person needs to grab whatever he can – whether it is fear of Hashem, love of Hashem or any good trait. How pitiful is it when one leaves this world without ever even beginning to love Hashem in his heart. A person has to also work on awe of Hashem, as well as to also love Him; if not now, when? Who knows if he'll have tomorrow to do it...

16.

Loving Hashem is not only for Chassidim...

There are those who argue that “anything new is forbidden by the Torah”, and that what we have said here is not the way we have received from our blessed teachers. The claim is that our way is to only learn *mussar* and about awe of Hashem – meaning to only have fear of punishment, for we don’t find any of our earlier teachers stressing the fact to love Hashem. This claim is simply nonsense, because there is an open verse in the Torah that we have to love Hashem with all our hearts.

If loving Hashem is just a product of “*Chassidus*” or a simply nice conduct, then there would be room to claim that it is not our accepted way, because our fathers never did it. But it is a mitzvah of the Torah, so how can there be any such claim? Our holy ancestors surely performed the mitzvah of loving Hashem, so no one can say that it is not our ancestors’ way.

Who is greater than the Chofetz Chaim, the light of the exile, who brings the words of Sefer HaChinuch in the beginning of his sefer, Biur Halacha: “This mitzvah is that person should place his outlook and thoughts on loving Hashem, and he should understand in his heart than any other love in this world such as love of wealth, children or honor is nothing in comparison to love for Hashem.”

Although these are simple words to anyone who seeks Hashem, we must speak them out so that any doubt is removed. Don’t let your evil inclination tell you that loving Hashem is a “Chassidic” thought. How can an open mitzvah in the Torah only be for someone who is Chassidic?

The *Sefer HaChinuch* writes that it is a constant mitzvah for every person, and he writes clearly that one needs to place all his thoughts on loving Hashem. We don’t need to elaborate on this topic for one who is searching for truth. But the evil inclination is very powerful, and he has succeeded into swaying many people into false notions; he’ll tell a person anything just to get him far away from truth.

17.

Inspiring words of Rav Yisroel Salanter zt”l and Rav Dessler zt”l

If you’re still in doubt and you think that loving Hashem is a “Chassidic” thing, (even though it’s not true) then, for the sake of your future, I will quote you the words of the founder of the *Mussar* movement, Reb Yisrael Salanter, who is quoted in *Michtav M’Eliyahu* (Vol. 1, p.38):

“In our times, we lack the true way of *mussar*. Gone are the truthful men who have it strong. We have reached the footsteps of Moshiach, which is known as an ‘external’ generation. When a person learns *mussar* today, he is focused more on the wisdom, philosophy and psychology of it. Even if he learns *mussar* with feeling, he doesn’t bring it into his soul. Those of the Chassidic movement are also lacking in attachment to Hashem; they are left with just the outer shell of *Chassidus*, which

seems like enthusiasm but isn't. Uplifting songs have remained, but the soul of the songs is gone. Enthusiasm in prayer has become a thing of old. Today the only thing we have is to take anything that helps us serve Hashem, by combining the wisdom of *Mussar* and *Chassidus* together. If only we can be illuminated and be opened up to recognize Hashem. If only today's *mussar* can uplift us to a little Chassidic enthusiasm. If only that enthusiasm would spur us on to make a deep self-accounting. If only through all of this we can grow spiritually and have a strong religious commitment. Hashem should help us reach this!"

These words of Rav Dessler *zt"l* are here to give us advice and help us serve Hashem.

18.

In our times, one must strengthen himself in whatever way he can

In order to feel these words properly, we have an explanation from Rav Hutner *zt"l*, who says a wonderful parable.:

A great philanthropist had two daughters. He wanted only to marry them off to the best scholars, true servants of Hashem. He was willing to support them forever so that they could have a clear mind to serve Hashem. Hashem granted him this kindness, and he married off his daughters to two outstanding people. He asked one of his sons in law which kinds of food they will need, so that they should never feel weak. The first son in law said that he needs to eat meat every day in order to have strength. The second son in law said he needs milk. Since one needed meat and the other needed milk, they could never eat together. (Although they technically could have dined together on separate tablecloths, they chose to be stringent).

One day, the wealthy father in law lost all his money one day, and he became poor. Yet he still found enough money to support his sons in law with their diets, but he couldn't give them everyday. Soon he became even more poor, and couldn't give meat or milk, only hard bread and water.

Now that the two son-in-laws are eating the same foods anyway, nothing should hold them back from eating together.

The same is with our subject. Once upon a time, *Chassidus* was real *Chassidus*, and *mussar* was real *mussar*. Each person chose his unique way to serve Hashem. But today, the *Chassidus* being practiced is not *Chassidus*, and neither is *mussar*. We are all partaking of the same "table" and reading the same *sefarim*, any *sefer* that strengthens us in serving Hashem.

Anyone who is searching for truth should nullify themselves to the words of Rav Dessler *zt"l* and Rav Hutner *zt"l*, and **strengthen themselves in whatever way they can**. Maybe through this, the words here can enter the heart.

19.

It's not enough to love the Torah without loving Hashem

The evil inclination is called an “old and foolish king.” It has many ways to advise a person in straying from Hashem, and if it doesn’t succeed one way, it’ll look for another way. There are those who are swayed by him in thinking that since “Hashem, the Torah, and the nation of Yisrael are one”, and it suffices for them to love only learning Torah, and that alone is like loving Hashem, for Hashem and the Torah are one. (We will explain why this does not suffice to love Hashem).

The truth is that there are three types of love: love for the Creator, love for the Torah, and love of the nation of Yisrael. If I love one of them, that doesn’t mean for sure that I love the other two. So no one can rely on the fact that he loves Torah.

20.

What it means to truly love Hashem

There are people whom the evil inclination tests them by telling them that they already love Hashem. It will argue that you already love Hashem, and you only need to love Him more, and that you are already loving Him more and more.

This is also a false argument, because someone who thinks this doesn’t know what love is. One should know that love for Hashem at least resembles the love of a husband and wife or the love of parents to children; just as when a father doesn’t see his children he misses them, so must a person miss Hashem and long for Him, like the *Chovos HaLevovos* says, “The soul longs for G-d.” Nowadays this is a problem, for even in our regular kinds of love we are lacking true love, and our feelings aren’t so strong. This problem is one of the curses of the footsteps of Moshiach.

True love brings one to have a longing for the one whom he loves; he has a great desire to see him, to feel him, and to speak with him. These are not merely unstable feelings; they are feelings that fill the whole person and make him feel a tremendous warmth in his heart, and sometimes even in his whole body. It is hard to put this concept in writing, but the Rambam has already stated that all of the thoughts remain solid in a lover of Hashem. Someone who loves Hashem lives in a different world, a world of friendship with Hashem; he can talk to Him, feel Him, and is bound up with Him in his soul.

Upon loving Hashem, a person’s heart stops being dead and comes to life; he is given a satisfaction and joy in life, and his whole life becomes different.

A person doesn’t just think, “Okay, so I love Hashem.” If he thinks this way, he doesn’t know what love is, and certainly he doesn’t know what loving Hashem is. One needs to understand that loving Hashem means to be moved to tears out of yearning for Him. A person cries out of warmth, love and happiness when he loves Hashem.

The evil inclination, though, tells a person that he already loves Hashem with just his small amount of feelings for Him.

It is hard to explain this any clearer to one who is searching for the truth, for he knows that loving Hashem is a deep, inner matter which needs a lot of hard work to acquire.

21.

Besides for learning Torah, a person must also develop a love for Hashem

The evil inclination tells some people that they don't have to try to love Hashem, for they can rely on the words of the *Sefer HaChinuch*, who writes, "How does one acquire love of Hashem? Through Torah..."

However – what should we say? The fact is that our eyes can see that many people are diligent in learning Torah, yet they don't love Hashem. We are puzzled: Why does Hashem let this occur?

But there is really no room for such a question. Why is this so? Because we know that all the benefits that come through Torah learning can only come when Torah is learned *lishmah*, for its own sake. Rav Chaim Vital wrote, "Who can say on himself that he learns Torah for its own sake?" So we don't learn Torah for its own sake, and therefore we don't get its benefits. It is therefore apparent that in order to attain love for Hashem it is not enough to learn Torah. We need more advice on how to get there.

The Rambam writes, "What is the way to love Him?..." He does not say that it is enough to just learn Torah. A person needs to seek ways how to love Hashem – besides for learning Torah, which is the basis for acquiring anything. What we need is to be healed, and we need the medicine to be healed.

The Vilna Gaon writes that when Torah learning is lacking in quality, we need medicine to heal us; we are referring to the advice found in our holy *sefarim*, which we will explain.

22.

People don't know what to work on first

Many good people have been tricked by the evil inclination and become so mixed up by him that they stop serving Hashem totally. They don't know where to begin, and where to end. People learn *mussar*, and they come across things that they would like to try to do; they know that they are sorely lacking in many areas that need improvement. But they don't know where to start and how to go about. They cannot come up with an order of what to do.

Additionally, people see others who are trying to help our communities – and every person speaks of one particular topic we need to improve on. One speaker will speak about on how we have to stop evil gossip, and another will lecture us on the sin of talking in shul. One gives a lecture on how we have to improve on answering Amen with concentration, and another tells us we have to improve on the laws of Shabbos. One lectures us on how we need to work on modesty, and another will lecture us on how we should really welcome in the Shabbos early. Each of them is trying to strengthen a particular area, but there is no order.

People are wandering around in the dark trying to figure out how they can work on all of these things at once. It is a problem that many people have, especially those who are searching for how to serve Hashem best. We need to be able to know how to put order to all of these things, in order to serve Hashem properly. When we will understand how to serve Hashem properly, we can arrange all of these matters properly.

There are so many details involved in serving Hashem; it's endless. We need to understand the inner meaning in all of it, its inner contents, and the purpose of all of it together. When we know the purpose of how it all comes together, we can grasp the details with clarity, and we can know where each detail belongs and how it connects to the greater picture. Therefore, when a person begins to serve Hashem, one must know exactly what the purpose of his service is, to where his service is leading him to. After a person knows that purpose, he must now understand how each detail can bring him closer to it.

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23.

What is a secret?

What is a secret? Let's give an example. Reuven wants to sell his house, but he hasn't told anyone yet. No one knows of his plans except himself. Is this a secret? No. Why? Because if he would tell everyone, everyone knows. The fact that only Reuven knows is not really a secret; he just happens to be the only one who knows of it.

What is a true secret? The holy *sefarim* tell us that a true secret is when a soul reaches a level that can only be reached when it is purified. A true secret is the heart's secret, an inner secret.

24.

The secret of life

What is the secret of life? It appears that many already know it. However, only rare individuals "know" it, and that is why it is a secret.

First of all, what is the secret? The *Mesillas Yescharim* writes, "And if you reflect on the matter more you will see that true perfection is attachment to Hashem, and it is what King David said (Tehillim 73: 28), "And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good." And it says (ibid 27: 4), "One thing I request from Hashem: That I dwell in Hashem's House all my life, to see the glory of Hashem." For only this is good, and anything else that people say is good is nothing but nonsense...."

Here it is revealed to us what the secret of life is.

Anyone who really understands these words understands what the secret of life is. Anyone who doesn't -- he can carry out all of the Torah's commandments in all its details, but he doesn't grasp what life is about: that life on this world -- and the inner, eternal life -- is one and the same.

How many people have read those words of the *Mesillas Yescharim*? Thousands, ten thousand -- and more. Yet how many grasp the truth? That's a big question.

25.

Why this is the secret of life

If you ask someone what it means to be attached and close to Hashem, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* spoke about, you will get many answers.

Some will answer that the Sages already spoke of the matter, when they explained that the mitzvah of *“And you will cleave to Him”* doesn’t mean that one should try to cleave to Hashem’s Presence, but rather by cleaving to the attributes of Hashem, such as that He is merciful. People claim that this is called attachment to Hashem.

Others answer that attachment to Hashem means by attaching oneself to a Torah scholar and righteous person, which is what the Sages say to do, in explaining the verse of *“And you will cleave to Him.”*

Others quote the words of Maharal that it means to totally rely on Hashem.

However, all of these answers do not explain to us the secret of life. They are all totally true, and they are the words of the holy Sages. But they are only explanations found in one’s mind. True attachment to Hashem involves one’s heart, one’s soul – they are real feelings, not just an intellectual understanding of what it means to be attached to Hashem.

Attachment to Hashem is an actual feeling one can sense. Just as one can touch a table or chair and feel it, so can one feel and have a sense for Hashem. Before a person ever feels Hashem, it is a secret to him.

How can I feel Hashem? He has no body. But there is a God-like sense placed into one’s soul, and it called a *“portion of G-d, from above.”* This part can feel its deeper part of the soul – Hashem Himself.

This is why it is the secret of life; it can only be given to one who has perfected it, and it cannot be explained, only sensed. No parable can attempt to explain it; a parable is physical matter, while feeling Hashem is entirely Godliness.

26.

Desiring to be close to Hashem

After one merits to feel Hashem, he can feel a love for Him in his heart, and it is a bond of friendship with Hashem, a companionship with Him, a seclusion with Him. It is a much stronger bond than two human beings who have a connection. It is the true friendship that has no comparison. When one loves Hashem, he loves Him more than anything. He is connected to Him more than he is connected to anything else, and he can feel Him more than anything else he feels. It is an inner feeling in the soul, and anyone who hasn’t reached it cannot comprehend it if it is explained to him. But anyone who reached it knows with absolute clarity what it is.

Our senses for physical matters are external, and those senses are therefore not so reliable. But the inner sense for Hashem is a much stronger sense. It is the inner meaning of life, and the secret of life.

Whoever hasn't experienced it yet needs to pray and cry to Hashem that he merit to understand this – life, the secret of life, closeness to Hashem and being attached to Hashem. He should weep incessantly, day after day, month after month, and year after year until Hashem hears and accepts his request. His heart will by then be purified and he can reach it.

One who doesn't attain it not only loses out on knowing the facts, but is lacking a major understanding in his soul. But one who attains this can feel Hashem totally, and he can have a true friendship with Him, and speak with Him just like he does with any friend.

This is the inner meaning of life, and it is the purpose of life – to be close to Hashem.

27.

Conditional love and then unconditional love

To summarize: just as in our regular relationships, we need to begin a relationship by first recognizing our friend, and afterwards we can slowly build up a connection and strengthen love, so it is with our relationship with Hashem; first our soul needs to recognize Him, and actually relate to Him; only after this can we start to have an inner connection to Him, a connection of love and friendship.

This needs a proper structure, because many good people find it hard to start serving Hashem right away. We will explain how to go about this: first a person needs to know how to love Hashem, conditionally. Then one needs to work on recognizing Him, and only afterwards can a person work on loving Him unconditionally.

If one loves Hashem only conditionally, he is not guaranteed to recognize Him.

One who can start serving Hashem right away is well off. But a person has to clarify first if he truly is able to start serving Hashem – or if he's fooling himself.

28.

Reflecting on Hashem

We should explain the root of this matter. The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes (Chap. 19), "One is actually standing in front of the Creator and dealing with Him, although He cannot be seen by human eyes. One can see that it is very difficult for a person in his heart to form an image of Him, for he is not being helped by any of his senses. However one who has a proper mind can establish in his heart the truth of this matter, with a little contemplation and reflection in his heart, how he is conversing with Him, and that from Him he is beseeching, and that He is attentive and listening to his words just as when one speaks to his friend and his friend listens."

Similarly, the Chazon Ish (Letters Vol. 1: 23) writes, “It is a difficult job to do in Tefillah, to imagine vividly how Hashem is listening to our words and being attentive to the thoughts in our hearts.”

Let us reflect well on these words.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* above wrote of “one who has a proper mind.” What does a person have to do? He has to have a little contemplation and reflect in his heart the truth of the matter. But what should one do if he does not have a proper mind? Most of us don’t; we try to picture Hashem vividly in our hearts, but we can’t. What should one do if he wants to feel the Creator? Should he think that everything he does has what to do with Hashem? It is not enough to just reflect a little. We need to thus explain more how to succeed.

29.

Everything a person needs is already present in one’s soul

First we will quote the words of the Ramchal and then we will try to explain them. He writes in *sefer “Derech Eitz Chaim”* that “Wisdom was already given by Hashem into our hearts, but in order to be strong in it one needs the mouth to sustain it and give it energy, so that it will become a fire, just as when we blow on fire with our mouth. When we blow with our mouth, wisdom is fused and we can see that this knowledge was here all along, except that until now we could not see it. This can only be done only with the energy that comes from the Mouth from above.”

Here the Ramchal is telling us an awesome secret. He is speaking of wisdom, but his words can be applied to much more than that. He is telling us that the soul really knows a lot. **The soul already has everything it needs to know:** wisdom, knowledge, understanding, feelings, love of Hashem, awe of Hashem and attachment to Hashem. But what is the problem? Everything is hidden deep inside in the soul, and it needs to come out. No one has to do anything new; everything is already there inside the soul! A person’s job is to **bring it all out** from within his soul.

30.

Uncovering the soul

This is a deep matter.

It is a mistake to think that one needs to acquire knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, or love of Hashem, etc. No one has to “get” anything new. Anything a person needs is already inside one’s soul, but it is just hidden.

A person needs to work on uncovering and revealing his soul by removing the outer layers that cover his abilities. A person can reveal from himself a world of great wealth: knowledge, wisdom, understanding, love of Hashem, awe of Hashem and attachment to Hashem. It is not just mere

knowledge, and it must change one's whole system of doing things. It is not our job to acquire new abilities, but rather **to reveal one's own potential**. A person needs to search deep within himself for it.

This is the general idea, and we will try to explain it more.

31.

