

P A R T S I X

BUILDING

A Sanctuary In The Heart

GUIDE TO OVERCOMING THE EGO

DEVELOPING CHOCHMA
IN ORDER TO NULLIFY THE SELF

UNEDITED SPECIAL INTERNET EDITION

AUTHOR'S PREFACE	1
1 ACHIEVING CLOSENESS TO HASHEM	3
01 THREE LEVELS OF THE SOUL	4
02 THE PURPOSE OF EVERYTHING – SEARCHING FOR HASHEM	15
03 NULLIFYING YOUR “I”	27
04 THE TRUE “I” IS HASHEM	35
05 TIME & ABOVE TIME	41
06 LISHMAH, PART ONE	45
07 LISHMAH, PART TWO	52
08 MESIRUS NEFESH: TO SACRIFICE FOR HASHEM	58
09 EMUNAH TOGETHER WITH TORAH	64
2 MATTERS OF INTELLECT	72
10 UNIFYING EVERYTHING INTO ONE POINT	73
11 THOUGHT AS REALITY	80

Building a Sanctuary in the Heart | Part Six

People involved in self-improvement often end up focusing too much on themselves, and in this way, actually become far from Hashem. In this volume, the Rav teaches about nullifying the ego before Hashem in order to become truly close to Him and serve Him selflessly. The second section of the book is about developing the faculty of *chochmah* (wisdom) in order to serve Hashem through that mode. The third section contains six essays about the holidays

Eleven Selected Essays

Author's Preface

The soul within a person knows its Creator and feels the truth of His existence, but it is covered over with a lot of garments that hold it back from being revealed in the thoughts and heart of a person. The more a person merits to know and to recognize in his mind and heart about the truth of Hashem's existence -- the higher level his soul will be on (and the 613 forces present in the soul will be aware of the knowledge as well). One needs great merit to understand these words here, and if he doesn't merit, then even if he looks many times into the Torah, he will still not see or internalize in his heart the inner point of the Torah, as well as anything in Creation.

When a person merits to know of Hashem's existence, his heart will be filled with a joy that has no end (as the Chazon Ish has written). His soul will feel attached to the knowledge of the Creator, and this knowledge will be the joy of his life. It becomes a part of his existence, and a source of life and hope. Throughout any stormy wave that a person encounters in his life, he can now be attached to the existence of Hashem, and it will calm his soul and bring pleasure to himself. When this knowledge will fill every soul of the nation of Yisrael, and be revealed in their minds and hearts, all movements will come to a rest, and the souls of Yisrael will come to rest in the existence of the Creator. *Moshiach* will then come, for the light of *Moshiach* is essentially the attachment and serenity of the soul's realization in the truth of Hashem's existence

One who learns this *sefer*, the sixth volume of *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, knows that this is the purpose of the *Bilvavi* series – to bring a person to a realization in his mind and a feeling in his heart about the truth of Hashem's existence.

1 *Achieving Closeness To Hashem*

01 | *Three Levels of the Soul*

These opening words will give you the proper outlook on everything to come in this *sefer*; and if the foundations of our “tree” are strong, only then can we see strong branches and good fruits from our “tree”. So don’t skip this introduction.

Nefesh, Ruach and Neshamah

We will learn a concept mentioned in the words of Rav Dessler *zt”l* (see *Michtav M’Eliyahu* Vol. V, p. 13), which formulate everything we are about to say. He writes: “We have written that there are three lower forms of the soul of a person, which the holy *seforim* term as “*Neshamah, Ruach, and Nefesh* (“life-force”, or lower part of the soul) *.

There are various ways of serving Hashem through these three levels...” In other words, there are three general formulas for serving Hashem, and we will soon explain them.

Nefesh - Action

Rav Dessler continues: “Serving Hashem through the “*Nefesh*” means to serve Him with only our outside actions.”

This means that we carry out our obligations. It is indisputable that we need this, because even though the “main thing that the Torah wants from us is our heart”, still, it is important for us to achieve this elementary level – doing the right actions, keeping the *mitzvos*. We must “learn in order to do”, and this serves as the basis of everything. If we aren’t carrying out the actions we are supposed to do – the *mitzvos* - we are totally disconnected, *chas v’shalom*.

This is an important rule in serving Hashem: “Today is for action”. There is also a rule, “Learn in order to do.” Everything is based on a foundation, and the foundation of everything is that we do the actions required of us. That is *Nefesh*: doing the *mitzvos* and acting properly.

Ruach - Inspiration

Rav Dessler continues: “Serving Hashem through the “*Ruach*” is to do actions with enthusiasm. This is the power of self-awakening (*hisorerus*) and being amazed (*hispaalus*). This mode of serving Hashem is done by entering further into a matter, when one awakens himself and feels a wonder from something.” That is how we use our *Ruach*: inspiring ourselves.

* There are in addition two higher levels of the soul, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*. This *sefer* does not deal with those two.

Neshamah - Internalization

Rav Dessler continues: “Serving Hashem through the “*Neshamah*” is by placing a matter on the heart, which is like a “soft, subtle voice”. It is a firm realization of the truth in one’s heart.”

This means when one clarifies the inner depth of a matter; that is *Neshamah*.

So far, we have explained the basic outline of what we need to know here.

Improving the Nefesh

Rav Dessler continues to explain how to improve each of these three levels of *Nefesh*, *Ruach* and *Neshamah*: “For one who wants to improve his service to Hashem on the level of “*Nefesh*”, he must be proved his mistakes, by being told stories that will help him improve, and by growing more accustomed to do good actions.”

In other words, if someone isn’t keeping the Torah, and he wants to better himself, he is at the level of *Nefesh*. He needs to be taught Torah and the *mitzvos*; how to carry out the Torah.

Even if someone generally keeps the Torah, still, it is necessary for anyone as well to work on himself in this area, because there is no such thing as even a righteous person who doesn’t sin (sometimes), from lack of proper knowledge in the Torah and *mitzvos*.

This is how one who is on a level of “*Nefesh*” improves: by clarifying his actions to himself, to see if they are in line with the Torah.

Improving the Ruach

Rav Dessler continues: “For one who is serving Hashem on a level of “*Ruach*”, he can improve himself by being infused with enthusiasm in learning the Torah and in the *mitzvos*.”

In other words, the level of “*Ruach*” is to infuse ourselves with enthusiasm for spiritual matters. If a person is doing everything he is supposed to, but he is lethargic and sleep-like, he needs to be woken up, like it is written, “Awaken and then strongly awaken the love, until there is desire.” (Even when someone is spiritually awake, he needs to be awakened even more.)

Improving the Neshamah

Rav Dessler continues: “For one who is serving Hashem on the level of “*Neshamah*”, he can improve himself by working to reveal the innermost points of truth in the heart.”

From Which Part of Our Soul Are We Talking From?

Rav Dessler finishes by saying, “Anyone who switches around these levels will not be improved.”

We need to understand that these are three unique ways of serving Hashem, and there is no way to switch around what works with one for another. We need to know in what way we are serving Hashem in.

For example: when we talk, are we talking from the *Nefesh*, or from the *Ruach*, or from the *Neshamah*?

Talking from the *Nefesh* means that we are describing a certain action to do. If one is talking about carrying out a Halachah (the laws of the Torah), or he is giving practical advice on how to carry out the Torah and the *mitzvos* – he is talking on the level of *Nefesh*.

When we talk from the *Ruach*, we are speaking on even higher level. This is when we are talking with enthusiasm, and we are trying to cause in ourselves an awakening for something spiritual. This usually occurs at certain events or times that require this awakening (hisorerus). All of creation actually tries to awaken all people from their sleep: “Awaken, sleepers, from your slumber...”

As an example, people forget the truth when they indulge in frivolous things, and they need to be awakened with the shofar blast in order to return to the Creator.

This is the level of *Ruach*. The function of *Ruach* is not merely to describe mere details of something, but the opposite – it is to enlarge the matter in order for it to cause in us a feeling of amazement and awaken us from our lethargy to our spiritual situation. To talk to someone on the level of *Ruach* is to try to instill in him something he is not used to, because something a person is used to doing will not awaken him. This is how to talk from the *Ruach*: talking in a manner that inspires others and getting them to awaken themselves.

Serving Hashem from the *Neshamah* is an even higher level. It is to realize the truth in everything, the “truth of the truth” – and it is very subtle. A person serves Hashem with his *Neshamah* when he probes into the more subtle aspects of every matter.

Serving Hashem through the “Ruach”

Rav Dessler continues to explain that these three levels are also different ways to influence the public.

He writes: “To influence others from our *Nefesh* is to give external influence – like by giving lectures or writing books to inspire people to improve. Serving Hashem through the *Ruach* is to speak with enthusiasm to others, causing them to be uplifted, and “Words that come from the heart enter the heart.” However, even these words come from the *Ruach* are still not from the most truthful point of our heart, the level of *Neshamah*. To influence others through the *Neshamah* is when a great person places a matter into his very heart, and he nullifies himself to the truth. He can then shine his spiritual light outward to the public. Even if he doesn’t talk to them, they can feel his words, even without using their senses.”

These words of Rav Dessler need to be understood. If one is being influenced through the level of *Nefesh*, then that means he needs to be clear exactly what to do in practical terms. This is understandable, but what we need to

understand is *Ruach*. If he is being influenced through another's *Ruach*, the *Ruach* will not always be enough to improve him, because it can just be to him like a wind that comes and goes; after all, "*Ruach*" means wind.

Let us explain what we mean. There are different kinds of wind – in other words, there are different levels of inspiration. Sometimes wind is moving toward the right or left. Sometimes it is strong and sometimes weak, and sometimes it can barely be felt. The wind is always different, and it always moves in a different direction. The same is with the wind\ *Ruach* of the soul. If one is serving Hashem from his *Ruach*, there are constant ups and downs. There is always movement, just like with real wind; there is no such thing as serving Hashem without movement.

We pray, "Do not bring us to have trials." Every person has trials. All of life is full of trials. When a person lives on a level of *Ruach*, he draws inspiration from hearing a good lecture and gets enthusiasm to learn Torah better and do *mitzvos* better, but if the rabbi is absent one week and he doesn't hear the lecture, he is missing the spirit of his life. He is only going with the "wind" that is blowing on him and awakens him. If someone G-d forbid dies, he feels an awakening. But if nothing happens, he stays unmoved...

With the level of *Ruach*, the main thing is the enthusiasm, but not the actual contents of what is being conveyed. Someone who is on the level of *Ruach* needs to hear words of awakening every week in order to be stirred; such awakening won't be here forever - it eventually dies down.

We experience this all the time when we get something new – a new house or a new type of food. In the beginning, we are excited to have it, but then we slowly get accustomed to it. It doesn't have the taste of being new anymore.

The same is when we hear things that improve our *Avodas Hashem*. There is a rule that "There is no piety as much as in the beginning." When a person begins his *Avodas Hashem*, he is receiving new concepts. But after half a year of hearing inspiration, or after a year or two, there aren't many new things to give him enthusiasm.

Generally speaking, anyone with even a little understanding knows that if someone only goes with enthusiasm alone, it won't be enough to build him up for life – because as soon as the reason for the enthusiasm is taken away, he stops. But if he is being obligated by a more subtle point, this can cause him to feel more motivated.

A judge has to judge every case by the truth, and everyone is a judge on himself as well. A person can thus judge himself more and more on the subtle points of every trait. This subtlety is the level of *Neshamah* – a lasting inspiration, unlike the temporary inspiration of *Ruach*.

But if a person's whole *Avodas Hashem* is through self-awakening (hisorerus), he limits himself, because the awakening can only last for a certain amount of time.

Also, if a person is being influenced only from *Ruach*, he isn't being influenced as much as he really should when it comes to practical terms. It's like the saying "Grab and eat something today because tomorrow you will die."

In spiritual terms, it means that a person should grab another page of *Gemara*, another act of not speaking slander, another mitzvah, etc. – as long as the person does something now as a result.

If a person is influencing others through his *Ruach*, any successful results he has in others can be called success, but he never reaches the true outcome of what needs to be done. Instead, the one who is influenced just "grabs" onto some new, temporary improvement in a specific area: either the listener is indeed awakened to learn more Torah, while another is awakened to daven better, and another feels inspired to do more kindness.

All this “grabbing” doesn’t last.

When a person talks from his *Ruach* to others, although he inspires them, he is only awakening the listener to an area his own heart is drawn toward, and this will not accomplish the ultimate goal.

Talking on a level of Neshamah

But serving Hashem through the *Neshamah* is a different level altogether.

Let us use an example – the Alter of Kelm. Anyone looking for self-awakening will not find much in his words. The Alter’s words did not stem from being amazed at something and then writing down his original thoughts; this was not his way. The Alter had a certain way of life. He saw life in a certain way, and anything he wrote reflects this way of life that he viewed. It is well known that the Alter kept his original thoughts to himself for sometimes twenty years before telling them to anyone.

Why did he do this? On a simple level, we can understand that this means that he worked a lot on his character traits, but there is a deeper point in this.

Most people who see something and get amazed will immediately tell someone what they saw. This is talking from the *Ruach*, and the talking here does not stem from a matter that settled in his heart. But if he tells it over to someone only after he has had a long time to digest it, it becomes a simple matter to him. When he tells it over now, it is from his very essence – he is telling it over from his *Neshamah*.

This is the difference between a true *Baal Mussar* (disciplined person) and those who lack inner improvement. A true *Baal Mussar* doesn’t immediately tell over to others something he is amazed at. If he gets a spiritual awakening for something, he doesn’t yet speak of it.

He only speaks of matters that are simple to him, after he has worked to understand it – and not before he understands.

The Mashgiach, R’ Yechezkel Levenstein *zt”l*, never spoke of a matter that wasn’t ingrained in his inner being and soul. He never spoke from his *Ruach*, from mere enthusiasm about something – he only spoke of things that he acquired an understanding of, a matter internalized in his *Neshamah*.

This is really the inner aspect of *Mussar*. Of course there is hisorerus\self-awakening found in *Mussar*, but that is only a part of it. The inner point of *Mussar* is an inner grasp on life itself.

The son-in-law of the Alter of Kelm said that there are three things necessary to learn *Mussar*, and he said this in front of R’ Yechezkel Levenstein *zt”l*. One of them was that a person needs a “straight head.” This is referring to the ability of reflection (*hisbonenus*), which is thinking that comes from the *Neshamah*, and not enthusiasm, which is hisorerus that comes from the *Ruach*.

A person needs a *lev tahor* (pure heart) for this, as well as the ability of *hisbonenus* (reflection). Without a “pure heart”, the mind is bribed, and it cannot properly reflect on matters. If a person has just a pure heart, though, but he

doesn't know how to reflect on the inner aspects of life – although he will get rewarded by Hashem for his efforts, he is still lacking the inner *Avodas Hashem*.

We have to understand that *Mussar* is not here merely to awaken us. It is here to give us a way of life, which are the ways of *Mussar*. It is the way life should look – and it is not just “inspiration.”

Only A Few Truly Serve Hashem

If we understand these words – we can turn around our life. Otherwise, we turn everything into just “inspiration” that doesn't last.

We need to understand: there aren't many people in the world who are truly serving Hashem, and there never were too many in the first place.

When *Moshiach* comes, only then “The world will be filled with knowledge”. But until the Redemption, there was and will only be few people who really serve Hashem. There were only rare individuals who served Hashem: Avraham in his generation, Noach in his generation – every generation has a unique individual. There were only individuals who served Hashem on such an amazing level.

When we stood at Har Sinai, for a moment we all rose to an exalted level, but immediately we fell. True service of Hashem is only reached by individuals, and not by everyone. This is the way it always was and will be, until we are redeemed with *Moshiach*.

Thus, in order for the matters of this *sefer* to be actualized, we have to understand one thing: since we are trying to influence a public here, most people will not hear the inner point of what it being conveyed.

They can only hear it as a self-awakening, as inspiration, which is fine and praiseworthy; in fact, if only we could all be even like this level. So the public as a whole will not gain much from this *sefer*, just some temporary hisorerus.

But if this *sefer* is being given over to an individual, then it must not be given over on the level of *Ruach*. It needs to be given over on the level of *Neshamah*. When we speak to people on the street, we need to talk to them only from the *Nefesh*.

We need to tell them what to do: this is prohibited, this we must do, and so forth. When we speak to a Ben Torah (generally speaking), though, we need to speak in a form of *Ruach*. We are trying to awaken him – each according to his situation.

But if we are speaking to a group of individuals whose only desire is to serve Hashem, we do not express to them words of mere self-awakening. Self-awakening doesn't last forever; those who are truly seeking Hashem need the higher level than self-awakening. The words of the Sages are not based on self-awakening. The Sages spoke from the *Neshamah* – and they spoke words of the *Neshamah* too.

When hearing the words of the Sages, the words are meant to bring us to the *Neshamah* of the matter, not the *Ruach* of the matter. The mode of *Ruach* is fine for the public in general, but the mode of *Neshamah* is meant only for certain individuals, who have come to hear the matters of this *sefer*.

A Life of Growth

The inner aspect of our *Avodah* is not something we hear as self-awakening, and thus these matters should not be mere self-awakening to us. They must cause in us a change more than mere temporary inspiration. When we hear something, it is really supposed to change us completely. If a person listens well to what he is hearing and clarifies for himself the inner aspects of *Avodas Hashem*, he is the not same person as before (just as a person who repents “becomes a new person”, as the Rambam writes). Clarifying a matter to yourself is the level of *Neshamah*.

The Sages say, “I have seen those who are going higher, and they are few” (*Sukkah 45b*). The explanation of this is that if there is a house with an attic, there are two kinds of people living in it; one stays on the first floor and sometimes goes up to the attic, while another can live in the attic. The ones who are “going higher” are like the ones who “live in the attic”; it is where they reside permanently. It is not like self-awakening, which is done by sometimes visiting the attic. Someone who “always lives in the attic” is living a whole different kind of life – a life of growth!

There exists a kind of life that is internal, and there is a kind of life that is external. An external kind of life can have in it self-awakening, and it can also even have quite fiery enthusiasm in it. But it is not yet a life of a “soft, subtle voice” (*kol demamah dakkah*)– there is no calm, and there is no inner grasp of matters. It lacks clarity of the inner meaning of everything.

It is a simple fact that in order to really grasp something, we need a lot of *zechusim* (merits). The Mashgiach, R’ Yechezkel Levenstein *zt”l* one time said, “There are people who are sitting in front of me for the last 20 years, but they have yet not even begun to understand what I am saying!”

This is not an exaggeration. He was not being haughty in saying so. There were people that heard him speak and listened intently, with a great desire to work on themselves. But they lacked proper understanding in what they wanted. The Mashgiach *zt”l* did not come every week and say, “I thought of a new, profound thought regarding *Avrohom* or *Yitzchok*, or a new thought about a character trait.” That was never his point. He lived a certain way of life, and he was trying to explain this when he spoke. Whoever grasped it, grasped it! There were only individuals who did.

The words we will say in this *sefer* are internal matters regarding our *Avodas Hashem*. They are only meant for those who want to build their life in their souls by these words. If someone just thinks these words are an “*Avodah*”, he is already lacking grasp of these matters. It is not an *Avodah*; it is life itself. But in order to bring these words into our internal life, we need an *Avodah* to actualize it.

On a deeper note, however, there is really no “*Avodah*” here! It is our grasp on where we are standing in life, what we truly want.