Uncovering the soul's potential – through the mouth

How does one bring his inner potential out of himself? The Ramchal has revealed how.

The way to do this is through one's **mouth!** The Ramchal wrote that one needs to "blow with his mouth." Contemplating a matter deeply is not the main thing; the main thing is the mouth. If a person utilizes his mouth, he is giving a lasting effect to what he does; if not, it is very hard to do so. Anything we need to do is already hidden in us, and all we have to do is reveal it through our mouth, with speech. If we want to acquire anything, it is through our mouth. Now we will explain how to use the mouth and bring out our inner potential.

32.

Conditional love and unconditional love

A person can love in two different ways.

- 1) **Conditional love.** The holy *sefarim* tell us that this is a love that has to do with any reason, or knowledge. It is to love something for a specific reason.

Let's say a person loves Hashem because of He performs great actions, or because He gives one what he needs. He is loving Hashem – because he has a reason to. This is conditional love, a love that has to do with reason or knowledge. It is a love that can be explained on an intellectual level.

- 2) **Unconditional love.** This is true love. Love is *ahavah*, which has the same numerical value as *echad*, which is one. True love is to be one with the beloved. When one loves another and feels as if he is part of him, he loves him even if there is no intellectual reason.

If a person wants to awaken from within himself the conditional love for Hashem, he needs to use his intellect. But when a person wants to awaken unconditional love for Hashem from within himself, he needs to awaken his bond with Hashem. This cannot come from the intellect; it must come from a simplicity found in the soul. Simplicity is *temimus*, which comes from the word "*Tomim*"; it means to be "perfect". One who wants to awaken his perfection needs to awaken his simplicity.

(Really the best way to serve Hashem is by first recognizing Him and then loving Him, even by loving Him conditionally. However, every person is different. We have chosen to first speak about conditional love before recognizing Him, and everyone on his own should choose what way is best for him.)

33.

Setting aside time for this

Now we will explain how to awaken both types of love found in one's soul, and how to reveal them.

First, a person needs to set aside time where he can sit alone with Hashem; he shouldn't be around people. He should then begin to speak to Him.

There are different ways of talking to Him, depending on if one loves Hashem conditionally or unconditionally. We will start with the lower level, which is conditional love, and we will say examples of it, but one can expand on his own according to his own understanding.

34.

Talking with Hashem in first-person

(Before continuing, one should read our opening words.)

A person sits in solitude with Hashem actually talks to Him, just as the Chofetz Chaim would do every day when he would leave his house, for two hours. This is what one should do: He opens his mouth to speak to Hashem, and says, "*Ribono shel olam*, who created me? You created me a long time ago, and You have not forgotten me for even one second. Who is keeping me alive since I am born? You! You, and only You! You keep me alive every second, even now when I stand before You. Master of the world, what do You give me? First of all, you give me air to breathe every second; life itself! If for one second you won't sustain me, I would die, G-d forbid. You never forget me for even one second. Every second you are thinking about me and renewing me with life. As soon as I was born, You didn't let me remain unclothed; no – You gave me people to constantly take care of me, to worry for me and put clothing on me.

“Additionally, You gave me a place to rest – my crib! You gave me pillows and blankets to keep me warm. You worried about my food from as soon as I was born, and as soon as I was hungry You didn't leave me; you worried that I should have a mother who would feed me every day for hours. You worried that my parents raise me responsibly, and always worried about me as I grew up. You have worried for personally in all Your Honor that I not lack anything. You also worried for me by giving me the ability to inform others about anything that bothers me, by giving me the ability to cry. Without this ability I would go through so much pain but no one would ever know. You worried for me by letting me digest properly, an awesome wonder. You worried for me by letting me reach items I wanted and play with them. You worried for me that I should be able to walk; if not

for that, I would be lame until today. I know how painful it is not to be able to walk. You worried for me by giving me friends to play with, and if not for that I would have been terribly lonely.”

All of these things should be thought about well, until a person reveals everything that goes on in his life to Hashem. One should talk to Hashem in a first-person language. He should say, “*You* worry about me” in all aspects of his life.

He should always talk to Him, saying, “*Ribono shel olam*, I can see that You love me and worry for me so much. If a person would worry for me this much, I would thank him, and so I am thanking You as well. I love You for worrying about me so much and for all that You do for me. However, Master of the World, I feel as if my love for You is miniscule in comparison to what I really owe You for what You gave me and for how much You love me. I beseech You, *Ribono shel olam*, that I be able to truly love You, that my soul should truly feel all the good You do for me, and this should awaken in me a proper love for You. *Ribono shel olam*, I feel so low that You love me so much and think about me all the time, while I do not always feel all the time that You love me. I know it in my mind, but I don’t feel it. I beseech You that my feelings for You should not be so dim, that my love for You should be alive and burn in me, that it should be a part of my life, that I never forget it, that it should live in my heart every second.”

In this way a person should pray, beg, and cry to Hashem that he should merit loving Him. Everyone according to his level should pray in this way, and do so every day.

There are many people who find it too hard to do this every day. They feel like they’re just repeating words. One must approach this with a holy kind of simplicity. Do you think Hashem can’t stand you? Do you think Hashem feels the same as you do – that you’re just repeating it? If a person would reach the understanding that Hashem thinks about him all the time – as well as right this second, as he stands before Him – then it won’t be hard for one to pray to Him again and again, that he loves Him and has thanks to Him.

When one doesn’t feel like doing this, he should become stubborn and not give up. If one doesn’t feel anything, he should beseech Hashem saying, “*Ribono shel olam*, I want to love You and remember all that You do for me every day, in order to awaken my love for You. But I have no desire, and it is not enjoyable for me. I am ashamed of myself and my situation. Have pity on me, purify my heart from its blockage, give it life. I feel ashamed of my situation of not loving You. Have pity on me for being so low and for not loving You like I should. Show me the way how to love You, awaken my heart that I be able to remember Your goodness that You do for me.”

One should pray according to his abilities. Whatever the case is, no one should ever give up! Giving up is like giving a divorce to Hashem – Heaven forbid.

On a day that a person succeeds in speaking to Him with love, he should be thankful. On a day that one is not successful in doing so, he should beseech Hashem and cry over it with Hashem. But either way, there should never be a day that goes by without any of this.

One has to be very stubborn with this; the Vilna Gaon said that a very stubborn person (in spiritual matters) will succeed.

We will mention two conditions necessary to succeed in this.

1) One needs to speak to Hashem about things he can feel at least a little. He shouldn't speak to Him about things that he merely knows in his mind but not in his heart. He needs to have a little feeling for anything he says. A person needs to pray as well for this: that the words he is saying should come from his heart. If he only speaks of things that he knows in his mind but not what he feels in his heart, nothing will come of it. One must feel what he is talking about. The least a person can do is want even a little of what he speaks about.

2) One also needs to speak with Hashem in first-person – “You” -- and not in third person, “Him.” In order to form a personal connection with Hashem, we need to address Him in first-person. To speak to Him in third-person causes one to distance himself from getting close to Him.

35.

Talking to Hashem in a private, secluded place

After a person works hard on this for a long time, and truly acquires in his soul the feeling of love for Hashem, he must now continue in this way by secluding himself in his room, opening his mouth, saying, “*Ribono shel olam*, I know and believe that You are here, and that at this moment You are standing next to me, but I don't feel it. Let me merit that I should feel that You are with me.”

One should pray like this from the depths of his heart every day, week, and month, and not slacken off. Every day one needs to set aside time to be alone with Hashem and pour out his heart to Him that he should merit to truly recognize Him, and truly feel Him.

After one gets used to this for some time one should be able to see from all his words if he feels Hashem. Yet a person is in danger in this way, for one has to be careful that he is not being fooled by his imagination. **One needs to be very careful that his feelings are not just imagination.** If one feels Hashem, then good; if he doesn't, he should pray to Him that he should, but he shouldn't push himself to see if he feels him.

If a person pushes hard to feel Hashem, he will fall into a fantasy. True feelings for Hashem come from an inner calm, from a “*soft, subtle voice (kol demamah dakkah)*”, which is a very refined feeling, and not from anything external.

36.

Be stubborn with this

One should be very stubborn in this. A person can work on it for a long time and still not feel anything, yet he should never give up. One should be strong-minded in it, because in the end Hashem will have mercy on him and make Himself revealed to his heart, where he will feel Him totally.

Hashem specifically tests a person in this aspect: to see if he will become stubborn, and to see how much he will want to feel his Creator. If he gives up in middle of the way, he is giving up all of life's inner meaning, the ability to feel Hashem. Only one whose heart is totally trustworthy in Hashem that He won't hold back good from those who are wholesome in serving Him will succeed.

One should be stubborn in this way, day after day, beseeching Hashem, "I want to feel You", or "My whole desire is to feel You and be close to You", and surely then it will be realized that "*Hashem is close to all who call out to Him, to all who call to Him in truth.*" A Jew who truly wants to feel Hashem and be close to Him and is stubborn in begging Hashem for this will definitely merit to feel Hashem.

To be stubborn means to be persistent, again and again, and to never give up. This is the secret to success: to truly believe in Hashem that He will hear one's prayers every day. Anyone who goes in this way and doesn't give up will merit to truly recognize Hashem, and be very close to Him.

One should try every day to set aside at least a half hour or hour every day for this. Then Hashem will merit him that he will truly feel Him.

37.

Strengthening the friendship with Hashem

After one merits to truly feel Hashem (at first one feels Him a little, and eventually he feels Him much more), it is then his job to form a connection to Hashem. Just like regular friends start out by first recognizing each other and then forming a friendship as time goes on, so in one's relationship with Hashem a person first recognizes Him and then goes on to form a loving bond with Him.

38.

Feeling Hashem

Now we need to explain how to form this connection of friendship with the Creator.

In order to form a lasting bond with Hashem, one has to make sure that he recognizes Hashem as a real entity and not just as imagination. If one recognizes Hashem only in his imagination, then everything is built on his imagination, which is a problem.

Many people think they already feel Hashem, for they already recognize Him. If you will ask any of them if they feel Hashem, they will right away respond, “Sure!” One will say because he prays specifically to feel Hashem. Another will say that he learns in depth and can therefore feel Hashem after learning, since he feels how great the Torah is. Another will answer that when he rejoices on Purim he connects to Hashem unbelievably. Many answers are given – each according to his own.

However, although all these feelings that people have are tremendous feelings, there is still a huge difference between recognizing Hashem and feeling Hashem. It is difficult to explain the difference in writing, but anyone who has merited to recognize Him knows the difference between true recognition and feeling Him as opposed to a mere elated feeling. True recognition and feeling Hashem is not a mere elated feeling of awe. A true feeling for Hashem means that one senses Hashem as real as he can sense a table or chair. It is a feeling that Hashem actually exists, just as anything else exists.

If one’s recognition of Hashem is not properly structured, but merely a fleeting feeling, then whatever is built upon it won’t last. Many fall short in this area. People can spend their whole lives being enthusiastic and speaking of how much they love Hashem. But it doesn’t help much, because they don’t truly *recognize* Hashem, because they think that Hashem is in Heaven, while they are merely on earth...

39.

Feeling Hashem more and more

When a person merits to truly feel the Creator, first he feels Him as “*His Glory fills the earth,*” or “*Hashem is always next to me.*” The Rambam says that this means that people can feel Hashem as an actual entity, and wherever one goes he actually feels Hashem with him.

After this level, when a person is more purified, he can begin to feel Hashem in his heart. He doesn’t just feel Hashem in his physical heart, but on the inner dimension of his heart – this is called “*I will build a sanctuary in my heart.*” (“*Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*”).

When a person is even more purified, he feels as if he’s actually standing right in front of Hashem, and this is the state called “*Hashem spoke to them face to face*” (Devorim 5: 4).

When a person purifies himself even more, he merits to feel that he himself is a part of Hashem, as it says, “*A portion of the living G-d is with him.*” This level can be reached and is hidden in every Jew’s soul, because everyone stood at the mountain by Sinai. It is covered over in many layers and remains hidden in the soul, and it is one’s duty to uncover it and reveal that inner power to feel Hashem, “As a man speaks to his friend.”

40.

Levels of feeling Hashem

We can give a parable to this, although the lesson is not exactly equal to the example. A person is talking on the phone. There can all sorts of scenarios:

- 1) He is talking with someone he doesn't know.
- 2) He is talking with someone he knows, but he is far away in another continent.
- 3) He is talking to someone on the same continent.
- 4) He is talking to someone who lives in the same city.
- 5) He is talking to someone who lives in his own complex.
- 6) He is talking to someone on the same street he lives on.
- 7) He is talking to someone who lives in his building.
- 8) He is talking to someone who lives next door, in the same building.
- 9) He is speaking to someone who is in his room, but he is in a big room and can only talk to him on a phone.
- 10) He is speaking with someone face to face, without a telephone.

Just as there levels in conversations, so are there levels in how one feels Hashem. The highest level is to actually feel Hashem in one's heart.

41.

Don't fool yourself

One needs to cry many tears to Hashem that he should not become deluded by his imagination. When he recognizes Hashem, it should be a true recognition that comes from the depths of the soul – and not from one's imagination. If one falls into this mistake, he can live his whole life with enthusiasm for Hashem, yet he is fooling himself – Hashem should save us from this.

Generally speaking, there are signs of how we can tell this. It is written, "*Hashem is not in an earthquake or in a great wind, but rather in a soft, subtle voice.*" (Melachim I: 19, 41). If a person doesn't properly recognize Hashem he cannot recognize Him in a "soft, subtle voice." A person can also fool himself that he has the signs, and therefore he must beg Hashem to make him realize the truth.

42.

Developing unconditional love for Hashem

After a person truly recognizes Hashem, he should now open up a bond of friendship with Him – an unconditional love. There are many ways to acquire love for Hashem.

The Rambam writes (*Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2), “What is the way for a person to love Hashem? One should reflect on His actions and awesome creations.”

Sefer HaChinuch says that through learning Torah, one can recognize the greatness of Hashem and come to love Him.

There are many other ways prescribed to us as well. However, it is very difficult to use the advice given, because in earlier generations, people were so purified in their minds that it was enough for them to just reflect on creation or learn Torah for Hashem’s sake. We, on the hand, are like orphans; our minds and hearts are dulled, and it is very difficult to find someone who learns Torah for its own sake alone. We need to realize how to love Hashem even in our pitiful, closed up situation.

43.

Feeling like being a part of Hashem

Now we need to explain the way how to awaken our unconditional love for Hashem. What is the root of unconditional love? To be one with the Creator.

Hashem is our Father and we are His children. Just as a child is a part of his father and comes from his father, from his very essence, so are we a part of Hashem, so to speak. We come from Him – from the radiance of His light.

So in order to feel this love, we need to feel as if we are a part of Him, a part of His Godliness. In order to reveal this love, one needs to reveal the very essence of our soul, which is a “*portion of G-d from above*”.

44.

Pray to Hashem like He is Your Father

Now we will explain how to reveal the very essence of one’s soul – the part of the soul that is a son to Hashem, the part which is a portion of G-d from above.

One needs to designate time with Hashem in a quiet, empty place and begin to talk to Hashem, saying: “*Ribono shel olam*, what is Your connection to me? You are my precious Father, and how great is my merit that I am your child, that You have merited me that You are my Father. But Father, although I have feelings for You that You are my Father and I am Your child, I don’t feel it in my heart. Sometimes I feel it less and sometimes more, but I am not actually living with it. I can relate to my physical father, but You I cannot feel as my Father. I want to feel that You are, but it is difficult for me, and I forget how. Father, I am so ashamed that I don’t feel this way. Even when I do remember, I don’t really feel it; it’s just a thought in my mind. Father, I am asking of You one thing: that I should feel that You are my Father, that I am Your child. I am not asking of You anything else – just this.

“Father, how much pain would I have if my own son would forget that I am his father, who gave birth to him and raised him, how much pain I would have if he were to forget his own roots. Therefore I don’t want to cause You pain by forgetting I am Your child; I need to feel it in my heart.

“Father, it pains me that even as I talk to You I still do not feel like You are my Father. Who can help me with this? Who can help me feel that You are my precious Father? Only You! Therefore I ask of You and beg of You that You have pity on me, that I should be able to feel You, that I should feel that You are my Father, and that I shouldn’t forget this, and that I should relate to You as to my own physical parents.”

In this manner everyone should pray at length, each according to his own style. A common denominator in everyone’s prayers is that they should be every day, and no one should give up. One needs to really beg Hashem for this and not slacken off from it. If he does this, eventually he will merit to feel Hashem as his Father, who hears his requests and answers him.

One should have no doubts that eventually he will feel this way. One who persists with this and always prays like this, every day, will merit to have a pure heart that feels its father, a heart that loves his father. One needs to only remember two conditions: 1) To speak from his heart. 2) To speak to Hashem in first-person.

May Hashem help all those who truly seek Him, who are seeking their Father; if one does so, his Father will surely reveal Himself to him, and one will feel just as a child enjoys his own father.

09 | *Talking To Hashem About Our Middos*

Introduction

The Ramchal writes in the beginning of *Mesillas Yescharim* that “going in Hashem’s ways (*halichah b’drachav*) entails working on one’s *middos* and perfecting them. It as the Sages say (Shabbos 133b), “Just as He is merciful and compassionate, so should You be merciful and compassionate.”

It seems that we must cleave to Hashem’s *middos* because since He is entirely good, we need to cling to the good of His ways. Yet, this is only a superficial perspective. The deeper reason why we must cleave to Hashem’s ways is because they are the *middos* of Hashem – and that itself obligates us to cleave to His *middos*. By cleaving to His *middos*, we come to have *d’veykus* in Him; Chazal say that the way to achieve *d’veykus* (“*And you shall cleave to Him*”) is by cleaving to Hashem’s *middos*, by getting our *middos* to resemble Hashem’s *middos*.