The Chazon Ish writes that Torah and Tefillah\prayer are dependent on each other. We will explain at length that Torah, prayer and faith are all part of one structure in the soul of a person, just like we understand that Torah is not just a mere self-awakening.

If a teacher of a Ben Torah is speaking to him about the importance of learning Torah, he is not merely trying to awaken him. A Ben Torah needs a higher level of spirituality to help him grow more – he is beyond mere inspiration, and we are trying to get him to realize the truth of “For Torah is our life and the length of our days” –

that the world stands on Torah, as the *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* writes. Someone who isn't a Ben Torah needs the lower, basic level – hisorerus\inspiration - in order to grow; someone who is already a Ben Torah needs more than hisorerus.

When we understand that Torah, prayer and faith are dependent on each other in the internal sense, then our view on prayer or faith becomes part of our take on life itself, not just as a means for self-awakening. It becomes life to us.

It is well known that the Chazon Ish would put more effort into his prayers than his learning. This doesn't mean that his learning was detached from his praying, or the other way around; it means that his learning was so bound up with his praying, and his praying with his learning – in a way that he was able to expend more into his praying. Obviously, after putting all his effort into praying, he merited more understanding in his learning. All of his actions were intertwined, and there was no separation between the two matters.

Holiness is to be Constant

What exactly are we referring to?

We have until this point been accustomed to hearing a *shmuess* (inspirational lecture) every here and there: first in yeshiva, then somewhere else. We go to hear words of truth from truthful people...

But this is not really a plan for us to improve. There is no order here; there is no structure. Words of inspiration are only there to make sure people don't fall asleep, or to give us a profound thought. There is no inner aspect of life contained in this way of *Avodas Hashem*.

The Chazon Ish writes (Igron, Vol. I: 3), "Holiness is to be constant." We can understand this as we explained: "*Ruach*"\self-awakening is not constant. If self-awakening isn't constant, then it can be understood that there is no real holiness when we receive inspiration in the form of *Ruach*.

In order for a person to enter into holiness, to enter what is called "You are holy and Your name is holy, and holy ones praise You every day, Selah", we need to enter the point of consistency in our *Avodas Hashem*. Being "constant" will not come from self-awakening; it can only come from developing the structure of life in the soul – the level of *Neshamah*. We have to go beyond inspiration and build our souls through these matters.

Finding the Point of Renewal in All Matters

One of the points in *Avodas Hashem* that was introduced by the Alter of Kelm (which applies both in learning Torah and *Mussar*) is that we should grow accustomed to think into anything new we hear. We should think, "What did I hold before I heard this, and what do I hold now? What changed in my thinking?"

When the soul becomes accustomed to thinking like this, a person can build in himself an inner world in which he clarifies everything new that he hears.

For example, if one reads a *sefer*, he can think, “Is there something new in here?” If he can’t come up with anything new he found in the *sefer*, he should try to think why it’s not new to him. Maybe he knows it already, or maybe he saw the same thought in a different *sefer*. Either way, he should reflect if there is something new here or not, and if it is new to him, he should think: “What did I think before I saw this, and what do I think now?”

A person should get accustomed to this form of *Avodah* in a way that his life is changed. A person never changes his life (or at least parts of his life) because he never really thought about the depth of a profound thought that he hears. He sees that the thought is giving him a new idea, and he understands that it is new, but the actual point of the new thought stays hidden in his soul, because he just hears it and then runs away from it.

Everything needs thought. Everything has a plan and structure to how to go about it. When a person goes over the same point – not once or twice, but four times – as is necessary for learning Torah – and he clarifies for himself if there is nothing new here or if there is something new here – he is actually building himself. He is not working to merely awaken a matter. He is beginning to build a way of life of *Avodah*.

This is the level of *Neshamah*. It is to clarify for oneself more and more subtle points, until he reaches a total clarity in the most inner point of the soul – each according to his own level.

Living for Life itself, Not Mere Self-Awakening

This way of *Avodas Hashem* is, without a shadow of a doubt, not for everyone. It is only for individuals, perhaps even only for rare individuals.

But we need to understand: these words here are not supposed to be just fiery words of enthusiasm or self-awakening. They all focus on the same point: to bring us clarity of life, and the purpose of life; “What Hashem asks of you.”

When a person realizes that his soul needs more internal work – more subtlety, more calm, more clarity – he should know that this fact needs to be transformed into a very inner kind of life.

It is impossible to grasp a very inner point of a matter once a month or once a week just by doing a little thinking during the day. We need to be totally “immersed” in these matters (as the Kotzker Rebbe would say).

To illustrate, when a person is immersed in forty se’ah of water, even if one hair is not inside the water he is still impure. We do not apply here the rule “The majority is like the entirety”, because we need to be totally immersed in order to be considered “immersed.” To enter into a matter is to be inside it, to live in it, to breathe it, to clarify it. Clarity in a matter is not only sometimes. Holiness is to be constant, and to enter the inner world, we need to bring our life itself into our internal self.

We need to enter the internal mode, the mode of “kol demamah dakkah”, a “soft, subtle voice.” These matters need to fill all aspects of our life. Of course, this doesn’t mean to take away from learning Torah, but when we are learning these matters, we must be immersed and devoted to the topic. (This we can see in the words of *Rabbeinu Yonah* in *Shaarei Teshuvah*).

We must know that these words are not for everyone. They are relevant for some, but for the rest who hear them, it would be like entering a world that isn't theirs. Someone who has relevance to these matters can be successful here, but someone who doesn't have relevance to these matters is not being possessed by a good will; it is rather just breaking a fence (poretz geder).

Someone who does have relevance to these matters, however, must live in them. He shouldn't just apply these words for a certain amount of time and then move on, satisfied. He needs to exist with them. He needs to live in it and be absorbed in it, breathing these words. It is the life he is going by.

Generally speaking, when there is a lecture that can be said on any topic of *Avodah*, people come to hear it. However, not of all of them have to come to hear a lecture. Some people need to only come to a lecture sometimes if they are to grow from it and internalize the words very strongly. Others need to come more often to hear something. But in either situation, there should never be a break in between the lectures – there should never be a halt to a person's growth. The inner point of what the lecture conveyed must never be lost in the interim until the next time there is a lecture.

Our words here are arranged in a way that whoever wants to enter must live there internally and breathe it. One who feels that these words apply to him should know that he must go through an overhaul on his whole structure of life, and that it is a constant process of clarification.

There is a well-known expression that was said by R' Boruch Ber Levovitz *zt"l*, when he was sitting by a speech one time and he heard someone lecture that "Torah is air that we breathe." R' Boruch Ber trembled when he heard this; he got up and exclaimed, "Torah is not the air we breathe; it is life itself!" Air is still an outer entity when compared to the Torah's worth to us.

When we understand the internal aspect of Torah, that "All your commandments are faith", and that connection to Hashem is the essence of life, for "Torah brings one to be cognizant", we can grasp everything as a way of building our life, and not just merely as an *Avodah* that we work on. *Avodas Hashem* is really shaping our structure of life.

If these matters are understood well, and they are clear, they must cause a change in a person's priorities as well. It is not just another step in a process. It is the thought that accompanies one when he puts on Tefillin, when he wears a Tallis, or when he learns Torah. Torah is intertwined with being connected to Hashem, and so is wearing Tefillin! Just as we cannot stop learning Torah or ever stop putting on Tefillin, so can't we ever stop trying to be connected to Hashem, for it is the purpose of all our Torah and prayer.

Therefore, everyone must clarify for himself what exactly he is looking for. One must clarify this through his ability of inner recognition, as well as with praying and crying to Hashem that he should clarify his soul. A person has to know exactly what he is looking for in this life.

One who is looking for self-awakening needs to receive self-awakening from time to time. One who is looking for inner, subtle matters must receive them in a way in which subtle points are clarified. But if someone mixes up the two – self-awakening, with clarifying subtle points – he will never be successful, as Rav Dessler *zt"l* explained. This is because one who is looking for "self-awakening" and instead hears internal matters will just use them to awaken himself, but he will not accept them in the proper way. The same is for one who is looking for internal matters and

hears it as self-awakening; he is bringing it down from a level of internal matters to the level of what he is looking for, which is a mere level of self-awakening.

We must try to be clear from which point our words stem from, and to where we want to be brought. One who accepts these words and is searching for these words from within himself must understand that it is or job to enter the inner part of the matter – from beginning to end. Anyone who doesn't must look for the source in the way he is searching.

But one who has relevance to the internal points of these matters knows that this is the only way of life. It is not a bonus; it is life itself. It obligates one to enter into that world.

Anyone who sees great people can see that they are deeply absorbed in their thoughts. This doesn't mean that they are self-absorbed; it means that they are delving deeply into matters of Torah, *Avodah* or connection to Hashem. They are there – it is their life. They have constant thought about the most subtle points of the inner mission of mankind.

Therefore, all these words need to be utterly clear. When one realizes from where we are coming from with these words, with Hashem's help, he will be given a way how to enter the inner world of *Avodas Hashem*.

02 | *The Purpose of Everything – Searching for Hashem*

Searching for the “Right Way”

Firstly, let us review a basic fundamental which we have already explained in previous volumes.

It is written (Koheles 7:29), “G-d made man upright, but man searches for many motives.” What are these “many motives” that people have?

Really, everyone knows that he has a true desire to be close to Hashem. We need to figure out what exactly is stopping each of us from actualizing this desire.

The truth is that all of us have “many motives” (cheshbonos rabim). It is the general idea of looking for things other than being upright, to look for things that for our own selfish reasons.

Simply speaking, some people are searching to have better character traits, some want to know the Torah in its entirety, and some are trying to attain *Ruach* HaKodesh (the holy spirit). Each according to his own level is searching for something else.

However, each person is being opposed by some force – “There is no righteous person who only does good and never sins.” Everyone has times of growth and times of descent; times of light as well as times of less light in their life. Dealing with these situations is not simple, and many times a person does not know how to utilize his soul in these situations; generally, a person’s aspirations remain in their potential state and do not become actualized.

So we need to clarify here what point exactly is holding us back from what we are seeking. Is it because we seeking something that isn’t good, or is it that the way we are trying to get there isn’t good?

It’s unfeasible to say that the goal we are seeking isn’t good. We all need good character traits, and Torah is our life – without a shadow of a doubt. These are all necessary. The goal we have is good, so the problem must lie in the way we are seeking it.

But this is also difficult to understand. We learned many *seforim* and try to do everything we see in them, and they are obviously proper instructions. So the problem can’t either be with the ways we are taught to attain what we are seeking.

So a person realizes this and he says to himself, “I must be really lazy”, or “I must have committed a lot of sins. Maybe I’m not successful in serving Hashem because of my sins I committed when I was a child, or in a previous life.”

However, “He fashioned light and created darkness.” Hashem is constantly renewing creation. Just as He created man on the first day, so is He creating man every second, so to speak. If a person thinks that what he did previously should prevent him from getting close to Hashem, then he doesn’t believe in how “He renews constantly in His goodness the act of creation.”

If a person would sincerely believe that Hashem is renewing all of creation every moment, he would also believe that “Hashem made man upright”, and nothing would hold him back. Unfortunately, a person’s soul thinks that the past mistakes are still here, holding him back.

We can find contradictions in life. For example, we know that we need atonement for our sins – either through repentance, or Yom Kippur. Doesn’t this contradict the fact that we can’t change?

The truth is that there are many contradictions. We find contradictions all the time – in *Gemara*, in *Tosafos*. But we must know that although we find contradictions, the point of the matter still remains. “He renews constantly in His goodness the act of creation” – this is a basic, fundamental point. A person needs to repent for past sins, so it is also true that he does have some connection to the past.

But although this is true, still, “He renews constantly every day...” Hashem is renewing us every second! There are apparently many layers holding one back from this truth. We need to clarify how to reveal our purpose – to become always close to Hashem – and to use the light of this understanding to penetrate the layers that holds us back.

Our Purpose Is Attachment to Hashem; Anything Else Are Mere Tools

When a person learns a *sefer* and he knows what it says in the *sefer*, he thinks that he can immediately work on what he sees. But this is a mistake. He will never be successful this way. Why?

There is a fact that serves as a basis to build everything on. The very first thing that a person must clarify before he begins to do anything is: to be clear what he is searching for. Are you searching to better your character traits (*middos*), your learning, or your *mitzvos*? These are all good things, but something else has to be behind all of this. There is more to life than perfecting our *middos*, our learning, and our *mitzvos*!

Let’s say a person wants good *middos* – as a goal for itself. “I want to have good *middos*.” He certainly has a good kind of desire, but if he wants good *middos* just for the sake of having good *middos*, and not as a means for a greater goal, then he isn’t thinking correctly.

The truth is that there is nothing a person should be searching for except for Hashem!

When we learn *Mussar*, we receive much advice on how to fix all our character traits, and they are all proper words. But the point of all of it is to take away factors which hold us back from Hashem.

For example, since a person’s goal should become close to Hashem, he must understand that this is the point of the statement of *Chazal*, “Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful.” If he doesn’t act merciful, then he isn’t close to Hashem. The search for good character traits is only as a means to remove the barriers holding us back from being close to Hashem. There is no such thing as searching for anything else for its sake alone, without the goal of using it to become closer to Hashem.

We will give another example. Many people aspire to reach *Gan Eden* one day. Let’s think what this really means to a person. The Sages tell us that this world is like a great entranceway to the palace – and that palace is *Gan Eden*. Let’s think about this.

How many years will we be in *Gan Eden*? We're towards the end of a 6,000 year period on this physical world, and at its end we will experience the coming of *Moshiach*, the Resurrection of the Dead, and then all the souls will descend onto this world. We believe *Moshiach* can come even today; and we are told that the Resurrection will take place 40 years after *Moshiach's* arrival.

If we make a calculation, we can see that there isn't much time to be spent in *Gan Eden*. We don't know if there will be more time spent on this world or more time to bask in the pleasure of *Gan Eden*. How much is the maximum time to be spent in *Gan Eden*? At most – 235 years. What will be after that? There will be a period until year 7000, and then another period until year 8000, as the Ramchal writes in *Daas Tevunos*.

And then what? What will be after that time period?

It is clear, then, that *Gan Eden* isn't our purpose. Although we aspire to merit *Gan Eden*, we do not live for *Gan Eden*.

Anytime a person is searching for something, he must clarify: What will be after I find that? I want *mitzvos*; good. What will be after I do *mitzvos*? I want *Gan Eden*; What will be after I'm in *Gan Eden*? I want to reach perfection. And what will that give me...?

Whatever point we are searching for, we must know what comes next. If a person is only doing everything on this world for ulterior motives – he wants reward in the next world – there's not much to talk about such a person; all he has to do is give up on some of this world's pleasures so he can enjoy the next world's pleasures.

But if a person seeks the truth, he needs to know what will be at the end. For example, if a person learns Torah, he needs to know: "To where is the Torah bringing me to? If I want to know the Torah – what will that give me? If I would be given all of that knowledge – what's after that? Is it Hashem's will that I should just keep knowing more and more – or is there something more behind all of this? Is there more to doing *mitzvos* other than just carrying them out with every stringency?"

Our words are clear and they are not new. They are stated clearly in the writings of the Ramchal, the Maharal, and in works of Chassidus: the purpose of everything is for the soul to become attached to the Creator!

If the goal isn't clear to a person, he can have all kinds of aspirations – "I need to correct my anger", "I need to become humble", "I need to have a good eye and a good heart on others"; etc. Of course these are all true aspirations we need to have, and they are all stated in the Sages, but we need to know where all of this is bringing us to.

If the exact goal is clear to us, and we understand that developing our character traits is merely a tool to connect to Hashem, the Torah is a tool to connect to Hashem, humility is a tool to connect to Hashem, etc. – only then can we have a proper outlook on life.

A Person's Nature Is To Be Far from Being Attached to Hashem

Every person, upon hearing anything, is actually far in his nature from the words he is hearing. The nature of a person contradicts becoming attached to Hashem. The “I” in a person – his self-absorption, his self-worry and self-centeredness – is the opposite of a total attachment to Hashem.

The knowledge of our goal – d’veykus, attachment to Hashem – is not a mere fact. It is an inner understanding that one is not on this world for himself.

Regarding the Redemption, it is written (Yeshayahu 48:11), “I will do it for Myself”. This is not happenstance. The Redemption will be a revelation that all of the 6,000 years of man were only for Hashem! Meaning, a person is searching for Hashem using the tools that Hashem gives us; the tools are Torah and *mitzvos*. Besides this purpose, our learning and *mitzvos* have no other purpose on this world or in the next world. The tools on this world and the next world can be different, but the purpose is always the same: we need to become close to Hashem.

It follows, then, that if something is lacking in the soul of a person – and it holds a person back from attaining perfection – it is essentially the fact that he isn’t attached to Hashem. Any deficiencies present in us (laziness, sins, etc.) are all results of not being attached to Hashem.

Hashem is perfect, while a created being is lacking. When a person attaches himself to Hashem, he won’t be lacking, because he is interconnected with Hashem, who is perfect. Any deficiency in us is thus essentially something that holds us back from attachment to Him, and it really comes from not being attached to Him.

“The End of the Actions Is Originally Planned in the Thoughts”

We are taught by our early Sages, “The end of the action is originally planned in the thoughts” (sof maaseh b’machshavah techilah). The goal, which is “the end”, is stated in the words of the Mesillas Yesharim, that “True perfection is attachment to Hashem.” This is the “end of the actions.”

A person might say that he knows what the purpose of life is, but “Now I am just doing things as a means to get there, and with Hashem’s help, I’ll eventually get to the purpose, when I do a lot of such actions.”

But this is mistaken, because we have to know that “sof maaseh b’machsavah techilah”. A person’s first thought must be: “What am I looking for? For what reason am I learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*? Because Hashem commanded me to. What is Hashem’s will in all this? How will Torah and *mitzvos* work for me?” It will work for you in that it will get you to realize that we are only looking for one thing: Hashem!

The Zohar states that “Hashem and the Torah are one.” The meaning of this is that the power found in the Torah is the same power that brings one to realize that he must only search for Hashem and nothing else.

This is the essence of life: “Hashem was, He is, and He will always be.” He existed before creation, he exists after creation, and He is with creation right now. Our entire job on this world is to search only for Hashem.

A person sees that there are many views on how to serve Hashem. All these views are correct, but they cause a person to scatter his soul. There is no “view” that says that one doesn’t have to search for Hashem. There are many ways to get to Hashem, but the point of where all these ways leads to is always the same: Hashem.

This fact, although it is already written, becomes forgotten from our hearts because of life's challenges. Even if someone knows it as a fact, it doesn't necessarily become the way he perceives what life is about. A person thinks that "Torah is the main thing" or "Mitzvos are the main thing", but he doesn't think that the main thing is the goal itself. Of course the Torah is the main thing, (as the Sages say that Torah is more important than all the *mitzvos*) but what the Sages meant is that the Torah is the main tool to get to one's goal. The Torah is called a *bris*, a "covenant"; a covenant is meant to connect something to another. The covenant itself is a tool for a greater means – it can bring two things together to reach the goal.

The main point of everything has to be clear. A person has to know clearly why he is on this world. This cannot be absorbed in a mere day or two. It can take many months to fully absorb this detail. If it was a fact that any baby in his crib can know, we would be able to just tell him over and over, and every baby would grow up with this simple fact, and it would be basic to everyone. But, as much as this fact is known and in writing, it is Hashem's will that we have free will to decide to live by it, and so this fact is hidden and forgotten from our hearts, because people are obviously choosing to ignore it. Therefore, our *Avodah* is not to start correcting ourselves or to start doing more good deeds. That is definitely a step of our *Avodah*, but the root of the matter that we need to work on first is to be clear of why we are living. Ask yourself: Are we living to do *mitzvos*? What is the purpose of that? Is it to get us to learn more Torah? What comes from that? *Gan Eden*? Is *Gan Eden* the purpose?