How indeed does resembling Hashem’s *middos* bring us to have *d’veykus* in Him? It is because in order to become attached with Hashem, we need to resemble Him. The more and more we get our own *middos* to resemble Hashem’s *middos*, the more we become one with Him.

Thus, the *mitzvah* to go in Hashem’s ways – *halachah b’drochov* – is not because we have to cling to His *middos* since they are good. It is more than that. It is because by getting our *middos* to resemble Hashem’s *middos* – such as by acting merciful – we get ourselves more and more to resemble the Creator in an inner way. That is what brings us to become attached to Him.

1.

Working on your *middos* is a vast, deep subject. We will try to explain its fundamentals briefly.

The first thing to do is that one has to find out what his worst *middah* is. The *sefarim hakedoshim* say that a person’s main job on this world is to fix his worst *middah*, and that it is for this reason that he was sent to this world. The Vilna Gaon even writes that if a person doesn’t break his bad *middos*, there is no point in living.

2.

After a person is clear which *middah* he has to fix the most, he can begin to work on his *middos* (and after he has decided to work on it, he must still figure out what he should work on first, according to the current situation he is in. Even after you work on a certain bad *middah*, eventually you will have

to work on it again in a few years from now, because the more you purify yourself, the more you can fix the bad *middah* on an even deeper level than before. Working on your *middos* is a lifelong task, and each time you work on it, you are able to purify that bad *middah* more and more. This is well-known to anyone who searches for the truth in life).

When you want to begin working on your bad *middos*, do not immediately begin to work on it. First, you need to learn about its nature, and included in this is to learn what its opposite will entail; there is a rule that in order to know about something, you need to learn about its opposite. Also, each of the bad *middos* comes from one of the four elements – fire, water, wind and earth, as Rav Chaim Vital writes. We will also need to know what the results each bad *middah* gives birth to, and how each bad *middah* affects different areas of your life.

3.

While you are doing this, don't think about your "self" at all. Just think about the actual *middah* you find in yourself which you are trying to fix. This is a very large part of the job: don't try to "find yourself" in this and how it is affecting you, and don't begin to work on improving yourself right away. Without this mentality, a person has a very superficial approach to working on his *middos*, and he doesn't understand what it means to work on your *middos*. It is impulsiveness to attain levels, and it lacks a properly built plan.

Thus, the first part of our job here is not to think about yourself. Just learn about the bad *middah* you are trying to fix. Learn about its root (fire, water, earth, or wind), what it causes, and how it can be fixed. You are trying to learn about the bad *middah* and what you can do about it, not about what this has to do with "you" per se.

4.

After you have studied the bad *middah*, write it down – the concept of it, what its roots are, and what other bad *middos* it leads to. This is very necessary to do. It takes time, and it might even take a few weeks. This is not because of laziness – it is simply because it takes time to build up a plan. That's the way it works.

After this, you can begin to see how this bad *middah* relates to you, and where it manifests itself in your life. You can think what awakens it in your life, and how strong it is in your life. Then, think how much you want to fix this *middah*, how much energy you are willing to put in to fix it. Write this all down before you begin to actually try to improve yourself.

5.

After you have clarified all this, now you can sit down and think into what you can do about this bad *middah*. Pick one strategy that you feel will work for you, from all the advice you learn about on this bad *middah*. Only after figuring out what the best strategy is to work on it should you actually begin to carry it out. You first have to learn what the bad *middah* actually is before you see how it relates to you as a person. It is an art that you need to learn about, and a person is apt to make many mistakes when he tries to improve himself, because working on a *middah* is a deep wisdom.

After you begin to actually work on the bad *middah*, you will gain more and more clarity about the *middah* with time. You will see the bad *middah* from all different angles. Keep paying attention to your perspective on the bad *middah* as you work to improve, because clarifying it once to yourself before isn't enough.

6.

In order to work on your *middos*, a lot of patience is required, because you need to keep paying attention to your growth along the way. For this, a person needs an inner calm, as well as a power of subtle feeling to see progress and more clarity with the bad *middah* at hand. A lot of patience is required if one wants to bear results. But the main thing is never to give up, not even when you fail. Even if you fail a thousand times, pull yourself together and don't give up. Just tell yourself that maybe you made a mistake somewhere and try to examine yourself. But again, don't be depressed when you do this! Stay calm inside, and hold onto your motivation to build yourself up.

You can this for every bad *middah* you want to work on. The basic method is that there must be a carefully built plan, and you shouldn't just work on your *middos* impulsively.

We should stress a very important rule: Never work on two bad *middos* at the same time. Each *middah* needs to be worked on separately.

7.

A very fundamental point about working on your *middos* is that it has done be joyously. We should want to work on our *middos* happily, and not begrudgingly. When someone doesn't have this attitude, he will become very depressed every time he discovers another fault about himself. But this is a very big mistake, and we can explain why.

Who gave you the bad *middah*? Hashem! Why did He give you the bad *middah*? The purpose of Creation is to perfect it, as the *sefarim hakedoshim* tell us. If so, someone who is sad because of his faults is really sad about the way Hashem designed the world. (Not only that, but he is sad because

of his fantasies. He thought until now that he is perfect, which was a fantasy. Now he has snapped out of that fantasy, and instead of being sad about this, he should be happy that he has finally escaped his fantasies and that now he sees the truth!)

When a person discovers his faults, he should be happy, because now he knows what he has to do on this world. It's actually a happiness that there is nothing greater than! How pitiful is a person who never realizes in his life what he has to work on, because he will leave this world unfulfilled of his purpose.

The proper attitude to have toward our faults is that Hashem created the world so we can perfect it by working on ourselves, and it is thus the will of Hashem that I have my shortcomings. If a person is sad because of his shortcomings, this can either be for one of two reasons: 1) He is haughty, because he doesn't want to accept that he is imperfect. 2) He is lacking *emunah*, either in his conscious or in his sub-conscious, because he feels guilty for his shortcomings, which is kind of saying that he created himself! If that is his problem, then he has to work on his *emunah*, and realize that Hashem gave him the fault, and that this is his Avodah on this world.

So when we work on our *middos*, we should be very happy to do so.

8.

All mistakes in Avodas Hashem, especially when it comes to working on our *middos*, should never cause a person to be sad. Hashem wants us to work on ourselves, and it is written, "A righteous person falls seven times and gets up." It is not my fault when I fall; that is the way it is supposed to be. I am supposed to "fall" in order to "get up." It's a cycle we must go through.

If that will be our attitude, we will be happy throughout our growth process, even the failures. The *yetzer hora*, though, tells people that it is your fault when you fail, and in this way it succeeds in getting people to become depressed. Sometimes the *yetzer hora* succeeds so well that it can convince a person to drop out of all Avodas Hashem, *chas v'shalom*. This is all from a lack of understanding that everything is the will of Hashem, and from not knowing that we are supposed to have failures. Without *emunah* in Hashem, serving Hashem will cause a lot of sadness to a person. Only with *emunah* can we work on ourselves happily, and when we are happy, we will be very successful.

If a person feels that he cannot do this happily, generally, **he should not** attempt to work on his *middos*! What such a person has to do instead is to work on his *emunah*, and from that, he can come to be happy. Only after a person becomes at least a little happy can he begin to work on his *middos*. (Of course, for every rule, there are always exceptions to the rule; we leave it at this understanding).

9.

There is a point which even more important, though.

The Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) says that the *yetzer hora* gets stronger each day, and if not for Hashem's help, it would be impossible to overcome.

The *yetzer hora* is far stronger than us. Naturally, we cannot defeat it on our own. What can we do about it then? Were we created to fail and go to Gehinnom?! For this, Chazal reveal that Hashem can help us overcome it. This, of course, is not automatic. If you enjoin Hashem in your battle, you will get help from Hashem, but if you never entreat Hashem to help you, then you are fighting the battle without Hashem.

Thus, a person has to decide that he wants to succeed at this battle, and that in order to succeed, he needs Hashem to help him.

10.

How can a person enjoin Hashem with him in his battle against the *yetzer hora*? Only by talking to Him. When you need help, you have to give a call for help.

So if a person wants to work on his *middos*, he needs to talk to Hashem. This is what he can say to Hashem:

“*Ribono shel olam*, You commanded me in Your Torah to cleave to You, and Chazal have explained this to mean that one must cleave to Your *middos*. I want to fulfill this mitzvah, and attach myself to Your good *middos*. Since the *middos* which You have given me are not matching up to Your *middos*, I want to correct them and get them to be more like Your *middos*. You did not give me the strength to overcome all the *middos* at once, but only to work on one of them at a time. So I am asking of You that You give me the understanding to know which *middah* I should work on now.

“*Ribono shel olam*, Chazal have said that the *yetzer hora* is stronger than me, and if You don't help me, I can't win. I am asking of You to help me at all times and be with me throughout this battle. If You don't help me, I don't stand a chance to fix my *middos*. I am asking of You to help me fix my *middos* so I can thus cleave to You. Please help me with this, that I merit to cleave to you.”

The sefer *Yesod V'Shores H'Avodah* writes that even if a person keeps falling to the same sin again and again, he should keep davening to Hashem about it constantly that he be saved from the sin, and that if one persists in this, Hashem will definitely help him, because “one who comes to be purified will be purified.” He also adds on that “I tried this with myself many times when it came to

trying to work on my *middos*, and I saw this openly how Hashem helped me when I davened to Him constantly. I especially increased my concentration by *Hashiveinu*. I did not have the strength alone to purify my bad *middos*. Therefore, strengthen yourself, my beloved son, in this high service, and you will then be called a true servant of Hashem.”

When a person sees that he has a bad *middah*, he should not be depressed at this. Instead, he should talk to Hashem and say, “*I really want to fix this middah, and I keep failing. I have accepted to keep working on myself, but please help me that I shouldn't fail again with this bad middah.*”

Whichever bad *middah* you are trying to fix, always talk to Hashem with a prayer that He help you fix it and that you should be shown the way. Each person can *daven* to Hashem according to how much he needs to. These matters should be discussed with someone else who truly serves Hashem and has been through these matters successfully. You need to *daven* for this as well – that you be sent the right person to talk to who can guide you.

10 | *Living With Clarity*

1.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes that the true good on this world is closeness to Hashem, and that whatever anyone else thinks is “good” is nonsense.

How can a person bring himself to feel that being close to Hashem is indeed the true good one can have in life, and that whatever anyone else thinks is the true good is truly worthless?

2.

This chapter is only for someone who is stable in his internal world and doesn't delude himself. If someone tends to imagine things, then even his Avodas Hashem will be like one big fantasy to him. A person who is prone to imagination will have delusions in his Avodas Hashem, imagining for many years that he is close to Hashem, when in reality it's all just in his imagination.

In order to practice any of the matters we have written about here, a person has to work very patiently and calmly, with a clear knowledge of the goal and a strong desire to reach it. One's Avodas Hashem needs a carefully built plan, and it needs to be done slowly. We have already mentioned in the preface the words of the *Yesod V'Shoresh H'Avodah*, which should be reviewed again; they are very applicable to the subject of this chapter.

3.

First, a person needs to think about this intellectually: that the only good on this world is to be close to Hashem, and nothing else is truly good.

Then, realize that this is only information in your mind, and it is now upon you to take this knowledge and imprint it onto your heart – that you should sense this fact.

We do not mean to become amazed in an emotional way, but rather, to sense this just as much as you walk by dirt and sense that it's worthless, so can you sense how nothing on this world is worth anything.

This is a subtle point. Many people, who begin Avodas Hashem, think that you have to become emotionally amazed. The truth is that you can use emotions to help yourself begin to **enter** the world of spirituality, but you can't **base** your spiritual development upon emotional excitement. It won't build you. Emotions cannot serve as a basis for anything – only something which you can actually sense can serve as a basis.

This is a very deep and subtle point, and it needs to be absorbed; many people have become mistaken by not grasping this point. There are unfortunately some people who go their whole lives serving Hashem only out of emotional excitement, without ever really building themselves inside.

Our internal world is built upon a *kol demamah dakkah* – a “soft, subtle sound” – not on a loud noise. A soft, subtle sound means that we sense a matter, while a loud noise refers to something loud and exciting, which is nothing but air. When people don’t realize this, all of their Avodas Hashem is built on air – which doesn’t amount to anything.

Please absorb this point, and think deeply about it for a while. Don’t just read this quickly and say, “I understand; this problem doesn’t apply to me.” Seek the truth – *“Hashem is close to all those who call out to Him in truth.”*

4.

A person has to come to actually sense how this physical world is worthless to pursue.

How can we bring ourselves to feel this way?

Set aside time and look at different items you see. Think about the gains you get from each item, as well as the disadvantages each item causes. Think about every last detail of an item. After you see all the advantages and disadvantages of an item, now see how this relates with regards to becoming closer to Hashem: Does this item bring me closer to Hashem?

Conclude that it doesn’t, and therefore, it cannot be considered a “good” thing – because it doesn’t bring you closer to Hashem, and it only serves to distance you from Him.

Let these words come from your heart. You can go over it even hundreds of times, calmly and slowly (sometimes it is better to write it down, and it depends on what each person is more comfortable with), and say these words from your heart. “Matters which come from the heart enter the heart.”

5.

Generally speaking, one has to work from the foundation, as opposed to starting from this detail and that detail. The details of our Avodas Hashem also have to be worked on, but the point we are talking about here is where to start from, because it is the foundation: the only true good is closeness to Hashem.

In other words, one should get used to saying: *“Ribono shel olam*, the true good is to be close to You, and nothing else is called “good.”

Each person can talk to Hashem in the manner he's comfortable with, but the point is to repeat that the only thing which is good is to be close to Hashem. Go over as well the opposite point, that nothing else is good - besides for Hashem.

Of course, there are more details to our Avodas Hashem than just this, but this is the foundation. We need both the foundation as well as all the other details in our Avodas Hashem.

6.

A person should get used to talking to Hashem like this for years: "*Ribono shel olam*, the only good that exists is to be close to You, to be with You, to live with You. The only thing we have on this world is You."

We do not mean to say here that this indeed is the level you are actually on as you say these words. Even if you know about this in your head, and even if your heart feels how it's true, that still doesn't mean you've really reached this level, because the heart can still have additional interests other than this, closeness to Hashem. The point of speaking all this out verbally is so that we can come to reveal the hidden good in our heart (rooted in our soul).

This is the truth which our soul knows and wants, and it's possible that we have already begun to reveal it in our heart. But our heart still has other various desires that it wants. By speaking out verbally that the only true good on this world is to be close to Hashem, we are able to remove those various desires in our heart and come to reveal our true, inner desire – the desire of our soul: to become close to Hashem.

7.

One's avodah is to always verbalize his generally obligation on this world – the will to become close to Hashem; and that nothing else besides this is considered good. When a person ever feels that he still wants other things than this, he should talk about it with Hashem in the manner we have said. If there is something he wants very badly – and it's not something which brings him closer to Hashem – he needs to repeat to himself all the pros and cons of the item and then see how it doesn't bring him closer to Hashem.

8.

After a person realizes this consciously, now he needs to work to know about this even in his sub-conscious state. This is a lifelong task: that even subconsciously, a person has to keep nullifying his desires for evil, and only desire good.²⁰

9.

²⁰ The way to work on your sub-conscious is explained in *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. III, Section V: Mussar, Chapter 10.

In addition to all this, a person needs to daven to Hashem that he should come to realize how everything he can think of on this world is something that can bring him closer to Hashem – or not. After a person indeed realizes that nothing on this world can bring him closer to Hashem, he needs to daven that he should feel this in his heart as well, besides for knowing about it intellectually.

10.

When talking to Hashem about this, two points need to be expressed: Firstly, that we are asking Hashem that we merit to realize that only closeness to Him is true good, and secondly, that anything else which we think is good isn't really good, and that we want to feel this. Keep *davening* about this, all the time.

11.

This chapter is very important for anyone who wants to truly serve Hashem and searches for a pure connection with Him. The inner point which we are describing here must be absorbed – and practiced.

It is a very subtle point in our Avodas Hashem. If we absorb it, we will gain tremendously – but if we don't, we will just be imagining that we are succeeding.

It's possible that a person is always talking to Hashem, yet he's far from the Creator, far from a simple feeling of closeness with Him. We can see with our own eyes that many people thought they were truly serving Hashem with their hearts, yet they never even reached the simplest layer of their heart. A person needs a special merit to reach even the simple layer of his heart.

11 | *Bitachon*

1.

There is *emunah* (belief in Hashem) and there is *bitachon* (reliance on Hashem).

Emunah means that a person believes that everything that happens on this world is all because of Hashem, who is running every last detail in Creation.

Bitachon, however, is a deeper matter.

2.

Bitachon is that I trust in Hashem, because He is concerned about me and taking care of me. This doesn't mean that I know for sure what will happen; it means that I am calm, since Hashem is taking care of me. *Bitachon* means that Hashem knows exactly what I need – what's good for me, and what isn't. Hashem loves me and is concerned about me every moment– both in this world and in the next, and until the rest of eternity. Hashem doesn't forget about me for a moment.

Not only does He always worry for me, but nothing limits Him. He can give me anything, because nothing holds Him back.

3.

Bitachon is a feeling of total calmness, when I feel that I am being taken care of, because Hashem is taking care of me every moment.

In order to feel true *bitachon*, one needs to first develop a love for Hashem – a love which results in a feeling of total trust in Hashem.

Bitachon is not an intellectual matter. It is a soul matter – it is something which the soul feels when it feels the Creator and feels His love. When a person becomes aware of that love, he comes to rely on Hashem that He will take care of Him, because since Hashem loves him so much, He will never abandon him.

4.