The facts are clear – no doubt. Our purpose is to become close to Hashem and be attached to Him. We need to go with this thought for many months.

“Know Him In All Your Ways”

It is written (Mishlei 3:6), “Know Him in all your ways.” This rule has no exceptions. “Know Him” comes from an expression of connection to the Creator. It should be our outlook on life.

Before we begin to speak of this *Avodah* of “Know Him in all your ways” – which is the highest form of *Avodah*, firstly we need to know: For what purpose did Hashem make all creations? The answer is simple: So that they can all be used to connect to Hashem.

Without a shadow of a doubt, it is difficult at first to form an attachment to Hashem; a person is naturally drawn toward materialism. But we need to at first acknowledge the facts. Hashem gave us the ability to eat bread in the morning, or to eat a meal on Shabbos – all in order for us to get closer to Him. Every action we do is really meant to help us get closer to Him.

As an example: a person is sitting in his house. He sees a table, or a chair, or a candelabra, or a window. He can ask himself on each item: Why did Hashem make this? Why did He make this window? The answer is always: in order to get closer to Hashem.

How do we become close to Hashem through a window? That's another question. But the first step is to know that “Everything is created in My Name to honor”. Everything means everything! Know Him in “all your ways” –

simply put! If I am sitting on a chair, I should know that Hashem created this chair for me to somehow use it as tool to get close to Him.

The way to get close to Hashem is through Torah and *mitzvos*. The Sages say (Berachos 6b), “The entire world was not created except for this commandment.” A person has to be clear that everything that he has is entirely for one reason – to get close with Hashem.

“Heavenly Assistance” is to Be Helped Directly from Hashem

This way of thinking can get one to realize his purpose. In order to reach the purpose, he needs to have inner strength in his soul to do this. From where can a person draw strength to get close to Hashem?

The Sages say that there is such a thing as “Siyata D’Shmaya” – Heavenly assistance. What is the inner meaning of “Heavenly assistance”?

It is written (Tehillim 51:12), “A pure heart Hashem created in me, and a proper spirit He renewed in my insides.” Heavenly assistance is not found outside of anyone. Hashem is present in everyone, and when He is revealed in our hearts – that is Heavenly assistance. “A pure heart Hashem created in me” is the same as saying “The rock of my heart and portion is Hashem”.

That is the meaning of a “pure heart.” What does a “pure heart” actually mean? It means “As for me, closeness to Hashem is good.” A pure heart means that one is searching for only good, and “Anything else that people regard as good is nothing but foolishness”, as stated in Mesillas Yesharim. A pure heart is the same heart that is searching for the ultimate good – Hashem. Who awakens this within us? Hashem – when He is revealed in each of our hearts. “I will dwell among you.”

If a person doesn’t awaken within himself the knowledge that Hashem is found in him, how will he get Heavenly assistance?

Simply put, Heavenly assistance is a spirit that comes from Above and clothes itself on a person, pushing him to serve Hashem. This is a true definition, but there is more that lies in it: the one who is pushing a person to serve Hashem is Hashem Himself. He does everything.

Heavenly assistance is, on a more clear note – Hashem’s push. If a person isn’t thinking about Hashem, then Hashem hasn’t become revealed in his heart; from where will his Heavenly assistance come from...?

What is the reason that we have so many failures, difficulties, and depressions? It’s simple: Hashem is missing from our life! If Hashem would become more revealed in one’s heart, He would be doing everything. Although Hashem left a small amount of room for a person to have free will, it is still clear that one can’t attain anything without Heavenly assistance. Everyone knows this.

Heavenly assistance doesn’t just mean “help” from Heaven, in the simple sense. Who is in “Heaven” anyway? Is “Heaven” helping a person?! Hashem is the one who is helping. He can come in the guise of an angel or anything He wishes, but it is all a garment in which Hashem disguises Himself to assist a person.

It follows then that the more a person reveals Hashem in his thoughts, the more he is applicable to “A pure heart Hashem created in me.” Hashem is then found in his heart, and He can help him get close to Him. But if a person merely knows about the goal of getting close to Hashem, yet he doesn’t actually involve himself in it – he can never reach Heavenly assistance. He is not thinking about Hashem, so from where will his energy to succeed come from?

“If not for Hashem’s help, we would not be able to overcome”

The truth is that these words are really simple. Every one of us knows the words of the Sages (Berachos 35b): “Many tried to do like R’ Shimon Bar Yochai and did not succeed.” Why didn’t they succeed?

R’ Shimon Bar Yochai himself reveals the secret of this matter. Before he died, he testified about himself that in all his days, he was connected to Hashem.

Many tried to do like him and didn’t succeed. Why? Because there is no one who has the strength on his own to climb on that same ladder of growth the way that R’ Shimon did; only if Hashem wants someone to succeed will he do it. If Hashem is doing it, He can do anything. He can turn someone into the greatest person in the generation in one second – if He wants; nothing is stopping Him. He can do anything.

So what is a person’s *Avodah*? To bring Hashem into the heart. “Open for me an opening the size of a needle, and I will open for you an opening like an entrance.” What is an “opening the size of a needle”? What does a person have to “open”?

The true opening that a person must open in his heart is to bring Hashem into his heart! The Sages add onto the statement, “And I will open it for them.” This doesn’t mean that Hashem is sitting in the heavens and opening our heart. It is like an “opening the size of a needle” – in other words, when we bring Hashem into our heart, so to speak, only then will Hashem Himself create an opening. By us bringing Him in, that itself is the key to open our heart to Him. Once a person brings Hashem into his heart, Hashem can begin to work with him there, in his soul.

Without this, there is no way to succeed. Nothing else will work if Hashem is not found in one’s heart. We know that “Every day the evil inclination gets stronger, and if not for Hashem’s help, we would not be able to overcome him.” We wouldn’t have the ability to deal with the evil inclination at all without Hashem. The Sages revealed it to us: Hashem helps a person!

But if a person just thinks that Hashem is only found in Heaven and not on this world, we can compare this to some raindrops that a person catches in his hand. How much drops can he catch already? Maybe a few. But when a person believes wholeheartedly that “The rock of my heart and my portion is G-d”, that Hashem is found in his heart, and he thinks all day: “What is my purpose? The purpose is Hashem! Where is Hashem found? Not on the outside, not in heaven – but inside the heart!”

If a person does this, Hashem will definitely help him. This is not some new concept; it says so in the *possuk*.

A person has to form the basis of his *Avodas Hashem* by first bringing Hashem into his heart, believing that the purpose is to be close to Hashem; and then he must believe that Hashem is found right next to him.

Even if he doesn't feel it, that doesn't change the fact of it. If a blind person comes and announces that he doesn't see a table in the room, that doesn't mean there is no table. He just doesn't see it.

Hashem is found everywhere, as the Sages say, "There is no place that is empty from Him." Without a shadow of a doubt, He is found in the hearts of everyone.

How Do We Reveal Hashem In Us?

How do we reveal Hashem within us?

If we believe in the words of the Sages, we believe that Hashem can be found near us. This also tells us that it is in our power to reveal Him in our hearts; when Hashem is revealed in us, then He helps us. If a person just tries to work on himself and that's it, he will be unsuccessful. The Sages warned us that it's impossible to succeed without Hashem: "If not for Hashem's help, we would not be able to overcome." A person can't do anything by himself.

This point is clear. Hashem made man naturally helpless. Man only has some weak resources, and they can't help him withstand powerful opposing forces. The only force that can help a person is Hashem, and if Hashem is in one's heart, then "Hashem will fight for you, and they will be silenced."

Does This Contradict Free Will?

What about free will? Doesn't this contradict free will?

Free will means to bring Hashem into your heart! "Make for me an opening the size of a needle". A person doesn't have free will if he will be successful in a fight; Hashem isn't asking something that can't be done. So what is Hashem asking of a person? That he should allow for Him to enter the heart. This is done by first reflecting on the purpose of life. Then a person must begin to believe that Hashem is next to him in his very heart, and that He helps him from within – not as some outside assistance.

Anyone who lives by these words finds them very simple. They are not new ideas; they are necessary for existence. So what mistake do people make? The mistake is that people have grown accustomed to living alone, thinking alone, working alone, and fighting alone.

Sometimes a person goes to a *tzaddik* to receive guidance. He thinks that the *tzaddik* is bestowing on him all kinds of power. Instead of going to Hashem and receiving power directly, he goes to a *tzaddik*...

But who is giving the *tzaddik* any success? Any power comes from Hashem, and no one else. Of course, there is such a concept that a person can receive help from a *tzaddik*, but this is a very subtle point. The main part of our soul, however, needs power from Hashem alone!

Hashem – The "Place" of the world

If not for our belief that it is Hashem's will that the world should be a place of confusion (the world is called *olam*, which is rooted in the word *he'elam*, which means confusion), we wouldn't be able to understand how such a simple thing can be overlooked.

Many people are searching for something – some are a little successful and some are less – but they aren't being helped.

Let's say we hear an inspiring lecture every week, and then we become inspired and feel like we want to work on ourselves. Then Yom Tov comes and goes. What do people do after Sukkos ends? They wait for Chanukah.

If so, people are living only for Yom Tov! This is not a way to live. It is not either a way to live from our inspiring lectures that we hear from time to time. People who only search for a self-awakening will end up getting awakened, but they aren't building themselves up from it.

A structure can only be built in one way: Hashem is called "the place of the world." If a person doesn't have a foundation, can he build on it a structure? Hashem is the foundation that we are built on. We can't build anything unless Hashem is at our foundation.