Only when a person has true *bitachon* will he become truly happy and calm. Without *bitachon*, life is just one big pressure. Only by trusting in Hashem's love for His creations – that He cares for us every moment – can a person ever be calm on this world.

2

Essays

12 | *How To Reveal Your Soul*

Three Parts to our Self

There are three parts to the self: the soul, the intellect, and the imagination.

The soul in us is perfectly aware of the Creator; “*And my soul knows very well.*”²¹ It is only our intellect and our imagination which gets in the way of this. When the soul becomes revealed, it is shined upon the person, and the intellect and imagination complement it; the intellect and imagination are able to reveal the soul, and in doing so, these two forces in our self become sanctified and also are able to identify the Creator.

But as long as our soul remains concealed from us, our intellect and imagination are getting in the way.

There are three general ways how we can reveal the soul.

The First Way: Davening and Crying To Hashem

The first way we can reveal the soul is through davening to Hashem and crying to Him from the depths of our heart that we are searching to find ourselves and our Creator. A person has to consistently cry to Hashem for this. The tears reveal the soul, because the tears are the excess fluids that come from the brain, and they clean it out and purify it. Through davening and crying out to Hashem, one’s heart becomes opened, and the blockage on his heart is torn off. Upon revealing the soul in one’s heart, the brain\mind\intellect as well becomes aware to Hashem. The power of recognition begins in the heart, and then it gets sent to the brain from the heart.

(The brain thinks about what our heart wants, because *Keser* sends information to *Chochmah*; *Keser* is manifest in one’s heart, and the *Chochmah* is manifest in one’s brain. Then, the information in the brain gets sent back to the heart – the *Chochmah* of the mind gets turned into *Binah* of the heart).

Through this process, one’s intellect and imagination become purified, and can now recognize the Creator. (This is the general school of thought of *Bresslover Chassidus*.)

The Second Way: Deep Reflection

Another way how one can reveal his soul is through reflecting intellectually about Hashem. This can be done in either of several ways:

²¹ *Tehillim* 139: 14

1. To reflect about the greatness of the Creator and about G-dly matters. (This is the school of thought of *Chabad Chassidus*).
2. By reflecting about Hashem's deep ways of how He runs the universe. (This is the school of thought of the *Ramchal*, as well as *sefer Shiurei Daas*.)
3. By reflecting about the potential greatness inherent in mankind. Through a healthy self-knowledge of the greatness that people can achieve, one is able to awaken his soul. (This is the school of thought of Slobodka [headed by the Alter of Slobodka]).
4. By reflecting intellectually about the downfalls and evils which a person can fall to when he doesn't work on his *middos*, and together with this, to reflect about matters of fear of Heaven. (This is the general school of thought of the *Mussar* movement, taught in Kelm and by its great student it produced, Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt"l*).

Mussar, founded by Reb Yisrael Salanter, is leaning toward Bresslover thinking in that a person needs more than just intellectual reflection to reveal his soul; to illustrate, the *Mussar* method is that one has to repeat a statement of Chazal again and again until he comes to awaken his soul to the truths he is repeating. However, *Mussar* differs from *Bresslov* in that it does not involve intense crying out to Hashem in prayer; it is rather a different point, that one has to awaken his heart to work on himself.

The Third Way: Imagination

Another way to reveal the soul is by working with one's imagination. (This is the school of thought of *sefer Hachsharas Avreichim*, written by the same author as *Chovos HaTalmidim*. Some examples of this include for one to imagine that he is singing with the angels in Heaven, or that he is in the *Beis Hamikdash* doing the *avodah*).

Understanding the Second and Third Ways

We need to understand the second and third ways we brought in revealing the soul, which involve using either our intellect or our imagination. What is the depth behind it?

Everything we need to get is already there in our soul, waiting to be accessed. The problem is that our soul is hidden from us; this is explained by the Ramchal in *sefer Derech Eitz Chaim*. A person's mission is to reveal his hidden potential that lays in his soul. What is it that is hiding our soul from us? These are the two outer forces of our self: our intellect, and our imagination.

By using our mind or imagination to picture the truths that our soul really knows about, we refine our mind and imagination and get it to follow our soul. When we do that, we bypass the mind and imagination, which were once a barrier to our soul, and the soul becomes revealed. When the soul is revealed, our mind and imagination become refined and purified.

Our mind or imagination by itself wouldn't be able to picture such matters like doing the avodah in the *Beis HaMikdash* or singing with the angels. This is because both the mind and the imagination are forces that are rooted in our physical body, and our body cannot go to Heaven or be transported to the *Beis HaMikdash*. But our soul is already in these places – it identifies with being in Heaven as an utter reality, and it identifies being in the *Beis HaMikdash* as an utter reality. Thus, our soul is aware of these realities, and it can go to them as well – the soul is not bound to any place or time, for it is unlimited. When we reveal the soul, our mind and imagination is therefore able to picture those Heavenly matters and experience them as real.

However, caution is advised with this. A person has to be aware that his soul knows of these matter and can fully experience them – but not his body. Our body isn't actually going to these places or realities; our soul is. Let us not confuse the two. If a person thinks that he is actually transporting himself to Heaven or to the *Beis Hamikdash* in the past in the *physical* sense, he is trying to disconnect from his body, and he might *chas v'shalom* go insane from this. Our mind must stay connected to our body – one should never attempt to disconnect from his body when trying to imagine spiritual matters.

13 | *Overcoming Imagination and Using It For Good*

The Yetzer Hora “Appears” To Look So Big

The Gemara (Sukkah 52a) says, “In the future, Hashem will bring out the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) and slaughter it in front of the righteous and the wicked. To the righteous, the *yetzer hora* will appear to look like a tall mountain, while to the wicked it will look like a thread.”

Let us reflect into this. How big indeed is the *yetzer hora*? To the righteous *tzaddikim*, it looks very big. If so, why does the Gemara say that it only “appears” to be big? The Gemara should have just said that the *tzaddikim* see the *yetzer hora* as very big, and not just that it “appears” to look big. It sounds like the *yetzer hora* isn’t really that big, and it just “appears” to look big. The same question we can ask about the wicked people, to whom the *yetzer hora* appears as a small thread. Why does it only “appear” to them as small? Shouldn’t the Gemara just say that they “see” the *yetzer hora* as small, and not just that it “appears” to them to be small?

The Essence of the Yetzer Hora

Chazal revealed here a great fundamental: the *yetzer hora* is not a true reality! It only exists in our imagination.

That is why the Gemara didn’t say that the righteous or the wicked “see” the *yetzer hora*’s size. It is because the *yetzer hora* does not have any real size; it is entirely an illusion. (On a deeper note, all of Creation is an illusion. On an even deeper note, there is the true reality, and then there is a false reality that gets created from imagination.)

We find this when Avraham Avinu went to go bring Yitzchok by the Akeidah. Chazal say that the *yetzer hora* appeared to him in the form of a river to get in his way. There was really no river there; it was an illusion that looked like a river in front of him.

This is the entire power of the *yetzer hora*: it uses imagination (or fantasy, or illusion) to persuade us. Let us expand upon this discussion and explain what this implies for us.

How the Yetzer Hora Works

The *yetzer hora* convinces a person to do something evil. How does the *yetzer hora* convince you? It creates the following rationalization: It will somehow be beneficial for you to eat this or to buy this, etc. Then, the person feels pulled toward what he wants. So the *yetzer hora* convinces a person that

somehow, this thing is good to pursue. If the person wouldn't see what benefit is here, he won't pursue it. So the *yetzer hora* convinces a person that there is something worth pursuing here.

This is the whole *yetzer hora's* power – it plays with our imagination and gets us to justify our behavior! It fabricates for us a fantasy upon another fantasy. All of these fantasies are not reality – they are all being imagined as reality.

The Vilna Gaon said that this world is like salty water; the more you drink from it (by indulging in physical pleasure), the thirstier you will become. In other words, a person thinks that this world's pleasures are satisfying, but this is just in his imagination. In reality, worldly pleasures only make a person thirstier, like salty water. The *yetzer hora* argues to a person that this world's "salty water" is really sweet and satisfying.

The Way To Fight the Yetzer Hora

After a person's imagination convinces him and sways his heart to believe that a certain thing is good and pleasurable for him to do, it becomes very difficult to fight it. It is the intellectual mind pitted in battle against the desire of the heart, and the person feels like he is fighting himself.

However, if a person is wise, he will be able to avoid this inner struggle from being such a difficult battle. As soon as his imagination begins to convince him to do something wrong, he can discern that it's just in his imagination. The intellectual mind, our *seichel*, can show us as we're being tempted, that we are just imagining; that what we imagine isn't reality. As soon as we become aware that there is nothing substantial to the *yetzer hora's* argument, and that it is all just being imagined, we will be able to jump away from the *yetzer hora's* argument.

In order to succeed at this, a person has to possess strong mental abilities.²²

Using Imagination As A Powerful Tool For Holiness

Until now we explained how the *yetzer hora's* entire power is to use imagination. Now we will explain the root concept of what imagination is, and how we can use it to serve Hashem.

A person has in himself seven discerning abilities. Five of them are the senses of sight, hearing, smell, speech and touch. In addition to this, a person has intellect and imagination. Our five senses are used to feel tangible things. Our intellect, though, can feel things that aren't physically tangible, by proving that something exists. Yet, our intellect is still limited, because it is within the bounds of reality. It cannot comprehend things which do not exist.

²² For a more detail discussion on how to overcome the *yetzer hora*, see *Getting To Know Your Thoughts, Chapter 17: Using Imagination For Holiness*.

Our imagination, though, can imagine even things that do not exist, such as imagining a person with seven feet. From where does this ability in us come from? (People do not imagine things which they have never seen at all. People imagine things that they have distorted in their mind. Imagination works through a mental ability called *markiv* – to “combine” various images together and come up with distorted, exaggerated versions of the original image).

The Root of Imagination: The Realm of the Unlimited

First of all, let us remember that the power of imagination was created by Hashem! Hashem desired for us to use our imagination only up until a certain point. Beyond the limits of our imagination, we are not supposed to imagine.

Let’s understand this now. Hashem is Endless, and He is unlimited. He can create anything. But He created this world to have certain limits. Our imagination is thus a novelty, because it can come up with things that go beyond our limits. Our imagination can tap into the infinite – the sphere of the unlimited, the *Ein Sof* of Hashem. So imagination is an awesome power that we have which can help us enter the unlimited and shatter our usual limited perception; our imagination can serve to draw us closer to the *Ein Sof* of Hashem.

Therefore, our imagination never really imagines something that is a totally novel concept. It imagines an endless kind of concept, something that’s above the limits of Creation.

If so, imagination is a total reality. Our imagination can imagine the reality of the *Ein Sof* – the endlessness of Hashem. Imagination is our portal that connects us to the unlimited layer of reality, which is beyond our normal perception that is limited. Normally, we are not able to connect ourselves to the sphere of the unlimited – we can’t do it with our mind, and we can’t do it with our senses. But we can do it through our imagination.

Using Imagination Needs Guidance

However, there is a great danger in using imagination. Since imagination is essentially a power that can perceive the realm of the unlimited, a person might make the mistake of connecting to the unlimited using his normal limited perception. He might try to use his senses, which are limited, to sense the realm of the unlimited, which cannot be felt through our senses. If he attempts to do it, he will never feel what he’s imagining.

The *yetzer hora*’s tactic is that it fools a person to believe that he’s actually sensing what he imagines. It’s a lie, because a person cannot ever sense what he’s imagining. But when a person erroneously believes that he can, he falls into the *yetzer hora*’s trap. The correct attitude is rather for a person to believe that although his imagining something real, he cannot sense what he’s imagining.

Imagination can be a very positive we use to serve Hashem (and soon we will explain how to use it), but this can only be if a person realizes that he cannot use his limited senses to feel what he's imagining. We cannot mix our limited perception with the realm of the unlimited, and trying to do only causes a person to make grave errors.

Using Imagination For Holiness

How indeed do we use our imagination for holiness? What we can do is to imagine something holy, such as the *Beis HaMikdash*, or what it would look like when our nation would trek to Jerusalem each festival. The *sefarim hakedoshim* also bring that one should imagine that he is in Heaven and singing with the angels to Hashem. There are also other various holy images that are brought for one to practice.

However, a person has to always be aware that even such holy images are only imagination, and that they are not actually taking place in reality. If a person begins to think or feel that these things are really happening, he must immediately stop imagining it. It is dangerous. Imagination has to be used merely to awaken a person, but a person should never live in his imagination.

Imagination: A Tool To Reach Our Aspirations

In addition to this, our imagination can only serve to be a great tool that assists us in our aspirations. It opens up to us realms that are far from us, and inspires us to want to reach those unlimited places.

However, a person has to be very aware that it is only in his aspirations to reach the unlimited, and that he is not actually on that level yet.

Many people have made the mistake of fooling themselves that they are reaching their aspirations, while in reality they haven't reached yet those aspirations. A person must be aware of what his current level is and what his aspirations are, and that his aspirations, while being wonderful, have not been attained yet. Therefore, we have to be very careful with imagining for ourselves high aspirations.

14 | *Trusting Your Spiritual Mentor*

It is written, “*And they believed in Hashem, and in Moshe his servant.*”²³ From this verse, we learn the concept of *emunas chachamim*, trusting in our sages. The Gemara explains that the Torah does not mention the names of any of the elders who received the Torah in a tradition from Moshe, to show us that a *beis din* comprised of three elders was equal to the *beis din* of Moshe.²⁴ In this statement, Chazal are teaching us that we must believe in the wise sages that are in every generation.

Let’s reflect on the following. Chazal state, “*Do not rely on yourself, until your day of death.*”²⁵ The classic example for this, Chazal bring, was Yochanan the High Priest, who was a leader of the generation, who made a fatal spiritual error on his last day on earth, becoming a heretic. We learn from this that just because someone is a servant Hashem today, it doesn’t mean that he will be serving Hashem tomorrow.

There is also a verse, “*In his holy ones, He does not trust*”²⁶, which says explicitly that Hashem does not even trust that His holiest *tzaddikim* will always be loyal to Him. If even Hashem doesn’t trust His greatest *tzaddikim*, then why should *we* trust them? And there have been times where even the holiest people made grave errors. Hashem Himself testifies that He does not trust them completely. So why is there a concept of *emunas chachamim*? Why should we trust them more than Hashem does?

The answer lies in the verse that we first quoted: “*And they believed in Hashem, and in Moshe His servant*”. These are not two “separate” beliefs, to have *emunah* in Hashem and *emunah* in Moshe. Rather, *emunah* in Hashem directly results in *emunah* in the sages. From believing in Hashem, the people were able to believe that Moshe was His faithful servant who was transmitting His word to them. The *emunah* we must have in Moshe and in all the sages who came after him is therefore not a requirement of *emunah* in and of itself, but a result of *emunah* in the Creator.

Let’s elaborate upon this. If a person has *emunah* in a wise sage simply because he trusts him, this is an erroneous attitude, which can lead him to grave errors. This is because the wise sage himself cannot be completely confident that he won’t make any mistakes and that he won’t fall from his level. After all, Yochanan the High Priest and Acher [Elisha ben Avuya] were both great sages who became heretics. If a person believes in the sage with complete confidence, and the sage is mistaken

²³ *Shemos 14:31*

²⁴ *Rosh HaShanah 25a*

²⁵ *Avos 2:4*

²⁶ *Iyov 15:15*

about something, he will follow the same mistakes as his teacher, *chas v'shalom*, and fall together with him.

So what should a person do? Must a person always have suspicions about his *rebbe*, *chas v'shalom*, and assume that maybe his *rebbe* is mistaken about something? If so, what does it mean to have *emunas chachamim*, if the student always has to have his antenna up about the behaviors of his *rebbe*?

The answer to this is that *emunas chachamim* must stem from *emunah* in the Creator. This means that one must believe in the Creator and trust in Him, that He will surely send him a true *rebbe* (spiritual mentor), who can guide him to the truth. (This is all on condition that he is really searching for a true *rebbe*, with all his heart, and without a personal agenda; the lack of following this condition has led to much woe). One must not suspect that perhaps his *rebbe* is making mistakes, *chas v'shalom*. Instead, he must trust in Hashem, that Hashem will not cause him to stumble with a teacher who is unbecoming.

For this reason, a person must always be concerned that he is truly searching for a genuine *rebbe*.

In summary, if *emunas chachamim* does not stem from having pure *emunah* in the Creator, such *emunas chachamim* is mistaken, and it can lead to errors, *chas v'shalom*. Only when one first believes in the Creator and relies upon Him, can he believe in “Moshe, His servant” afterwards – and in the “Moshe” that is in every generation.

15 | *Erasing Amalek*

“Open for Me an opening the size of a needle”

Chazal said, “Open for Me an opening the size of a needle, and I will open for you an opening the size of an opening to an entranceway”.²⁷ Our *sefarim hakedoshim* point out that the ‘opening’ has to be made on both sides – it does not suffice to make a mere hole. We will explain the meaning of this.

The Concept of Amalek

The root of all evil in Creation is Amalek. The depth of Amalek is that it is a force of evil which exists to induce doubts into creation. (The hint to this is because the *gematria* numerical value in Hebrew for “Amalek” is the same as “*safek*”\doubt). The purpose of Creation is that all of Creation will come to recognize Hashem as King. First, there will be a judgment over Esav, as the possuk states: “*And all the saviors will ascend to the Mount of Zion, to judge the Mount of Esav, and Hashem will become the Kingdom.*” So before Hashem is recognized as King, first, “Esav” has to be judged; in other words, the *kelipah* (husk) of “Amalek” must become shattered. Meaning, the force of “doubt” must become erased. As long as Amalek is in the world, there is doubt, and the world cannot come to its desired purpose.