If a person hears some inspiration, he wants to inspire himself from it; but where is Hashem in the picture? Without Hashem in the picture, there is no structure here, and he's just being pushed by wind. Sometimes an inspiring individual comes to a community and causes a self-awakening in a certain area in our life which we need improvement in. It's better than nothing, but in order to build something from it, we need to reveal Hashem in life.

When a contractor wants to build a house, he first purchases the real estate to build on. What is our "real estate" that we need to build on? *Chazal* say that Hashem is called "The place of the world." If Hashem is not our "real estate", nothing will happen.

This needs to be clear, without a shadow of a doubt. These words are stated clearly in the Sages. The beginning of anything first needs a place to be built in, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes. It is to bring Hashem into one's life.

Hashem Is Life Itself

What does it mean to bring Hashem into one's life?

Torah is one of the 613 *mitzvos*, and all the *mitzvos* are one. There is a sharp expression that was said by the Admor of Rizhin *zt"l* that even if he would be placed in a forest for 100 years, he still would not ever forget Hashem.

We don't come near that level, but we can see how our holy leaders lived life. Their entire life was about Hashem!

We usually think of Hashem's existence as a kind of lofty "*Avodah*" of trying to get close to Him. (Indeed, if only we could be even on this level.) But even when we finally realize Hashem's existence, He is usually to us like a mere source of assistance or a supreme being that we serve, and nothing more. It's all true, but it's not everything.

Hashem is not only a source of *Siyata D'Shmaya*\Heavenly assistance to us, and He is not just the source of our prayers. Hashem is the very essence of life itself! Although we see other things in life, there are always two views on

how to view those things: either it is a tool to reveal Hashem in our lives, or it is as the Mesillas Yesharim writes, that it can further us away from Him. There is only true existence: Hashem!

What is “life”? “And you will cling to Hashem your living G-d, all of you, on this day.” The essence of life is d’veykus\clinging to Hashem. It’s not like we are used to thinking on simple terms, that a living being attaches himself to Hashem; it is more than that. Life itself is Hashem, and a person lives the Creator. Hashem is called “He who lives forever”, and life itself for any created being is this very point: that Hashem can be found and revealed inside a person. “Life” is essentially Hashem!

“Life” means eternal life. A created being dies eventually; he doesn’t remain forever, as a result of Adam’s sin. Even if Adam wouldn’t have sinned, creations would have still ceased to exist eventually at some point. The only one who truly lives forever is the Creator of the world. “On every breath that a person breathes, he should praise the Creator; what is the reason? “Every soul will praise Hashem” – this means every “breath” will praise Hashem.” (See Midrash Rabbah: Beraishis 14, 9).

What is the hidden depth of these words? This is not just an external praise. Hashem is giving Himself. The Torah is called “the Torah of life”, which means that Hashem and His wisdom are one, so to speak; this is why life itself is Hashem. One needs to understand that in every breath that he breathes, he is breathing Hashem, so to speak!

Although a person thinks he breathes air, it’s a mistake that everyone makes. The truth is that “There is nothing besides for Hashem”; Hashem is the true essence of everything, but He has many garments that He cloaks Himself in. The Zohar says that all of creation is actually a garment of Hashem. The *sefer* Tanya says that if a person extends his hand to greet a king, even if he’s only touching the king’s robe he’s essentially extending his hand to the King of the world.

One must understand that any point that he delves into is essentially delving into Hashem’s existence. Our physical senses see, think and feel differently. But the truth is that everything is, in essence, Hashem. So, what is our *Avodah*? Our *Avodah* is only to stop being a fool who doesn’t recognize the facts. We are used to thinking simply that our *Avodah* is to “become close to Hashem”. Although that’s absolutely true, the depth of this matter is that this is a clear fact. The fact is Hashem; that He is found here and everywhere.

It is written (Shemos 20, 20): “In every place that My Name is mentioned, I will come to you and bless you.” The blessing is a result, but what comes before that? “I will come to you.” It’s a fact – Hashem is found near every person. Even though people feel physical things and they don’t feel Hashem, it’s really all a fantasy that comes from not feeling the truth that He is the essence of everything.

Serving Hashem - Revealing the Essence of Life

We are saying in these words that “*Avodas Hashem*” means essentially to clarify for oneself that the essence of life itself is Hashem. Hashem is found near you. It’s not that we have to come close to Him. Hashem is already here! One needs to only recognize, with a palpable feeling, that Hashem is found near me and inside me.

There is no shadow of a doubt that one has to purify himself, learn Torah and do *mitzvos*. But what should be the direct result of all this? To truly recognize the truth – that Hashem is found everywhere; He is found in everyone’s heart. Life is sustained by our heart, and therefore, our heart’s very power to keep us alive is Hashem Himself.

We’re not coming to say anything new here. We are coming to reveal the facts, and that is that there is a Hashem, who is nearby us. Our entire *Avodah* is merely to feel Him with a palpable sense.

It is true that a person’s sins and bad character traits get in the way of feeling Hashem’s existence. But what is our *Avodah*? That each person should reveal how Hashem is found in “my” heart. It is that He is found in every creation, without exception.

A non-Jew can’t feel this, but a Jew can. It is written, “And I will dwell among them.” This is referring only to the Jewish people, and not the non-Jews.

(However, Hashem is still found in everything, and therefore in the future, all of creation will feel Hashem, including non-Jews.)

Avodas Hashem means to reveal the facts; it is not to reveal new feelings we have or to have self-awakening. When a person starts out, he needs to remove himself from his earthly element, so that he can start with the true kinds of feelings.¹ But when one starts serving Hashem, it’s not enough to remain on a level of a self-awakening. He needs to search for the facts, the fact that Hashem is the essence of existence, and that it is one’s job to feel Him in his heart.

This is a person’s entire *Avodah*. Anything else written in the *seforim* is merely a tool to remove the obstacles that are covering the soul from feeling Hashem.

If a person would truly believe this, he would feel Hashem immediately. The moment a person believes that he has become a renewed creation, he will not have any obstacles anymore. A renewed creation doesn’t have bad character traits, as it is written, “G-d made a man upright.” The Individual who gives a person this faith is Hashem!

It is written (Beraishis 15:6), “And he trusted in Hashem, and he reckoned it to Him as righteousness.”

Righteousness here means that Hashem gave *Avraham* the gift of *emunah* – faith. If a person doesn’t live with the realization that Hashem is the essence of all existence, he won’t be able to feel that he has become renewed, because he is absorbed in himself and only feels himself. He remembers all his failures and difficulties, and sees his bad character traits. How can he possibly decide that he has changed and become renewed?

The truth is, it’s impossible! The only one who can make a person feel that he has changed is Hashem. It follows that the only *Avodah* of a person is to enter Hashem into his heart, and when he does so it is written of him, “He made, makes and will make all actions.” Our job of free will is to enter Hashem into our heart, and to make sure that every moment we are entering Him into us and not making Him leave, G-d forbid.

Practical Avodah Takes A Lot of Thought

¹ See *Getting To Know Your Soul* for more about the “element of earth”.

What is our actual *Avodah* here?

Before anything, we need to reflect largely on the purpose of life. This reflection needs a lot of time; in fact, it needs a very long amount of time.

After doing so, one should reflect that it is not the person that is coming close to Hashem, but that Hashem is found near Him in his heart. He should strengthen his clear faith that Hashem is found near him, by thinking constantly about Hashem – each person according to his ability. He should believe that Hashem is found in his heart.

If a person reflects on this for a long amount of time, day after day, month after month, constantly – and he cries and begs Hashem that he should be worthy to feel Him, as the Sage who said, “I am not leaving this place until Hashem fulfills my request,” only then will he truly merit to feel Hashem in his heart, and he will be able to succeed in everything.

During the time that a person doesn't have Hashem revealed in his heart, he won't have the strength to deal with problems. What is the source of giving up? People usually think that giving up means that one has a low recognition of Hashem. The truth is that if one thinks that he can be successful on his own, he's deluded. But one who falls into despair actually is the one who starts to realize the facts, so despair can actually be a catalyst for one to recognize how much he needs Hashem. He realizes that he can't do it alone, and he needs Hashem's help. If a person has fallen into despair, it is his job after realizing this to think, “What does Hashem want from me?”

We can talk and talk forever, but there is only true point in life: the essence of everything is Hashem, and He is found in the heart of every person, and our entire *Avodah* is to reveal Him from within; it's just that there are many ways to do so.

Hashem should merit all of us, all the Jews and all of creation, that all of us should uncover the fact that Hashem is behind everything, and every person's job is only to search for Him and reveal Him from within us.

03 | Nullifying Your “I”

Many Ways, One Goal

The essence of life is Hashem, who is found in our heart. Our mission is to reveal Him from within ourselves. There are many paths to get there.

Generally speaking, the *mitzvos* are the ways to get to Him. There are 613 Biblical commandments and 7 Rabbinical commandments; if so, there are altogether 620 ways to reveal Hashem.

Each of our forefathers had their own way as well. Avraham *Avinu* figured out the whole Torah by himself (*Beraishis Rabbah 95:3*), and that was one way. The Torah which we received at Har Sinai is another way. What both ways have in common, though, is that they are both about how to reveal Hashem.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that the giving of the Torah didn't add anything new to our goal; the goal always remains the same – revealing Hashem. What the giving of the Torah revealed was how to get to Hashem, but the inner point, which is to reveal Hashem, never changes. It was unaffected by the sin of Adam.

The constant search always remains: to search for Hashem. The ways to get there are many; before the sin of Adam, there was a certain away to get there, and after the sin, the plan changed. Avraham *Avinu*'s path was *chesed*, Yitzchok *Avinu*'s path was *gevurah*, and Yaakov, (who is *emes*) is the synthesis of these two; Moshe *Rabbeinu* is the inner dimension of Yaakov's path. But the goal of getting to Hashem always remained the same.