This concept has two implications: (1) Amalek must be erased from the world. This will happen with the coming of Moshiach, may he come speedily in our days (Amen). (2) There is also a personal “Amalek” in each Jew’s personal soul, and it is upon each individual Jew to erase the manifestation of “Amalek” that in himself.

Protecting Your Emunah

The **Ramban** famously wrote that each person must tell himself that if he will have any heretical thoughts on his deathbed, *chas v’shalom*, he is accepting himself that such thoughts are already nullified from the start. Let’s think about the depth of these words.

Why would a person suddenly have heretic thoughts on his deathbed, if he believed in Hashem his whole life? The answer is, of course a Jew can believe in Hashem his whole life, but that doesn’t mean has acquired that belief in the depths of his soul. It might be that in the depths of his heart, he does not even have *emunah peshutah* (simple faith in G-d), *chas v’shalom*. That means that even the

²⁷ *Yalkut Shimeoni: Shir HaShirim: 588*

most basic kind of belief in Hashem can be doubted, *chas v'shalom*. If the basis can be doubted – if the basic fact that there is a Creator can be questioned, *chas v'shalom* – then all of one's Torah, mitzvos, righteousness, and holiness will all have no basis to support them [so they will all fall away].

These words of the Ramban can shudder any person's soul. It appears to us, superficially, that we have facts we are clear about as well as facts that we are a bit doubtful about, and that it is merely upon us to clarify what we are doubtful about. But the Ramban revealed to us that it's possible that our entire life was spent in one big doubt! If there is *chas v'shalom* any doubt in a person about the fact that there is a Creator, this surely means that all of one's service to Hashem for his entire life is under question.

Thus, the “opening” which Chazal say for one to make in himself, is for one to have *emunah peshutah* that there is a Creator. However, in order for this emunah to really be active in one's heart, one has to make sure that there are no doubts about it. This creates a solid “opening” in oneself. If a person does not make sure about this, his entire life is spent in doubt – he is found entirely in the *kelipah* of Amalek; Amalek will only be rectified when it is broken and destroyed.

16 | *Satisfaction From Within*

“Kol”: Revealing Your Ability To Have “Everything” In You

It is written, “*And Moshe said, so said Hashem, at about midnight, I will go out, in the midst of Egypt.*” Why did Hashem have to come precisely at midnight?

The word for midnight is “*chatzos*”, from the word “*chatzi*”, halfway, which implies something partial and thus incomplete. The opposite of something partial is when it is complete: when it is *kol*, “everything”. Yaakov Avinu possessed the quality called *kol*, of feeling that he had everything, for he said, “*I have everything.*” [He felt complete from within himself].

[To further illustrate this concept], the six days of the week were each “partial”, for on each day, more of the Creation was created. It represents the concept of *chatzos*, for it was partial, half. But Shabbos represents the concept of *kol*, when “everything” is here. Hashem “finished” the Creation on Shabbos, for Creation was complete then; everything was now complete. Shabbos is the revelation of the concept of *kol* everything.

Hashem Coming Into Egypt: The Revelation of “Everything” Within The “Confines”

The redemption from Egypt thus came about through the final plague, which was the death to the firstborns. It came in the midnight; the reason for this is because was that the “partial” was being nullified, and in its place, “everything” was revealed. “*At about midnight, I will go out in the midst of Egypt*” - The “I” of Hashem was revealed then – and that is *kol*, everything.

It is precisely within the Egypt that the “I” of Hashem went out, to show that even within the worst confines, “everything” can be revealed and banish away all the incompleteness.

The confines of Egypt represent the limitations placed on us; when we are limited, we cannot be complete. With the plague of the death of the firstborn, however, it was revealed that even within the limitations, perfection and completeness can be revealed: the perfection of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. It was revealed then that all of the limitations and confines on us are only external; in the inner dimension, there is only HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Who is *kol* – everything.

The Ultimate Rectification For Damaging The ‘Yesod’

The *sefarim hakedoshim* revealed that the reason why we had to endure the Egyptian exile was to rectify the 130 years after Adam’s sin, in which he separated from Chavah; during that time, [sperm

left his body]²⁸, and thus his trait of *Yesod* (“foundation”: guarding your personal holiness) was damaged; and *Yesod* is also known as *kol* everything, so we needed to get back our aspect of “*kol*.”

The rectification began with Yosef HaTzaddik when he first went down to Egypt, and he was tested in the area of *Yesod* (guarding his personal holiness.) At the end of the exile of Egypt, the aspect of *Yesod* Λ *Kol* everything was once again revealed in its pure and complete form.

Thus, the death of the firstborn was an end to the “*chatzos*”, to the “partial” level of man in which man is limited and confined; and in its place came the revelation of the level of *kol*, “everything”, the perfected level of man [when man realizes that he contains in himself ‘everything’ he needs]. The end to the exile of Egypt was now completely realized, and the Jewish people could now be redeemed.

The trait of *Yesod* (guarding one’s personal holiness) is referred to in the statement of Chazal about the desires of one’s evil inclination, that “There is a small organ in a man’s body. If you satisfy it, you starve it; if you starve it, you satisfy it.”²⁹ The deeper understanding of Chazal’s words is as follows: “Starving” the male organ is really a revelation of one’s *Yesod*, for man’s *Yesod* is parallel to the concept of “*Kol*”, “everything.” Because when a person realizes he has everything inside of him, he knows that he lacks for anything [and thus he will not be seeking anything outside of himself, so he will not seek to satisfy his male drives].

In other words, “starving” your physical lusts doesn’t mean that you force yourself to simply “starve” it. Rather, it means to reveal your aspect of completion within yourself; to realize that you lack for nothing. Because your *Yesod* implies that you really contain everything you need inside of yourself - for *Yesod*, by its very essence, is your all-inclusive aspect.

Understand this well...

²⁸ *Eruvin 18b*

²⁹ *Sukkah 52a*

17 | *Torah Of The Heart*

Introduction

The root of all sins began with the sin of Adam HaRishon, when he ate from the *Eitz HaDaas* (Tree of Knowledge), which Hashem had commanded him explicitly not to eat. We are taught a general principle from our previous sages, the luminaries of the generations, that the Torah doesn't just tell us stories about the past, for the sake of recording history. Rather, the words of the Torah are relevant to every generation, and every person. It is upon us to understand, then, what the "*Eitz HaChaim*" (Tree of Life) is within a person, what the "*Eitz HaDaas*" is within a person, so that we can be careful not to eat from the forbidden "*Eitz HaDaas*" and avoid repeating the sin of Adam.

The Inner 'Eitz HaDaas' and Inner 'Eitz HaChaim'

First let us explain the idea briefly, and then we will elaborate. The *Eitz HaChaim*, on an inner level, is the *neshamah* (Divine soul) of a person, which is revealed in the heart, after one purifies his heart from the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) which resides in the "left chamber" of the heart. The *Eitz HaDaas*, on an inner level, is the *seichel* (intellect) and *daas* (human understanding) which resides in one's brain. There is a "Torah of the *Eitz HaChaim*", of the *neshamah*, a Torah of the heart, of which Shlomo HaMelech says, "*My heart has seen much wisdom.*" The emphasis here on the "heart" is specific; it refers to the Torah of the *neshamah*, which is revealed in the heart of a person. In contrast to this, there is a Torah of the *seichel*/intellect, of one's *daas*, which is the Torah of the *Eitz HaDaas*, which contains a mixture of good and evil *da'as* (knowledge).

The Sages say that "if one merits it, his Torah learning becomes like an elixir of life to him; and if he does not merit, the Torah becomes like deadly poison to him". The intention of these words is that if one merits to draw forth the Torah of the *Eitz HaChaim*, his Torah learning becomes an "elixir of life" to him, for it is of the *Eitz HaChaim* [which provides eternal life]. But if a person does not merit it, his Torah learning becomes 'deadly poison' to him, because it is a Torah of the *Eitz HaDaas*; and just as Adam ate from *Eitz HaDaas* and was cursed with death from it, so is the case with who eats from his own 'personal' *Eitz HaDaas*.

The Proper Way To Acquire Comprehension In Torah

The commentaries explained that Adam's prohibition not to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* was only if he wouldn't first eat from the *Eitz HaChaim*. Once he would eat from the *Eitz HaChaim*, he would be allowed to then eat from the *Eitz HaDaas*. The understanding of this matter is as follows.

“Eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*” represents one’s intellectual comprehension in his Torah learning, where one learns Torah through his *seichel* and *daas*. This was originally forbidden to Adam. The ideal way to understand Torah was to first eat from the *Eitz HaChaim* – in other words, to completely purify oneself, until one reaches his *neshamah* – and after reaching the *neshamah*, one’s *neshamah* could then comprehend the Torah, in the heart. After that, one’s Torah learning could then be processed by his mind; by his *seichel*\intellect and *daas*\understanding, which is the *Eitz HaDaas*. However, at that point, one’s comprehension in Torah would not be an intellectual understanding of it, but a comprehension from his *neshamah*, which is the *Eitz HaChaim*.

The Torah of the ‘Eitz HaChaim’

Anything that a person comprehends through *Eitz HaDaas* – through his own *seichel*\intellect – is always tainted. This is because the *Eitz HaDaas* contained a mixture of good and evil. Only after a person has greatly purified himself, and his *neshamah* becomes revealed, is his Torah learning become totally clean and pure.

Thus the *avodah* of a person is to purify himself, totally, so that he shouldn’t be among those of whom it is written, “*And to the wicked one, says G-d, ‘Of what use to you are My laws?’*”³⁰ Only after this [self-purification] does one merit a Torah of truth.

The *avodah* of a person to learn Torah is to study Torah solely because it is Hashem’s will that he study it, and not out of an intellectual curiosity. This is how one merits a Torah that comes from the *Eitz HaChaim*.

As long as a person is only learning Torah out of intellectual curiosity alone, from a yearning for more knowledge, all of his Torah learning is of the *Eitz HaDaas*. The more a person learns Torah only so that he can give a *nachas ruach* (satisfaction) to his Creator and no more, the closer he is to a Torah that comes from the *Eitz HaChaim*. (This is referring to learning Torah *lishmah*. However, it is not referring to a desire of the *seichel*\intellect to learn Torah *lishmah*, but a desire of the *neshamah* to learn *lishmah*; let us suffice with those words).

Surely there is great pleasure when learning Torah, when one is pursuing more knowledge and understanding in Torah. But this should not be the sole desire of the person who is learning Torah; rather, a person needs to learn Torah mainly because he understands that it is the will of Hashem that he learn it.

³⁰ *Tehillim 50:16*

18 | *Who Will Merit Moshiach?*

Waiting for Moshiach

One of our 13 principles of faith (listed by the Rambam) is that we believe that Moshiach will come, and “even though he tarries, I wait for him every day that he should come.”

The Chasam Sofer asked: Why is belief in Moshiach one of the 13 fundamental beliefs? If a person doesn't believe in Moshiach coming, does that mean that he doesn't believe in G-d? Why is belief in Moshiach's arrival so important that it is considered to be one of the 13 basic tenets of our faith?

Why We Wait for Moshiach

In order to be able to wait for something, we need to be able to conceptualize it. If we don't know what something is, why should we wait for it? By knowing the concept of whatever it is that we are hoping for, we can then hope for it.

The more we know what a concept is, the more we await its revelation – and the less we know about it, the less we care about it.

Believing in Moshiach is not just to believe that he will come. There is more to this belief, and this is eminent from the fact that we have to awaken this belief every day. If we don't know what Moshiach is all about, why should we care if he will come or not, and what would we need him for? Only if we know clearly what Moshiach is about – what his purpose is, and what we are missing because he's not here – can we have await him.

Anyone who is waiting for Moshiach to come but doesn't know who or what Moshiach is just imagining things, and he's just fantasizing of a better world – he's dreaming about the unknown. This isn't belief in Moshiach, it's just a fantasy. In order to really await Moshiach, we need to know who and what Moshiach is.

The Concept of Moshiach

Chazal state that the first redeemer will be the last redeemer (*Bamidbar Rabbah 11:2*). The first redeemer was Moshe Rabbeinu – so he will be our last redeemer as well. Why is Moshe Rabbeinu our redeemer?

Moshe has the same letters as the word *lishmah* (to act for the sake of Heaven). This is because Moshe reached a level in which he was divested of all physicality, any vestige of ulterior motives that

stem from the body. He was connected to the Creator at all times with the greatest closeness, and all of his desire was about fulfilling his Creator's desire. He did not live at all for himself – he considered his existence only as a connection to Hashem.

The redemption is rooted in the ability to act *lishmah*, and thus Moshe will be the redeemer, because he personified *lishmah*.

Who Will Merit Moshiach?

It is written (Yeshayahu 43:7), “*All is called in My name, for My honor I created it.*” All of Creation, everything in existence, was all created for the sake of Hashem.

We are currently in exile. What is exile? Exile is essentially a situation in which we do not recognize how everything is all about Hashem. In exile, we are either missing this recognition in our minds or in our hearts. But redemption will be a situation in which we recognize – both from our internal self and the rest of our external self – that everything is all for Hashem, and we do not live for ourselves.

This is what Moshiach is about. Moshiach is a recognition – a revelation of this recognition – that everything exists for Hashem.

If a person considers his life to be for himself – whether he's looking for honor, or some other desire in life – he's disconnected totally from the concept of Moshiach. His whole existence is contradicting the idea of Moshiach. Only when a person lives *lishmah* will he merit the revelation of Moshiach.

A person always has some part of him that isn't *lishmah*. When Moshiach comes, only the *lishmah* aspect of a person will remain, while the rest of the person will disappear – the parts in us that are *shelo lishmah*. Our *shelo lishmah* will vanish from all of our senses.

Now we can understand why belief in Moshiach is one of our fundamental faiths – it is because Moshiach is about the purpose of Creation.

19 | *Transcending Our Comprehension*

Two Kinds of Perception – “Knowing” and “Not Knowing”

There are five levels of understanding. First, we will say what they are briefly, and then we will try to explain them. This is the order: *lo yeda* (to not know), *yeda* (to know), *yeda* (to know in a deeper way), *lo yeda* (to once again not know), and *yeda* (to completely know).

1. First, a person lacks the knowledge about something. This is called *lo yeda* (to not know).
2. Then, he knows about something on a basic level. This is called *yeda* (to know).
3. After this, a person reaches a higher kind of understanding, and this is a higher kind of *yeda*.
4. After this, a person is able to reach an even higher kind of understanding, in which he feels that he doesn't know anything, because he realizes that there is so much he doesn't know. This is called the higher kind of *lo yeda*.
5. Finally, a person comes to the ultimate level of knowledge, which is the uppermost level of *yeda*.

1.

At first, a person starts out in life not knowing anything. This is simply *lo yeda* – he doesn't know a thing. A person's perception at this level resembles a drunk person, who has temporarily lost his mind; or a retarded person, who does not have an able thinking mind. Or, he might also resemble a child, who has an immature level of understanding.

2.

A person then develops and gains *daas*, understanding. This is the first, basic kind of “*yeda*.” It is a person's simple *daas*, and the Sages say (Sukkah 42b) that even a child can reach this kind of *daas*. A child can reach this *daas* once he is able to tell the difference between certain objects. Pharaoh wanted to see if Moshe was a smart child, by placing a plate of gold and a plate of fire in front of him, to see which one he would choose. That is also an example of the basic *daas* which even a child can get.

This basic level of *daas* is what accompanies a person throughout his life. This basic kind of *daas* is needed for any human being to survive, Jew and non-Jew alike. A person has to be a *bar daas*.

3.

A person is able to reach a higher kind of understanding, a higher *daas*. This is also called *daas d'kedushah* – holy understanding. Such *daas* is used when a person differentiates between what is materialistic, and what is spiritual. There are two stages in this kind of *daas*.

The first part is called *havdalah*, differentiating information. The second stage is called *chibbur*, connecting information together. In the initial stage, a person can use his *daas* to differentiate simply between materialism and spirituality, as we said above. After that comes a second stage: connecting to the spirituality that one finds.

A person can discover that not all spirituality is the same, and there are differing spiritual concepts. We need to know and recognize the different spiritual concepts that exist, and then, we need to know which concepts to connect to, because there is a time and place for everything.

Such *daas* is exercised by those who serve Hashem, who have a very structured daily schedule. Those who truly serve Hashem realize that there are three main pillars in serving Hashem – Torah, *Tefillah*, and *Chessed* – and that there is a time of the day for Torah, a time of the day for *Tefillah*, and a time for *Chessed*. They know how to use their *daas* and see how much time is necessary to spend on learning Torah, for *davening*, and for bestowing good upon others; as well as to discern what to learn in Torah, what to *daven* about, and what kind of *chessed* to do.

4.

Higher than this kind of *daas* is *lo yeda*, which means to “not know” – in other words, a kind of knowledge that is above the regular kind of knowledge. This level, *lo yeda*, is revealed especially on Purim. Chazal³¹ state that on Purim, one has to get intoxicated until he reaches “*lo yeda*” – until he cannot tell the difference between “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai.” This does not mean that one should simply become like a drunk person who has lost his *daas*; that would just be returning to the immature level of understanding, which is the first stage of *lo yeda*. Rather, on Purim, Chazal revealed that we have to elevate ourselves to a higher kind of *lo yeda* – a kind of understanding that is above even our mature kind of *daas*.

What is the higher kind of *lo yeda*? We will explain this.

The Baal Shem Tov established a great fundamental: everything, in essence, is G-dliness. It only appears to us superficially that there isn't G-dliness in something; but in essence, the inner layer of anything is G-dliness. Therefore, everything contains G-dliness – whether it is good, or whether it is *evil*.

³¹ *Megillah 7b*

If there is G-dliness contained somehow in everything, even evil, if so, what is “good” and “evil”, if nothing is really evil?!

The answer to this is that what we call “good” is anything in which the good in it has become revealed out in the open, and that you can tell clearly that it’s good, even just by examining its superficial layer. (And the more that the good is revealed in something, the more it gains holiness; this is a separate discussion, and let this brief explanation suffice for now, as it is a vast topic). By contrast, we call something “evil” when its external aspect is concealing the G-dliness within it.

Thus, we only see “evil” when we look at the external layer of something. When we look at the inner layer of something, its essence, then all we will see is good – total and complete G-dliness.

5.

This is the secret behind our avodah on Purim. The avodah of the day of Purim is to realize that we shouldn’t look at the superficial, external layer of something, and that instead we should see the inner layer of something and connect to it. The inner layer of everything is totally G-dly, and that is what we need to see.

Let’s take, for example, Haman and Amalek – what we would consider classic evil. The root of Haman is good, and the root of Amalek is good!

On Purim, our inner mission is to arrive at our innermost depths. If a person merits on Purim to uncover this very deep perspective – which is the awesome spiritual light that is available to acquire on this holy day – then even after Purim ends, the inner perspective has been imprinted onto his soul. It is a perspective which goes straight to the root of all roots in Creation. Throughout the rest of the year, a person will then be able to see how everything is good at its root, and he will not just see “evil” in something he thinks is evil. He will be able to tell that something evil only appears to be evil on its outside, but on the inside, it too is good.

This was essentially the level that Rabbi Akiva reached, when he saw the site of the destruction.³² He laughed, because even though he saw the destruction, he was aware that in essence, even the destruction contained good.

6.

If a person merits well to absorb this perspective in his soul, there will be a total overhaul in his whole life. He will transform into a person who lives inwardly, in G-dliness – and not someone who

³² *Makkos 24b*

just lives superficially. This internal shift in his soul will change his whole view on life – as well as in the way he learns Torah.

Although a person even at this understanding will still feel that there are things that are evil, he will be able to realize that evil only appears on the outer layer of something, because the inner essence of something is always good, and that it is complete G-dliness.

On Purim, the Jews accepted the Torah again, willingly.³³ The depth behind this is that the generation reached the innermost understanding of Torah. When the nation stood at Har Sinai, we were forced to accept the Torah. We were afraid of being buried under the mountain, so our acceptance of the Torah did not show that deep down we loved the Torah. But on Purim, we accepted the Torah out of love this time, because the nation came to love Hashem out of the miracles He performed for us.³⁴ It was revealed then a new acceptance of Torah – an acceptance of love; to unify with the Torah. Since they accepted the Torah now in this way, they reached an inner understanding of Torah – and they then perceived the total G-dliness that is found in everything.

7.

On Purim, everything got turned upside down – “*V'nahafoch hu*”. Our enemy was plotting to destroy us, and the day that we would have been massacred ending up becoming a day of salvation, in which we all rejoiced.

What is the depth behind the matter of “*V'nahafoch hu*”?

Everything in Creation consists of two layers to it: an outer layer, and an inner layer. The outer layer in Creation are the nations of the world, while the Jewish nation is at the inner layer of Creation. “Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people are one.” In other words: it is exclusively the Jewish nation which is capable of revealing G-dliness in everything. By contrast, the other nations of the world cannot reveal the inner, G-dly essence of things. Although they are good too at their root – because everything is rooted in good – they do not even reveal the goodness.

At the time of Purim, the enemies of the Jewish people were seeking to massacre us. What was their real intention? They didn't just want to kill our physical existence. They wanted to destroy the Jewish people because the Jewish people represent the inner layer of Creation, which is G-dliness. They wanted to destroy G-dliness, and instead leave everything at its external shell, in which there is no revelation of G-dliness. Trying to destroy the Jewish people was thus their way of trying to destroy the inner layer of Creation: the G-dliness inherent in everything.

³³ *Shabbos 88a*

³⁴ *Rashi, ibid.*

And what did Hashem do? He turned everything around. The Jews ended up defeating their enemies – in other words, not only do the Jewish people serve to reveal the inner layer of everything, but even their enemies can reveal the inner layer, because when the enemies of the Jews are defeated, their very failure served to reveal how even evil can be good, because it brought the Jewish people’s inner power of revealing G-dliness to the fore.

8.

After the higher kind of *lo yeda* comes the highest kind of understanding: *yeda*. This final level of knowledge is that after a person reaches the perspective of *lo yeda*, in which he has seen how there is G-dliness at the root of everything, he connects totally to Hashem. Upon meriting this utter connection of ultimate *d'veykus*, the person receives a whole new *daas*. It is a *daas* that comes from the Creator. It is a *daas* of total G-dliness, which cannot be understood through human comprehension.

9.

This highest level was found by Betzalel, who was able to figure out how to make the Mishkan without having been told to make it. He was called Betzalel, which comes from the words “*B'tzail keil hayisa*” – “You are in the shadow of G-d.”³⁵ In other words, because he was so close to Hashem, he merited to receive *daas* from the Creator, and therefore he knew what to do in making the Mishkan.

Of Betzalel, it is written that he possessed *chochmah*, *binah* and *daas*. The understandings of *chochmah* and *binah* is the third level of *daas* we described, which is called *daas d'kedushah*. This is within the bounds of human comprehension. Betzalel reached a higher kind of comprehension, the higher kind of *yeda/daas*, the *daas* that comes directly from the Creator, out of his great closeness to Hashem.

10.

The Ramchal, in *sefer Derech Hashem* (III:3) describes this as *ruach hakodesh*.

11.

If we wish to have any inkling of understanding about this kind of *daas*, we will quote a letter written by the *Sfas Emes*³⁶ (which is really describing a lower kind of *daas*, but it still a higher kind of *daas* than the regular kind of *daas* we are used to):

³⁵ See Rashi to Shemos 37:22

³⁶ *Sfas Emes*, Avos p.56

“There is a higher kind of understanding that exists, which is not the external kind of understanding that we identify with simply. It is a kind of knowledge that is connected to the person, and it is no less powerful of an awareness to a person than the awareness of protecting one’s life – which, although a person doesn’t think about this all the time, it is also something that one never forgets, because it is a subconscious knowledge that has become attached to his very essence.”

There is an even higher level than what the *Sfas Emes* is describing, and that is when the awareness is coming from one’s very essence (which is deeper than when the awareness becomes connected and absorbed internally in the person). Meaning, it’s not just that this awareness has become internalized into my being – it is even more than that: just like the awareness that I exist is not some other knowledge, but a whole different kind of knowledge – an awareness that comes from my very existence – so can I be aware of certain truths, with the same conviction.

Understand this point well.

A Jew has to aspire throughout his life to reach this kind of understanding, and he must strive to reach it especially on Purim. At first a person should strive to reach *lo yeda*³⁷, and then he should strive to reach the higher *yeda*.

12.

What we have been describing here is the path towards fixing the primal sin of Creation – the sin of Adam. At first, Adam was in Gan Eden, and he had the highest kind of attachment with Hashem – the highest kind of *yeda/daas*. After the sin, man fell from this exalted kind of *daas*, to the level of intermediate kind of *daas*, which is *daas d’kedushah*. Chazal describe this demotion to our *daas* as “Yesterday (before sin), there was my *daas* (the *daas* of Hashem), and today (after the sin), I have the *daas* of the Serpent.”

Now that we are after the sin, our natural *daas* is the *daas* we gained from the evil *eitz hadaas*. In addition to what we lost after Adam’s sin, the generations have fallen to an even lower kind of *daas*, which is a mundane kind of understanding; and after that, the generations feel into the lowest level, which is the first kind of *lo yeda*, in which there is basically no *daas* at all.

If we want to return to the way things were supposed to be – to the *daas* we had from the *eitz bachaim*, which was actually the true *daas* of the Creator – then we need to come out of the *eitz hadaas*. In order to exit the *eitz hadaas*, which is the initial level that we all start out with, we need to

³⁷ As explained before, the higher *lo yeda* is to realize that everything is good in its essence, even evil. The higher *yeda*, which comes after the higher *lo yeda*, is to be aware of Hashem’s goodness not just as another fact of life, but in the same way that one realizes that he exists.

enter *lo yeda*. After reaching *lo yeda*, we can then advance to the highest *daas*, which is to gain the *daas* of the Creator.

13.

Let us explain this matter more.

The *Eitz HaChaim* contained the true *daas* of the Creator, and it is the *daas* of our holy *neshamah* (soul). Man is currently at the level of the *Eitz HaDaas*, the lower kind of understanding – even since Adam ate from it. If a person attempts to gain the *daas* of the Creator while he is still at the level of *Eitz HaDaas*, this is impossible, because he will not be able to contain such spiritual illumination. He only has human understanding, which cannot comprehend the higher *daas*. Therefore, it is impossible for a person to use his regular kind of comprehension to try to understand what higher *daas* is.

This is the meaning of the “fiery, churning sword” that Hashem placed at the entrance of Gan Eden, after He drove out Adam and Chavah. It was to show that we cannot receive the higher *daas* using our human comprehension, which is really the lower *daas* – the knowledge that entered us after the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*. The “fiery, churning sword” alludes to how we will only get confused if we attempt to gain higher *daas* while we are still at the lower understanding, just like something that churns takes things and turns them over and over, mixing everything up.

It’s actually a very good thing that Hashem placed the “fiery, churning sword” to guard the higher *daas*. If not for this, people would think that they understand perspectives from the higher *daas* by using their regular comprehension, and in reality, they wouldn’t be understanding anything. They would only be fooling themselves. It would be a degrading to the great spiritual light as a person attempts to lower it to his human understanding.

However, at the same time, it shows us how our lower understanding of the *Eitz HaDaas* can become fixed. How? When a person tries to understand things, he realizes that he doesn’t really understand, and that he’s very mixed up. The “fiery, churning sword” which guards the *Eitz HaDaas* in Gan Eden is stopping him from knowing what the knowledge of the *Eitz HaDaas* is, and it confuses the person as the person attempts to understand it. This itself makes a person realize that his *daas* is not the true *daas* – and through that, he is able to actually come to “*lo yeda*”. He realizes that he does not know anything; “*lo yeda*.”

Thus, one of the ways how we can fix our impaired *daas* which we received from the *Eitz HaDaas* is by learning about things that are way above our comprehension, and by realizing that we do not understand these things, our soul will realize that it does not have true *daas*. What will then happen?

Our soul will lose value for the current *daas* we have, because it has now become aware that our current comprehension is not yet the true comprehension.

(A person must be very careful with this, however, that he should not make the mistake of thinking that he indeed understands the perspective of *lo yeda*; he must be aware always that he does not understand anything. If he doesn't have this mindset, he will only fall lower, *chas v'shalom*.)

This is actually the secret behind why on Purim, “one is obligated to become intoxicated until he does not know (“*ad d'lo yoda*”) the difference between “Cursed Is Haman” and “Blessed Is Haman”. The *halachah* is that one has to become drunk on Purim specifically with wine, because wine reveals the secrets – the secrets of Torah. Through learning the secrets of Torah – matters that are really above our human comprehension – we can realize that we indeed do not understand it, and then we will be able to humble ourselves before the Creator and nullify our understanding. That is precisely what will bring a person to “*lo yeda*.”

14.

The climax of *lo yeda* is reached when a person comes to the level of that “*no man knows of his burial (Moshe's) until today*.” Let us explain this.

There are two perspectives of understanding that a person has: the understanding from our *neshamah*/soul, and the understanding of our *seichell*/intellect, which is our physical human comprehension, present in our body.

Our *neshamah*'s understanding has the higher perspective of *lo yeda*. Our *neshamah*'s understanding is not regular human comprehension, so it cannot be comprehended with our intellect. Therefore, it is only our *neshamah* which can gain the *daas* of the Creator.

Our *avodah* is to nullify our regular intellectual understanding (by realizing that we indeed do not comprehend anything). When we do this, our intellect itself will then be able to gain the perspective of *lo yeda*, and our *neshamah* will shine its understanding upon our *seichell*/intellect.

(This is the secret behind *ruach hakodesh*. There is an even deeper understanding than this, and that is the ultimate kind of *lo yeda*: when our *neshamah* reaches an even higher understanding, in which it becomes aware that even a *neshamah* does not truly comprehend the Creator, because Hashem is really endless. It will suffice just to mention this briefly, and we will not delve into this subject).

If a person merits to reach *lo yeda*, there is still a higher level to reach, and that is to get even his very physical body to sense the understanding of *lo yeda*. It is written (Tehillim 35:10), “*All my bones will*

Speak of this.” The *possuk* is hinting to us that there is a level in which even our very body is aware of Hashem.

The only person to ever reach this was Moshe Rabbeinu, as he was leaving his body; his body became so sanctified that it reached the level of *lo yeda*. Since his physical body had reached *lo yeda*, for this reason, “*no man knows of his burial*” – in other words, no human being, who is only at the level of *yeda*, can know of Moshe’s burial place, where his body lies; because Moshe’s body reached *lo yeda*, and our perspective of *yeda* cannot comprehend the perspective of *lo yeda*.

15.

The Gemara (Bava Basra 12b) states that ever since the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed, prophecy has been removed from the prophets, and it has instead been given to the mentally ill and to children. What is the meaning behind this?

It is because both a mentally ill person and a child do not have *daas*. Since they are each simple-minded kind of people, they do not possess *daas* of their own – and therefore, they are actually in the state of *lo yeda*. They are therefore able to reach the *daas* of the Creator. Although their level of *lo yeda* is not due to having worked upon themselves to nullify their *daas*, still, they have a certain simplicity in them. This is written by the Maharal in many places, in all different kinds of phrases.

One of the Sages also said (Berachos 57a) that if a person wakes up and a *possuk* suddenly comes out of his mouth, it is a small prophecy. This is because right when a person wakes up, he has no *daas*, because his *daas* hasn’t started working yet properly. A person who has just woken up resembles in some way the state of *lo yeda*, and therefore it is possible that a *possuk* will fall into his mouth – something rooted in the *daas* of the Creator; it resembles *ruach hakodesh* and prophecy.

16.

Even after a person merits to nullify his *daas* and thereby come to enter the understanding of *lo yeda*, it doesn’t end there. The Ramchal writes in *Derech Hashem* that no matter how much a person merits to comprehend even through *ruach hakodesh*, he can keep understanding more, the more he realizes that he still does not understand things.

No matter what level a person is on, he has to always keep davening to Hashem that he be drawn closer to a truer understanding. As long as a person lives on this world, *davening* for this should not stop. (To bring out the concept, we mentioned before that “*lo yeda*” implies that we never truly understand, and even if we reach *lo yeda*, the understanding of our *neshamah*, we can still realize that we do not understand things.)

17.

This is the meaning behind the famous statement, “The purpose of knowledge is for us to know that we do not know.”³⁸ Simply, it means that the purpose of our human comprehension is to come to understand *lo yeda*, and after reaching *lo yeda*, a person receives *daas* from the Creator as a gift. But there is a deeper meaning behind this statement. The deeper explanation of it is that the purpose of knowledge – even the higher knowledge, which is a *daas* poured down from the Creator – is not yet the goal, because even our higher *daas* has to become nullified.

When we keep nullifying our *daas* more and more – even our higher *daas* – we reach higher understandings, and it’s endless to how much we can do this.

Understand this.

**The Following Is Meant For Those Who Desire
(Or Have Already Entered) To Learn Inner Torah**

18.

In more recent generations, and especially in our own generation, many people are desiring to learn *Chochmas HaEmes* (Inner Torah), to taste the true *daas*, the *daas* of the *Eitz HaChaim*. After Adam sinned, he was sent out of Gan Eden, away from the *Eitz HaChaim*. Hashem placed a “fiery, churning sword” to guard it ever since, as the *possuk* in *Beraishis* states clearly.

What is the lesson of this? It is to show us that even when we desire to taste the true *daas*, which is Inner Torah/*Chochmas HaEmes*/the *daas* of the *Eitz HaChaim*, we cannot remain connected to the lower knowledge we got from the *Eitz HaDaas*. It has to be this way; why should a lowly human being, who often sins and rebels against the Creator, be allowed to cross into Gan Eden and taste of the true *daas*? Only after a person purifies himself – by separating himself from the knowledge of the *Eitz HaDaas* – can he be permitted to return to man’s original source, Gan Eden, and taste of the *Eitz HaChaim*.

19.

How, indeed, can a person remove himself from his current level of *eitz hadaas*?

Hashem has really revealed it to us in the Torah: the *Eitz HaChaim* is guarded by the “fiery, churning sword.” In addition, He placed there *keruvim* (angels) that hold the sword. This shows us that there are two aspects to the fiery, churning sword: the sword itself, as well as the angels who

³⁸ Sefer “*Bechinas Olam*”, 13:45.

wield it. We explained how we “guard” the *Eitz HaChaim* through the “fiery, churning sword”, before: by returning ourselves to *lo yeda*, which can enable us to receive *daas* of the Creator. In addition, we also need the “*keruvim*” who guard it – let us explain what this is.

Between the Aron, there were two *Keruvim* placed; when the Jewish people does the will of Hashem, they face each other, and when the Jewish people does not do the will of Hashem, the *keruvim* turn away.

The *keruvim* that Hashem placed to guard Gan Eden are similar to the state of the *keruvim* when they turn away from each other. The *keruvim* placed at the entrance to Gan Eden are serving to turn away, which resembles the *keruvim* when they are turned away from each other. The *keruvim* turn away whenever there is a lack of a relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem. So if someone wants to enter Gan Eden and taste of the *Eitz HaChaim*, he first needs to turn them around to face each other. In other words, he has to truly love Hashem – the state of the *keruvim* when they faced each other.