The many ways to serve Hashem are only “garments” of the inner point they cover over, which is to search for Hashem. “Just like all faces are different, all *de'os* (opinions) are different” – there are many paths to “know” Hashem, but the common denominator between all the paths is that a person has to become close to Hashem. How we look for Hashem differs with each person, but What we look for is always the same.

This should be very clear. When we learn sefarim hakedoshim, especially the works of Chassidus, a person usually attempts to find himself in it. A person thinks, “My soul is rooted in Avraham *Avinu*, who is *chesed*”, or “My soul is rooted in Yitzchok *Avinu*, who is *gevurah*.” This is dangerous because people try to base their entire life on all kinds of speculations.

We must all know, however, that we have only one goal – to become close to Hashem. Where to start is a different issue, but what we search for should always be the same.

The Danger of Thinking About Yourself

The words here are deep matters about how to work with our soul.

Usually, when a person is more involved with *Avodas Hashem* (serving the Creator) and he seeks to improve, what happens is that he begins to become very self-absorbed. He thinks about himself all the time – about his spiritual situation, and he is totally absorbed in himself.

Now, if someone isn't an internal kind of person, he doesn't have this problem, and he just goes about his way with life. He also has desires for glory, but he's not immersed in himself, and he's just leading a superficial kind of life. He looks for outer kinds of desires, and he isn't connected to himself to begin with. He experiences jealousy, desire, and a longing for honor, but these are just desires to enter outside one self. A superficial person doesn't have the kind of problem we are describing.

Only an internal kind of person, who really seeks to serve Hashem better, is faced with the danger of becoming too self-absorbed. An internal kind of person really wants to know his soul, and he is critical of himself, as he is involved regularly with making a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul accounting); each to his own. He wants to know who he is.

On one hand, this is wonderful; *Chazal* say, "Know the G-d of your father and serve Him", and it is written, "From my flesh I see G-d." A person indeed must know himself well and what his soul is, so he can figure out in which way he should serve Hashem. Without this internal self-examination, a person just lives a superficial life.

On the other hand, when a person enters himself and he begins to clarify who he is, he wants to know very much what his "I" is, and this is apt to make him become very self-absorbed, and it can have disastrous results. It can either make person become very broken and sad, and if this doesn't happen, the opposite will happen - it can make him become haughty and arrogant, because he thinks he knows himself so well. Either of these is not the proper way we want to achieve.

When a person is too absorbed in himself, it can be said of him in a subtle sense the statement of *Chazal*, "I and him cannot dwell under one roof." *Chazal* say this of a *baal gaavah* (haughty person), but the root of haughtiness is when a person is absorbed in himself, and thus it can be said that Hashem doesn't want to be with someone who is self-absorbed.

When a person is truly humble, he doesn't that he thinks he's a nothing. True humility is that a person doesn't think about himself at all – he's not thinking about "I." He thinks only about Hashem, the Torah, and how to help other Jews – both physically and spiritually – and he takes his mind off himself.

When a person thinks very much about himself all the time, this itself prevents him from reaching the goal, which is to be close to Hashem.

"Ani" Vs. "Ayin"

We said in the beginning of this chapter that there are many methods on how to begin serving Hashem, but the end goal of all these ways is always the same: Hashem. What we really mean is as follows.

A person's "I" (*ani*) is to be used as a tool to get to the purpose, which is to reach Hashem. Our mission is not solely for the sake of building our "I". Just to be in it for the sake of developing our self is like how "the building of children demolishes" (*Nedarim 40a*). A person only reaches perfection when he is totally divested of his ego; instead

of ani (I), he has reached ayin, “nothingness.” Perfection is not when you build your “I” – it when you leave your “I”.

Perfection is not about building your “I”; it is rather about negating your “I”. This does not imply that one should feel low about himself; it is instead that a person should realize that he doesn’t live for himself, and that he is not meant to think and worry about himself.

This is the ideal situation which we are trying to achieve. The more a person enters into *Avodas Hashem*, if he becomes more self-absorbed in the process, although he gains in that he has left the materialism of this world, he has harmed himself in a way that is very hard to come out of.

If a person isn’t aware of this as he starts out in his *Avodas Hashem*, he will suffer from his self-absorption until the end of his life. This is like what is written, “Until elderliness and old age, I will endure.” His “I” will prevent him from any true progress, and his whole life he will only be interested in how his “I” come into the picture.

The recognition we are supposed to have, though, is that when we want to search for closeness to Hashem, we should know that this is the common goal of whatever we are doing. The more a person purifies his “I” and leaves his ego, the more he will leave with Hashem in his life, and come to the recognition of *Ain Od Milvado*, “There is nothing besides Hashem”.

“Your Face, Hashem, I seek”

We are stating this point at the beginning specifically, and not at the end. Simply speaking, our mission is to first build up our self and then nullify it. But it is really more than that. Instead of entering our “I” and then leaving it, it’s better to stay outside of the “I” altogether. This is because we must be clear in what we are searching for: are we just searching to find ourselves, or are we searching to find Hashem?

When a person hears that he has to work on his *middos*, if he has only a superficial perspective, he will likely groan to himself, “Oy, I have so many faults, I am full of so many problems I need to fix.” It is indeed true that no one is perfect, and that we all have areas we need to work on. If you ask a person why he wants to work on himself, he might respond, “Because I want to give pleasure to Hashem.” But the truth is that he is only working on himself for the concern of his own well-being. He views “working on himself” in the same way that he has to fix a broken machine. He is aware that “working on yourself” and “getting to know yourself” is part of serving the Creator, and thus he thinks about himself a lot and does all kinds of outer actions to try to improve himself.

This is an erroneous attitude. We need to correct this outlook from the start and clarify what the goal here is, what we are really trying to arrive at. If someone is really searching for *Avodas Hashem*, he must know that it’s not about himself. You don’t need to find yourself, and the only search you need to have is to search for Hashem.

When people want to know, “Who am I? What am I? What is my *shoresh haneshamah* (soul root)?” – people have all kinds of questions like this – it shows that the intention isn’t for the sake of coming to better their *Avodas Hashem*. They are seeking knowledge about themselves, and that is not the true depth of *Avodas Hashem*.

The proper attitude to have about self-knowledge is that knowing about yourself can definitely enhance your *Avodas Hashem*, but to be aware of what we are really searching for – Hashem. It is written, “Your face, Hashem, I seek.” One should not be looking for his “I”, but for Hashem! Our mission is not to build ourselves; it is rather to realize that there is nothing else other than Hashem, and that we search for nothing other than Him.

Forgetting About Your “I” Is Personal Redemption

These words – that *Avodas Hashem* is not about you – can make a great change in your life. It can greatly help you – or it can backfire and make you sad.

If a person accepts these words in the way he should, he will feel like he has become free. When a person is involved in *Avodas Hashem* and he is immersed in himself in the process, upon seeing the words here he will feel like he is leaving Egypt. Many people who are involved in *Avodas Hashem* indeed feel like they are trapped inside their souls, and they want to be free of themselves.

When a person truly realizes the words here, he no longer thinks so much about himself, and he feels free inside.

Of course, a person still has to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul accounting), but if one has succeed in leaving his ego as we have said, he will only have to do it for ten or fifteen minutes a day; the rest of the day, what is he thinking? Either he is free to think about Torah, or about Hashem. The point is that he will no longer be thinking about himself.

This will feel like a personal redemption inside oneself – when you forget about your “I” completely.

The truth is that even if a person would try to understand himself more and more, he would get even more confused the more he enters inward, and he will never succeed in knowing himself. The soul is “a piece of Heaven from above”, and just like we cannot comprehend Hashem, so is it impossible to fully understand our soul.

We are not only referring to the knowledge of secular psychology, which explains the lowest parts of our soul. Even in what our Sages revealed to us about our soul, we still don’t know what our soul is, because our soul is so deep and vast. “Hashem, the Torah and the Jewish people are one.” Our thoughts cannot comprehend Hashem, and the “Torah is vaster than the sea”; so is it impossible to understand our soul. If someone is trying to clarify his soul, he should know that he is dealing with something that he will never fully understand.

Maybe a person will counter: “Just like we try to understand the Torah even though it is so deep and vast, so must we try to understand our soul as much as we can!”

That is true, but we must know one thing. If a person is trying to understand the Torah, and he isn’t looking to find himself in it – he learns Torah *lishmah* – then he is fulfilling the purpose of Creation, which is to connect to the Creator. But if he learns it for personal reasons, like to gain honor, then he doesn’t become close to Hashem through learning the Torah.

The same attitude we must have when trying to learn about our soul. If we are trying to understand our soul in the same way that a person can look at another person – in other words, if we remain outside our ego – then we can enter this field of study. But if a person wants to know his soul simply because he wishes to enter deep into his self

and understand himself – for that sake alone - then this comes from an egotistical desire, and he’s not acting *lishmah*. He will become very self-absorbed, and he will think the whole time that he is gaining and adding onto his knowledge, but he’s really just gathering air. All his work will be based on a faulty basis.

The goal of whatever we do, as we mentioned before and in the last chapter, is always to find Hashem. This is the groundwork for all that we want to build upon. When a person wants to build a structure, he first needs a foundation. Hashem has to be the foundation of anything; the goal must always be about Hashem.

When a person builds all his *Avodas Hashem* based upon his “I” – his main interest is in getting to know himself better – than of him it can be said, “I (Hashem) and him cannot dwell under one roof.”

If these words are understood well, they will make a total overhaul in your life.

Naturally, when a person wants to become close to Hashem, he starts by trying to develop his “I”, but this is an erroneous mindset.

It is written, “And as for me (*v’ani*), closeness to Hashem to me is good.” It’s possible that a person just focuses on the part of the *possuk* that says, “as for me” (*v’ani*), and he’s not focused on the part that says, “closeness to Hashem”!