Therefore, besides for reaching *lo yeda*, a person also needs to have a tremendous love for Hashem, if he wants to taste true *daas*. The love of Hashem has to be burning within his heart. Without a great love for Hashem, a person will never properly understand Inner Torah, and any attempts to do have only proven to be a failure.

20.

Therefore, those who seek to learn Inner Torah, the true *daas*, must make sure that they have these two prerequisites: 1) to have a very strong, burning love for Hashem. 2) To nullify one’s *daas*, which enables one to reach *lo yeda*; from thereon, Hashem can merit the person to taste of the *Eitz HaChaim* – the *daas* of our *neshamah*, the *daas* of the Creator.

We can reach both of these prerequisite to the *Eitz HaChaim*, on Purim. On Purim, the Jewish people reached a great love for Hashem, by accepting the Torah again. We also can reach *lo yeda* on Purim – through the wine of Purim, in which a person has to reach the point of “*ad d’lo yoda*”, the point where he cannot tell the difference between Haman and Mordechai.³⁹

For this reason, the Sage say that “in the future, all of the festivals will disappear – except for Purim”. It is because Purim enables a person to reach the understanding of the *Eitz HaChaim*, which is eternal.

³⁹ In the series *Getting To Know Your Happiness (Da Es Simchasecha)*, the Rov explains that through the wine of Purim, one can reach a level in which he does not differentiate between good and evil, because he realizes that even evil can turn out to be good; this is the meaning between not knowing the difference between Haman and Mordechai.

20 | *The Concept of Detaching*

Our Soul's Essence Vs. Our Soul's Garments

The essence of our soul is covered with two garments: *emunah*\temimus, “simple faith” in G-d (which is also known as “*kesser*” [Crown]), and *machshavah*, the power of thought. The actual essence of our soul, though, is a place in ourselves that is above these two abilities.

Our thoughts, and even our *emunah*, is not yet our essence. This is because both our thoughts and our *emunah* contain a silent plea for more understanding, and therefore, there must be more to our soul than just our deep thoughts and even our deepest faith in the Creator. Our thoughts seek to understand more, and our *emunah* seeks to be satisfied as well. But the actual “I” in us that thinks and yearns, our actual essence, is like a rock that is still. Our actual essence does not search for anything – it doesn’t want a thing! Our “I” is content with itself and where it is.

Even if a person is always connected to his *emunah* (deep faith) and *temimus* (simple faith), he must not come to confuse these abilities with his actual essence. There is more to who you are than even your deep abilities of *emunah* and *temimus*.

The Concept of Detaching

Therefore, at times, a person will have to remove these garments of his soul. Sometimes one has to remove his *emunah*, and sometimes he has to remove his *machshavah*.

The point is that one has to detach sometimes from his *emunah* or his *machshavah*, in order that they should not become too permanent. A person should recognize that these abilities are not his essence, but merely garments of his soul. They are deep abilities we possess, but they do not define our essence, and because we must recognize this difference between our soul’s essence and our soul’s garments, we have to detach sometimes from even these abilities.

We need to get used to experiencing our actual essence, and in order to do this, we need to be able to relate to it. Therefore, we need to get used to the nature of our essence, which is to be still.

The General Introduction of How to Detach

To get used to do this, it is recommended to get used to doing things that you don’t like to do so much. Do it simply because you’re trying to teach yourself to get used to something.

Normally, “acting by rote” (*melumadah*) is something we are supposed to avoid, but sometimes, acting by rote can be a holy power. The concept we are currently discussing is an example of how we can use “*melumadah*” for holiness. It is to be able to do something without any agendas, and not for the sake of doing *avodah*. It is reminiscent of what we request of Hashem, “*Shetargileinu B'Torasecha*” – “That we become accustomed in Your Torah.” Sometimes we have to do something not because we want to, but simply because we have trained ourselves to do so.

By doing this, we are able to have a temporary detachment from our aspirations – even from our holy aspirations – and to instead become still, reminiscent of a rock, which is the nature of our actual essence: nothing but stillness.

Detaching From Thought, Method 1: Saying Tehillim Quickly

Let us explain how we can detach from our thoughts.

One way to work on this is by getting used to the habit of saying *Tehillim*, and to do so very quickly, without having much time to think into what you are saying. In this way, you disconnect from your thoughts, which essentially transforms your thoughts into a way for you to experience your actual essence.

Experiencing D'veykus\Attachment with Hashem

One can keep doing this until he reaches a *total attachment with Hashem*. When that happens, there are no thoughts going on in a person, and there is no “*avodah*” going on either. The thoughts and the *avodah* aspects are just the preparation for *d'veykus*\attachment with Hashem, but they are not yet the actual *d'veykus* itself.

Detaching From Thought, Method 2: Sleep

Another way how you can detach from your thoughts is through sleep.⁴⁰ When a person is asleep, his thoughts are not in progress (except for his imagination). This enables a person to detach from his soul's external layers, and the person is then able to recognize that his thoughts are just a garment atop his essence.

Detaching From Thought, Method 3: Talking Quickly

There is another way as well how a person can detach from his thoughts, and it has an additional gain to the above exercises: to talk quickly. Let us explain how this works.

⁴⁰ The *avodah* of “sleep” is explained in *The Essence of Chodesh Kislev: The Depth of Sleep*.

The soul has three garments over its essence – thought, speech, and action. These abilities wrap over each other like garments, one on top of the other. Thought is the garment of the soul which is attached directly with the soul, but speech isn't attached with the soul, and therefore, the power of speech does not gain its vitality directly from the soul. This is the usual case.

However, if a person talks quickly, without any deep thought involved as he's talking, then his speech bypasses his thoughts (since it is not using any thoughts), and then it can attach itself directly with the soul.

If a person succeeds with this, he resembles the level of "The *Shechinah* (G-d's Holy Presence) speaks from his throat." His talking will be coming from his very soul, because there are now no garments in between his speech and his very soul. Even if a person doesn't merit this high level, he will at least merit what the Gemara⁴¹ says that if a person wakes up in the morning and suddenly he finds himself saying a *possuk*, it's a small prophecy.

By reaching this level, a person is able to learn things from what he's saying. Normally, a person talks only after thinking beforehand, and therefore there is nothing for his mind to learn from his words. But when a person gets used to talking from his soul – by getting used to talking quickly – then his mind will be learning new information from the words he is saying, because the words were never thought about previously. He will be able to learn new things in his mind from the words he is talking.

Every person has already revealed this ability somewhat, because many times when we talk, we suddenly realize things in our mind. For example, sometimes we think a certain thought, and then as we verbalize it, we realize that what we thought about wasn't totally accurate.

The root of this is because our intellect (*seichel*) is our innermost garment of the soul, and therefore, usually we think things through before we talk; but sometimes, there are little tiny holes and passageways in our mind, so to speak, in which a matter can pass through and get by our thoughts. When the words then come out of our mouth, the mind never realized the information, and it can now learn new information from the words.

A Few Reasons Why This Works

Another reason for this is because as we talk, our intellect is actually able to comprehend things better than when it is using the thinking process. This is because all of our abilities are rooted in our soul; thought, speech, and action are merely garments of our soul, and they are not the soul itself. Sometimes our thoughts work calmly and they do not require any mental strain to work, but

⁴¹ *Berachos 55b*

sometimes our soul feels weak, and then we can't think so hard, and then we don't comprehend things. But when a person talks, he puts his soul into action, and then the soul can get even more inspired, which will then fire more illuminations (“*ohr*”) onto the intellect and thus enable it to receive higher understandings. (This is reminiscent of the words of the Zohar, that “*daas* (understanding) is hidden in mouth.”)

Another reason for this is because as long as a person is within a matter, he cannot see the matter clearly, unless he enters outside the matter and views it from the outside. As long as a person is still in thinking mode, he can't see a matter totally, because his thoughts are trapping him within the matter. But by talking, he leaves his thinking mode a bit and he can begin to see the matter a bit clearer.

On a deeper note, talking uses up less of our thinking; by talking, our power of thought returns back to its source, which is called “*Ayin*”, the point of “nothingness” in the soul. This point is also known as *Keser*. When the thoughts return to its source, *Ayin*, the thoughts receive a new kind of mind to think.

Finally, there is another reason why talking helps us detach from our thoughts. Thoughts contain an external and an inner layer to them. The inner layer of thought is a silent kind of thought, while the outer layer of our thoughts is a loud kind of thought. For this reason, most people have a hard time sitting and thinking calmly, because the outer layer of their thoughts naturally demand some loudness.

When a person begins talking, what happens? The external layer of his thoughts stop thinking and they instead are being used to talk. The inner layer of the thoughts, the quiet part, can then be accessed. A person is able to use this as an opportunity to reach higher understandings of a matter.

The Benefits of Writing, Or Listening To Music, and Or Taking A Walk

This can be practically felt when a person writes down what he's thinking. When a person writes down his thoughts, the external layer of his thoughts are being used for the writing, and for this reason, often it happens that sudden thoughts fall into a person's head as he's writing something. These thoughts might even have nothing to do with what he is writing about. Where does this come from? It is because the person has calmed his thoughts as he writes, and when the thoughts become calmed, a person accesses his inner thoughts.

There are other ways as well in how to calm the thoughts, such as by listening to music, or by talking a walk. An even more effective way to calm the thoughts is by talking a walk at night, because it's quieter then, and it can be used as opportunity to gain the quieter, inner thoughts.

21 | *Internalization*

In order to internalize a matter – in other words, if we want our mind’s knowledge to settle into our heart, as it is written “*And you shall know today, and you shall return the matter to your heart*” – first we need to acquire the knowledge about the matter, and after that, we can begin to internalize it in the heart.

How can we internalize our mind’s knowledge? The way is to **repeat** something – the **brief** description of a matter [as opposed to exploring the matter in-depth] - again and again, for thousands and even **hundreds of thousands** of times. It can be a **constant repetition** of just one fact, again and again.

This is a method that is tried and tested.

If someone possesses strong mental capabilities, he can do this constant repetition even **mentally**, but if he can’t do this, then there are two alternate methods he can try: 1) Either review a matter many times **verbally**, 2) Or review a matter many times by constantly **writing** it down.

22 | *What To Do With Our Fears and Doubts*

Holy Fear Vs. Unholy Fear

Amalek has the same *gematria* (numerical value in Hebrew) as the word “*safek*”, doubt, as is well-known. Amalek represents an evil force in Creation that can induce doubts into the Jewish people. But for every force that is evil, there is something else equally powerful on the side of good that can oppose it. Therefore, we can find holy doubts as well.

There is a statement in the *sefarim hakedoshim*, “There is no happiness like the clarification of doubts.”⁴² Doubts are the antithesis to being happy; it creates a situation of misery. When doubts cause us to be sad, then doubt is evil; such doubts are coming from the Evil Side of Impurity, making a person confused and tangled up in his doubts, resulting in a state of misery.

However, there is holy doubt as well, and this is when a person realizes: “From where is the doubt coming from? Is the doubt simply coming from my own self – or maybe Hashem put the doubt in my heart, and He wants me to have this doubt?”

When this is our attitude toward our doubts, then we transform the doubt into an increase of our *Emunah*. We realize that the doubt was really coming from our own *Emunah* – to believe that the Creator placed the doubt in our mind and heart; that it is Hashem’s very will that I should have the doubt. And since it is Hashem’s will that I should be feeling this doubt, I’m happy to be in doubt! After all, it is Hashem’s will from me right now to be in doubt.

This is how our doubts become holy – when they cause us to be happier, as opposed to becoming sad, *chas v’shalom*.

What is holding back people from feeling happy when they are in doubt about something? It is because people usually think that doubts are always a bad thing. People think that nothing good can be said about a situation in which a person has no idea what to do.

But this is erroneous; when we feel ourselves in doubt, it is an opportunity for us to realize that the doubt came from Hashem. The ensuing happiness we will feel after realizing this is an obvious gain.

When people find themselves in doubt, it causes inner anxiety: “I can’t decide...” or “I don’t know enough...” , and this is usually viewed as a sign of weakness. This causes us to become frustrated

⁴² *Toras HaOlah*

when we have doubts. The proper attitude we are supposed to have is to change his perspective about this, realizing that Hashem placed the doubt in his mind.

However, even upon realizing this, a person has to also think the following: “Why indeed did Hashem place this doubt in me? Of what gain is it to me?”

The answer is as follows. The world was created from nothing - *yeish m'ayin*, “something from nothing.” The world will eventually return to the original *ayin* nothingness, and this is the goal. It is the Jewish people who are able to bring the world to its goal, which is to return it to “nothingness” as it used to be. This “nothingness”, *ayin*, is essentially the future integration with Hashem, in which all Creations will return to their root, Hashem. *Ayin* is thus the holy root of Creation, and Creation will eventually return to this root – the holy *Ayin*.

However, everything good has something else equally evil to counter it. What is the evil *ayin* in Creation? This is the evil force of Amalek. Amalek also wants to bring the world to *ayin*, but its plan is destruction – an unholy kind of “*ayin*”. For this very reason, Amalek’s whole desire is to destroy the Jewish people. It wants to turn us away from holy *ayin* (the path toward integrating with Hashem) and instead turn us towards unholy *ayin*: the Evil Side of Impurity, destruction.

Amalek is thus the evil kind of *ayin*. It seeks destruction. To bring out this concept more, the lowliest sin in Creation is the sin of homosexuality, which the city of Sodom was rampant with. Sodom was a city that earned its own self-destruction – and the depth behind this was because they were full of homosexuality. What is the depth behind homosexuality? It’s really a kind of self-destruction, because it is a union that does not produce children. This is reminiscent to Amalek – the evil force in Creation that seeks to cause a person a self-destruction.

On a deeper note, a person who is confident in something can bear results. It is written, “*The victory of Israel does not lie*” (Shmuel I: 15:29). The Jewish people have an ability to be victorious – to fight confidently. We also allude to this power when we say in the *piyut* (liturgy) of Rosh HaShanah, “*HaVadai Shemo*” – “He Who is Definite In His Name.”

But when a person is in doubt, he becomes too frozen to act, and his doubts hold him back from making any progress. When a person is confident, he will fight and do whatever it takes to get to his goal; but when a person is in doubt, he loses his power to fight. This is really the force of Amalek, an evil force in Creation that induces doubt into people, causing people to discontinue from their progress and to cause a person to have a self-destruction.⁴³

⁴³ Editor’s Note: It is interesting to note that Amalek is also known for its homosexuality; see Rashi Devarim 25:18 that Amalek attacked the Jewish people, engaging them in homosexual behavior.

When Amalek attacked the Jewish people, the possuk says that the Jewish people questioned: “*Is Hashem among us?*” The depth behind this matter was that they were at the level of crossing over from material existence (*Yeish*) and enter the sublime existence – *Ayin*; that was precisely why Amalek came, for Amalek represents impurity, the unholy kind of *ayin*, and they wanted to prevent us from reaching holy *Ayin*.

Holy doubt is essentially when a person nullifies himself, when he comes to feel that he is nothing. In this way, a person can enter the holy kind of *Ayin*. When a person recognizes his human lowliness – but in a joyous way, from an understanding that it is Hashem’s will that he should feel like he is nothing and incapable – that itself nullifies a person to his Creator, and he essentially reaches *Ayin*. This is also known as *hiskalelus* – integrating with Hashem. It is accessed through nullifying ourselves, which is when we use our doubts for this holy purpose. In this way, our doubts become holy.

Just as Amalek, who induces evil doubts, is the root of all evil – so is it true about the converse side: using our doubts for holiness become a tool that enables a person to reach the absolute perfection and integrate with Hashem.

The Way To Deal With Our Doubts and Fears

Amalek is the evil force of doubt in Creation. It has the evil power to get us to doubt anything. The only thing we cannot ever really doubt is Hashem, because Amalek can only get us to doubt everything within Creation, but Hashem is above the bounds of Creation, and therefore Amalek’s doubt cannot reach there.

Perhaps we can also discover the following from this: that homosexuality cannot be a form of real love, for it was the sin that Amalek embodied - and Amalek is the epitome of hatred towards the Jewish people. If they committed homosexuality with Jews, this could not have come from a love or desire for us, but rather from the deepest possible hatred for us. So although homosexuality appears to be a man’s sexual desire and passion for another man, and he might claim that this is obviously coming from a love for that person, he is fooling himself. It is actually a sign that there is no desire for love at all; it is only a desire to have a selfish taking if pleasure. In a homosexual relationship, there is no desire to give pleasure to the other, and it’s a purely selfish desire. By contrast, in the marriage between a man and woman, they can have a harmonious marital union in which they are able to reach the deepest kind of pleasure, not because they are seeking to enjoy each other, but because they seek to give pleasure to each other. In marriage, a man can take his normally selfish desire for lust and transform it into an act of the greatest possible giving, and this indeed is the epitome of the sanctity of the Jewish home.

For those who are seeking to understand the Torah solution to homosexual behavior, see the translation entitled “Shovavim Today” on the Bilvavi website, which has been adapted from sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Chanukah\Shovavim: Tikkun HaZachor (Fixing the Sin of Gay Behavior). While there are many professionals today who claim that homosexual behavior is an inherent nature by many people and that it cannot be changed, the Rov explains this sensitive topic through classic Torah sources and explains that it is a nature which can be changed. There are three solutions given there on how to a homosexual person can learn to change.

We explained before that the way to counter Amalek's evil is through being happy when we are in doubt, with the understanding that it is Hashem's will that we should be in doubt.

Since this is so, a person has to come to a point in which he really feels in doubt about everything – yet still be happy, in spite of all the doubts. If a person achieves this, he fixes the evil of Amalek in its entirety.

As long as a person doesn't feel 100% doubtful about everything in Creation, he cannot come to totally fix the evil of Amalek. This is a very deep point.

It seems to us that we shouldn't be in doubt, and that we have to know everything and be sure of everything. But it's really the opposite. We are supposed to be in doubt – in fact, we should feel in doubt about everything we know of. And we are supposed to be happy with all of these doubts. That is the complete way of how we stop the entire evil of Amalek.

All of life is really full of doubts; we must always be afraid that maybe we aren't acting properly. How indeed can we solve all these fears? The way is realize that all doubts and all fears come from Hashem. That is exactly how we fix our doubts, and our fears: "It is Hashem's will that I should be in doubt or to be afraid." With this realization, our doubts and fears will actually cause us happiness.

This is a great fundamental: that as we become afraid, we should be happy at the same time. We are supposed to always be afraid that maybe we are not acting properly, but we must also be happy at the same time that Hashem wants us to have fear. This is a very deep power in our soul.

Before the Torah was given, there we no mitzvos yet. It was one big situation of doubt, because nothing was clear yet. Before the Torah was given, each Jew's avodah was simply to serve Hashem in his own way and give Him a *nachas ruach* (satisfaction), and each person had his own intellectual and soul understanding in how to serve Hashem. Except for the fact that everyone had to keep the 7 Noachide Laws, each person served Hashem in his own way; each person was in doubt about how to serve Hashem.

But after the Torah was given, this period of doubt came to an end, and now the 613 *mitzvos* told us how to act. (Although there are still doubts, as well as many arguments about on what the Torah says, still, the giving of the Torah gave us all a definite guide for life). The Torah was actually a power that came from above the bounds of Creation. In Creation, there are doubts – the evil force of Amalek. But the Torah, with its mitzvos, revealed a wisdom that came from above Creation, above all doubts – that is the great power of Torah. It comes from above.

Understand this well....

Fear and Faith At Once

Everything in Creation is made up of an outer layer and an inner layer. The inner layer of each thing is the power of *ahavah*\love, (or *chessed*\kindness). The outer layer of each thing is the power of *yirah*\awe (or *din*\judgment, or *pachad*\fear). A person needs to take this understanding into his daily living, as follows.

Let's say a person merits to receive something from another person. He has just witnessed an act of love and kindness – and he needs feel Hashem's love through the act as well. By feeling Hashem's love for us in the love and kindness we receive from others, we are feeling the inner layer of the kindness: its source of love and kindness that it comes from – Hashem.

However, at the same time, there must be an accompanying feeling of fear: maybe we are receiving our reward on this world, only to get punished in the next, just as Hashem deals with the wicked? This is the outer layer of what we must feel in something we receive: awe and dread.

We should mainly feel Hashem's love and kindness in a favor we receive from someone, but at the same time, we should also feel a little of this fear. Since the inner layer of the act is Hashem's loving-kindness, that is what we should *mainly* feel; but it should be accompanied with a little fear, as we said.

However, that is only true when we experience an act of kindness. If we experience something scary, we must react differently: we should first feel afraid of Hashem, because now He is acting with us with *middas hadin* (the attribute of justice). We must first accept this. Together with this, we also need to remind ourselves that everything Hashem does is out of His love for us, a total kindness. We need to feel Hashem's love for us – precisely through this scary experience. This is the inner layer of the act – the love and kindness of Hashem which we can reveal through it.

There is a deep point here which needs to be understood. When we ever feel afraid of something, it must not come from a natural feeling of fear. Our natural fears that we are born with need to be removed through increasing our Emunah. After all, "Everything Hashem does is for the good." (Berachos 60b). Thus, there is no justified reason to ever be worried, because everything Hashem does is out of His total love for us.

Rather, we are supposed to feel a different kind of fear when we go through a scary experience: that Hashem placed the fear in me, and this is His will. If Hashem is acting towards me with the *middas hadin*, then it must be that this is His *ratzon* right now, and therefore He wants me to be afraid.

By reacting like this to a fearful situation, a person uses fear as a way to reveal the will of Hashem through the act, and he is able to feel, "Hashem wants right now that I should be afraid."

This is a deep and subtle point, and it needs a lot of internal understanding (*avanta d'liba* "heart understanding"). It is to be able to feel Hashem's love for us even when we have pain or suffering – to feel that even this is good; and at the same time, for us to be afraid of Hashem that He is acting towards us with the *middas hadin*, and thus He wants us to be afraid.

23 | *The Inner Voice Of Creation*

Every day, we encounter the creations of Hashem. This includes the four kinds of life-forms – still objects (such as rocks); plants; living things, (such as animals); and people. In each of these, there is a life-giving energy that sustains them, every second. What is that life-force? The Creator of the world!

Our mission is to connect the life-force in each thing we encounter. In everything, there is G-dliness inside it that sustains it, and this is what we must connect to – and not to the mere external layer of what we encounter.

If a person has developed himself more internally, when he encounters a cat in the street, he can actually feel the soul of the cat, and not just its physical shape. When a person senses *pnimiyus* (the inner essence of things), he looks at a rock and he doesn't just see a rock; he hears a song contained in it, for even a rock sings to the Creator.⁴⁴ He identifies and connects to the life-force of even inanimate objects, not just to its physical form.

How much more so does this apply to when we meet people. If we develop our internal world, we do not identify and connect to others based on what they are wearing, how long his jacket is, what kind of hat he wears, or how long his beard is; upon developing our internal world, we connect with others on a whole different level. We will be able to see people as souls standing in front of us, and we will seek to connect to the person's soul. We will connect to the “*pure soul that You gave to me is pure*” which is in each person – and then, we will find that it is actually not so difficult to connect to other Jews; *all* Jews.

Chazal (Sukkah 28a) say that there is such a thing as understanding the language of trees. What is the meaning behind this? It is because a person can develop himself internally and hear even the life-force of a tree. When a person just lives superficially, he identifies a tree as a mere physical object with a certain shape. When he seeks to connect to the inner essence of things, he connects to the very life-force of the tree, and not just to the external layer of the tree. And he will be able to hear the language of the trees.

When someone just lives superficially and he does not see each thing in Creation as containing a life-force, he does not connect to the life of each thing, and to him, everything around him is a dead organism. Even when he meets people, he doesn't connect to the actual life found in people, to their

⁴⁴ As we know from Perek Shirah, “*The Song of Creation*,” that all of Creation expresses its unique song to Hashem through a different *possuk*.

living soul – his connection to others is dead. He identifies people based on their physical appearance and the clothing they wear – to him, people are kind of like dead objects to him.

Only a person who connects to the actual essence and life-force of each thing can be considered to be someone who is truly alive.

24 | *Two Stages of Moshiach's Arrival*

There is a dispute in the words of our *sefarim hakedoshim* about the order of events concerning *Moshiach's* era. Some of the *sefarim hakedoshim* say that first there will be the war of *Gog* and *Magog*, and after that *Moshiach* will come; others say that first *Moshiach* will come, and after that will be the war with *Gog* and *Magog*.

Both of these views are correct, for “their words and their words are the words of the living G-d”⁴⁵; [let us try to understand the two different views and how they can both be correct].

The explanation of the matter is that there are two layers going on over here – an external layer (*chitzoniyus*), and an internal layer (*pnimiyus*).⁴⁶ In the internal layer to reality, *Moshiach* is slowly being developed as the generations go on, but we aren't able to [physically] see this internal *Moshiach* taking place. The external *Moshiach* will therefore come “*pisom*”, “suddenly”, [as the *possuk* says] because since we aren't able to see how *Moshiach* is developing throughout time, it will appear very sudden when he comes.

But the truth is that there is an internal *Moshiach* that is constantly developing; if someone is connected to the inner layer of reality (*pnimiyus*), than to him, *Moshiach* will **not** feel “sudden” **at all** when he arrives [on the physical world because he already identifies with *Moshiach* from his internal world.].

[This is how we reconcile both opinions in the *sefarim hakedoshim* about the order of events]: First *Moshiach* will come in the internal sense, and then there will be the war with *Gog* and *Magog* [in the world]. But on the external layer of things, *Moshiach* will only come after the war of *Gog* and *Magog*. [Therefore, both views are correct, and they are each coming from a different angle. The first opinion is coming focusing on the external layer to reality, while the second opinion is looking at it from the inner layer of reality].

Gog and *Magog* [together] has the numerical value in Hebrew as 70. This is because they represent the 70 nations. After they are destroyed – the roots of all evil – the external [physical] *Moshiach* will then be **fully** revealed.

⁴⁵ *Gittin 7b*

⁴⁶ See *Chovos HaLevovos: Hakdamah* that everything in Creation contains two layers to it, a *chitzoniyus* (external layer) and a *pnimiyus* (inner layer).

25 | *Public Redemption and Personal Redemption*

It is written in the Megillah, “*And Esther spoke to the king, in the name of Mordechai.*” (Esther 2:22). The Sages learn from here that when one says something over in the name of the original person who said it, he brings redemption to the world (Avos 6:6).

There is a famous question on this: We see that people many times say over a statement in the name of the person who said it, yet the redemption still hasn't happened yet. Why not? Why hasn't Moshiach come yet? The answer to this is because there are two redemptions. There is a redemption for the masses that will happen, and there is a private redemption for each person which must also happen.

When a person says over something in the name of the person who said it, he brings for himself a private redemption, not the public redemption. When will all of Creation have its redemption? It will only be when *everyone* in the world is saying that everything is all for Hashem's name.

Let us explain this matter.

In exile, we are cut off from our root. We only see branches of the root as we are in exile – and we never see the root, which is the source of all the branches. In the redemption, however, unity will come to the world – and all of the branches will become unified through the root. All of the branches will return to their root, and then all of the branches will become unified.

Thus, when a person says over something and makes sure to mention who said the statement, he has somewhat of a connection to the source, but it's only his private connection. The connection has begun, but it's not complete yet.

The redemption which will take place for the masses, however, will be an integration with the root of all roots – Hashem. In the redemption, G-dliness will be revealed in everything, and there will thus be unity amongst everything. Everyone then will be saying over Who the source of all information is – Hashem. People will feel that everything is all for Hashem, which will unify all of Creation together.

26 | *My Feelings Are Not “Me”*

Recognizing Who You Really Are

If you ask a person: “Who are you?” he will naturally respond: “I am the son of so and so”, or “This is what people call me” - or something else like that.

If you think about it, though, this is a very superficial answer. When a person identifies himself based on how he *relates* with others, or based on how *others* view him - then he has never yet discovered his real identity.

What does it matter who his father is, who his children are, or what people call him or know him as? A person has to know that there is much more to who he is than how others perceive him.

The Essence of the Soul Vs. The Garments of the Soul

Let’s say a person gives his friend a gold watch as a gift, and the watch is wrapped up in a nice box. Is he giving him a nice box with a watch inside, or a watch with a nice box? The actual present is the watch, and the nice box is just the superficial layer that covers over the real present.

So too, a person can’t identify who he really is based on superficialities. The box that the watch comes in is just the garment that wraps over the actual gift, which is the watch. The same goes for a person – a person has an actual essence, and he has garments that cover over his essence.

What we need to know is: What is the essence of a person, and what are the garments?

The Six Garments of the Soul

The *sefarim hakedoshim* say that a person has six “garments” altogether. They are one’s house, his wife, his clothing, his body, his bad *middos*, and his feelings. (There is another approach that says there are three general garments of the soul – the actions, the feelings, and the thoughts.) These six factors are just the garments on top of our actual essence of our soul.

Let us explain how each of these is only a “garment”, as opposed to our actual essence.

One garment that covers over our self is our house. Your house is not who you are. If a person spends his whole life immersed on how he can have the nicest house, then he’s spending his entire life immersed in his “garments”, and he never was involved with his actual self.

A second garment over a man's soul is his wife. Chazal (Yevamos 62b) say that a wife is called the "wall" of her husband, and it is written as well, "*A woman surrounds her husband.*" (Yirmiyahu 31). Although a person must honor and love his wife, no man should imagine he doesn't exist and instead view his wife as his very essence, receiving all his vitality from her. If a man depends on his wife for vitality, and he never builds up his own actual essence, then he is only involved all the time with a garment of his soul, and not with his actual soul.

Another garment of a person is the actual clothing a person wears. Many people spend a lot of time involved with what to wear and spend a lot of money on clothing. They spend a great deal of time only with their garments, not with their actual self; they are just living a superficial kind of life.

The body of a person is a garment that covers over who he really is. A person is not his body. Rav Chaim Vital (in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*) brings proof to this from the possuk (Shemos 30:32) "*On the flesh of man, it shall not be smeared*"; here we see that the possuk divides the "flesh" and "man" as two separate entities. If a person is involved with his body, he is far from himself.

The bad *middos* of a person are also not part of one's essence. We have good *middos* and bad *middos*, but there is a big difference between them. Our good *middos* are part of our intrinsic essence, while our bad *middos* are not part of our soul – they are just garments on top of our soul.

(The soul has in it layer within layer. The good *middos* are not either our actual essence, but they are an intrinsic part of our essence. Our bad *middos*, however, are just on the outer part of our self, and they are not part of the self at all. This is a deep, fundamental matter.)

If a person *only* involves himself with working on his bad *middos*, then he's still only working with his garments of the soul, and not with his actual soul.

Chazal say that the three things which take a person out of this world are jealousy, desire and honor. The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that these three things take a person out of his actual *essence*, and instead cause him to only be involved with his soul garments, which are only the external part of himself.

Feelings Are Not Yet "You"

The last garment of a person are the emotions\feelings.

Let's say a person identifies his "I" by his emotions – happiness, sadness, anger, calmness, etc. If he feels happy, he thinks that his is a happy person, but if he thinks he is sad, he will think that he *is* "a sad person".

If you think about it, the emotions are not really the actual self. Emotions are merely various situations we go through. Sometimes “I” am sad, and sometimes “I” am happy, etc. Therefore, since our emotions are prone to change, there must be more to who we are. Emotions are only the outer layer of our self.

The inner layer of our self is our actual “I”, which is a deeper place in ourselves than the emotions. Your “I” isn’t defined by any situation you happen to be in.

If a person only knows about his feelings - but not more than that - he doesn’t recognize his true self yet. He knows how that his “I” can have feelings, but he doesn’t know of his actual “I”. There is an inner layer of our self which is deeper than the emotions. Beyond your emotions, there is your actual “I” – your intrinsic self.

Differentiating Between Your Emotions and Your Actual Self

The sefer *Yesod V'Shoresh H'Avodah* writes that when one says the words “*You chose use from all the nations*” in the *Shemoneh Esrei* of The Three Festivals, he should rejoice that he was chosen from all the other nations, and right after that when comes to the words “*And because of our sins, we were exiled from our land*”, he should feel great pain at the fact that we don’t have a *Beis Hamikdash* and that we don’t have sacrifices to atone for us.

I heard a question from an upright person who asked, “How could it be that is such a short amount of time one can go from a feeling of happiness to a feeling of sadness?”

The answer to this lies in what we have said above.

If we’re dealing with the essence of something, it’s hard to reach. If we’re dealing with garments, though, it’s easy to change from one “garment” to another “garment.” If a person confuses his essence with his garments – for example, if someone thinks that “I” am my feelings – then it is indeed very hard for him to change from one feeling to another, because how do you change your “I” so fast?

But a deeper kind of person understands that there is a deeper part to himself than his feelings – he knows that he has an “I” that goes beyond his feelings, and thus he differentiates between his “I” and his feelings. He knows that his feelings are just garments that cover over his actual self. Since he views feelings as his garments, he can easily change from one feeling to another, because to him it’s like removing one shirt and switching it for a different one.

A Story About Rav Hutner zt"l

There is a story told of Rav Hutner zt"l, that one time he came to a bris of one of his students, and on the way there, he had to also attend a funeral of one of his friends. After the funeral, when he was on the way to the bris, he told the student next to him, "I made two rooms in my heart. One place in my heart is for happy occasions, and the other place in my heart is for sad occasions."

This is a great example of someone who was able to switch emotions very quickly.

But when a person views his emotions as his actual self, what will happen? His life is a mix of sadness and happiness. He won't be fully happy when he goes to a happy occasion, and he won't fully experience the sadness of a sad occasion, because he is one big mix of emotions.

Hashem Wears the Garment of "Gaavah"

These words are based on a concept of the Baal Shem Tov. The possuk says, "*Hashem, the King, wears splendor.*" What does it mean that Hashem "wears" *gaavah* \splendor?

The Baal Shem Tov explained that Hashem wears *gaavah* as a garment. This shows us man's mission on this world, which is to "resemble his Creator" – that one should view his *middos* as just his garments, but not his actual self.

How Can We Get To This Level?

The way to actually acquire perspective this is long and challenging, but we will still describe it briefly. Everything that a person does begins from a person's *ratzon* \will. For example, when you think about something, first you *want* to think about it, and then you think about it.

Most desires that people have are superficial. If a person wants to get to his self, he has to first nullify his desires. When he nullifies his desires, he will then find his actual self, and he will leave the superficial layer of his self, which are his desires.

It's Possible To Be Happy and Sad At Once

When a person goes about life in this way, he can grow tremendously as time goes on. He will be able to feel both happiness and sadness at once, because since he is aware that he is not identified by emotions, his own emotions will deep in the process.

Not only will he be able to switch easily from one kind of feeling to another kind of feeling (like to go from a funeral to a wedding, and vice versa), but he will be able to even have two opposite feelings at once!

The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that one should have “joy on his face, but mourning in his heart.” A person has to smile at others and look happy to others, even if deep down a person he is sad. What does this mean, though? Are we supposed to lie to ourselves?!

The answer, though, is that we can really have two feelings going on at once. We can feel both happiness and sadness at the same time, but we are able to allow that our sadness remain only on the inside, with our face radiating happiness toward others.