We do not mean to imply that if a person feels that he has some personal interests (*negios*) that he should disengage from *Avodas Hashem*, and never enter inward into himself. Chas v’shalom! Our intention here is rather to give the proper outlook on how to build our plan. If one feels that he has personal interests in this other than closeness to Hashem, he should daven to Hashem that these interests be removed, so that his motivations in this will be pure.

There is a very big difference between someone who has some *negios* to someone who is engaging in this only due to his *negios*. If a person basically has the right goal, which is to become close to Hashem, even if he has some *negios* as well, then he can daven to Hashem about this; there is actually no person who doesn’t have some *negios*. Even Moshe and Aharon were commanded not to take *shochad* (bribery), and even the greatest *tzaddikim* can be affected by taking a bribe. No one can say he is totally pure from personal interests.

But if someone is only involved in *Avodas Hashem* entirely because he is concerned about self-knowledge, then everything he does will be based on his ego, and when everything stands on his *negios*, his plan will never come to fruition. Not only will it never finish – it never starts!

By contrast, someone who has the right thinking is aware that he also has some *negios*, but he is working to break them, and he knows that he needs Hashem to help him, and he implores Hashem for this. His *Avodas Hashem* will last, because he is truly searching for Hashem, not to find “himself.”

This is the benefit that results from forgetting about your “I.”

“The End of the Action Is First In The Thoughts”

If someone has a strong amount of ego in him, he will not enjoy hearing this. Since he’s only in it for himself, when he hears that *Avodas Hashem* is not about “you”, he is likely to lose all his interest in *Avodas Hashem*. He thinks to himself: “If I’m not getting anything out of this, what’s the point?” It could be that he wants to become a great

person and reach high levels, but it's all a kind of haughtiness (albeit subtle and more spiritual). Such aspirations don't purify a person.

We cannot run away from the truth. In the future redemption, we will see that the world was all created for Hashem's sake, and not for our sake. "On My behalf I created." (*Yeshayahu 48:1*). The redemption will essentially be a personal redemption that will take place in each person's soul. When this point is revealed to each soul, *Moshiach* will then come. This inner point is the understanding that all of the universe was created by Hashem for Himself. We were created for Hashem, not for ourselves. This point will be fully understood in the future – and that will be the redemption.

When a person understands that he was created for Hashem, not for himself, he will be able to search only for Hashem and not for himself. So when all is said and done, every person has to learn to forget about himself, and to stop being concerned for his well-being. Understand that the center of our life should be Hashem, and it's not about you.

This is the goal of all our *Avodas Hashem*: not to arrive at your "I", but to be totally nullified of your "I" and to be integrated with Hashem, which is the state of ayin (nothingness).

If a person can't come to terms with this revelation, then there he will not be helped by any *Avodas Hashem*.

We all have to arrive at this understanding, and eventually, all of us will get there and become integrated with Hashem, divested totally from our ego. The only issue is, will we choose this on our own, or will we be forced to accept this fact by being purified through intense suffering, both in this world and in the next...?

We are not describing a "nice quality" to have, nor are we describing an act of Chassidus (piety). We are describing the very reality of Creation. These words are actually contained in the words of the *Mesillas Yesharim*, in the chapter about Chassidus (piety). But that doesn't make these matters "Chassidus." The *Mesillas Yesharim* already writes at the very beginning of his *sefer* that that we must realize that life is all about becoming close to Hashem. If so, the words here are not some high level that only comes later. It must be worked on even in the very beginning stage of *Avodas Hashem*.

If a person isn't prepared to accept that at the end of all this, he will not receive anything personally, and he thinks that he is doing a favor for Hashem by working on *Avodas Hashem* – then he is working against *Chazal*. He won't succeed.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner wrote in the name of the Vilna *Gaon* that if a person doesn't have any trace of *lishmah* (pure intentions) in his learning, he is prohibited to learn Torah! One is permitted to learn Torah *shelo lishmah*, if his intention is to arrive at *lishmah*. What does *lishmah* entail? It is when a person isn't learning to find himself, but Hashem. Although a person always have some *negios*, *Chazal* state that one should learn *shelo lishmah*, and one is not allowed to excuse himself from learning Torah with the fact that he isn't entirely *lishmah*. But we must know even at the beginning of learning that the purpose of learning is to eventually arrive at *lishmah*, and without this intention from the start, the Vilna *Gaon* writes that it is prohibited to learn Torah.

If a person never figured out that the purpose of learning Torah (and all of *Avodas Hashem*) is to arrive at *lishmah*, then all his learning is based on *shelo lishmah*, and such a person is actually not allowed to learn Torah. This is not

Chassidus; it is the basis of *Avodas Hashem*. A person is allowed to begin with *shelo lishmah* if he aspires for *lishmah*, but as we know, “the end of the actions is first in the thoughts”, and thus *lishmah* has to be our goal from the start.

What should first be in our thoughts? We need to know if the reason that we search for Hashem is because that will give us more gratification, or if we are searching for Hashem to find our His will.

These words aren't new. They are already written by the Vilna *Gaon*, as well as in all the sefarim of Chassidus. They are just written there in much shaper terms than how we have said it here. We must all know that our goal is to arrive at *lishmah* – both in how we serve Him and in learning Torah – and *lishmah* means that one isn't thinking about himself, but about Hashem. This is life itself, this is reality as it is!

It's possible that a person is learning Torah and abstaining from worldly pleasures, but he's still missing the whole point, because he isn't aware of the words here. A person might be learning a lot of Torah, but that doesn't necessarily mean he is looking for Hashem in his life. Maybe he thinks, “One day, I will get there...”

Such a miracle doesn't happen by itself; if you never think about what *lishmah* is, you don't just go from *shelo lishmah* to *lishmah*. Although the sefarim describe the change as a miracle, this miracle never happens if you don't have a plan to get there.

Why Don't People Succeed?

This point is one of the big reasons that people never arrive at the truth, even though they are looking for Hashem in their life. People can work very hard for many years at trying to grow – each to his own – but only few people reach the true connection with Hashem.

Why? People claim it's because of laziness. We cannot say this is incorrect, but there is a more inner reason that holds people back. When a person wants to grow in *Avodas Hashem* but he has never fully clarified what he wants to achieve, then he won't be successful. You have to know what it is exactly that you want to achieve, before you embark on an endeavor.

This Needs A Long Time of Thinking

Maybe a person will say, “Okay, I tried a day or two to clarify what my goal is. Now what do I do, *l'maaseh* (practically speaking)?”

This question shows a lack of understanding what *Avodas Hashem* is.

Avodas Hashem is not a building contract. Although there is a rule that “the heart is pulled after the thoughts”, and we need to do actions to influence our heart and purify it, we must know that this is only part of our job, and it is also not where we must begin with.

The beginning point is that before we start to work on ourselves, we need to know to where we are trying to go.

In order to accept this, if a person is truthful, then he should realize that it can take months even to think about this point. A superficial person will think “What’s the big deal?” when he reads this, and immediately try to start improving *Avodas Hashem*. But if a person is truthful, he can feel that his soul wants the opposite. How many tears a person must cry in order to arrive at even a small percentage of truth, to really want to be in this for Hashem and not for himself!

There is nowhere else to run to. Hashem is here. It is just that we must not become wrapped up in ourselves, and then we will feel Hashem. If you nullify your “I”, you will then feel Hashem every second in your life next to you.

This is an internal self-examination. It is a question of what we are really looking for. Even if a person understands the concept of nullifying his “I”, is he actually prepared to give up his “I” in order to reveal Hashem in himself? Or does he want both – he wants Hashem, but he also wants his ego to remain...?

It’s not that a person has to make a space in his heart for Hashem. That’s not enough. If there are still traces of ego in a person, Hashem cannot enter there, and the soul will not be able to truly feel that there is nothing else besides for Hashem that exists.

If we want to feel Hashem in our self, we have to get rid of our “I”. The more *lishmah* we uncover, the more room we give to Hashem to be revealed in us.

Chazal say that “There is nothing besides for Hashem – even in the space of the world.” There is an empty space in ourselves which doesn’t allow for Hashem to enter into it, and this is our traces of ego. But a person can give even that up for Hashem and allow Him to enter.

The words here require a lot of thought. Without this internal clarification process, it’s not possible to truly serve Hashem. If a person has at least ten percent, or even less, of a desire to give himself up for Hashem, he can then begin to truly serve Hashem.

May Hashem merit all of us to give up our self and give Him space to enter our souls, and through this, we will all merit the revelation of *Ain Od Milvado* – how there is nothing besides for Hashem.

04 | *The True “I” Is Hashem*

Revealing the True “I”

In the beginning of *sefer* Shaarei Kedushah, Rav Chaim Vital writes that a person is defined by his soul, not by his body. He brings proof to this from the words “flesh of man” (Shemos 30:32), which implies that there must be two parts to our self: our flesh/body, and our soul.

What, exactly, is a person? Generally, a person is called “neshamah.”

My “I” is identified with my neshamah, which is a cheilek eloka mimaal, a “piece of Hashem”. Why is the neshamah called “a piece of Hashem”? There are many reasons, and we will explain one of them, which is particularly relevant to our discussion here.

It is written (*Devorim 32: 39*), “For I am who I am, and there is no G-d with me”. The true “I” is Hashem. The sage Hillel once said, “If I am here, everyone is here”, and this is explained to mean that he was referring to Hashem, who is called “I”.

The soul is called a piece of Hashem, and this means that just as Hashem is called “I”, so can a person feel his “I”. Since our soul is a piece of Hashem, and Hashem is considered the only true “I”, our soul is able to feel this “I” as well. Our mission is to reveal and recognize who the true “I” is.

We will try to explain this, and how we can nullify our “I” and instead come to reveal the true “I”.

Removing Evil By Nullifying The Self

A general rule is that every matter is made up of two stages – to first remove the evil, and then to do good. “Remove yourself from evil, and do good.” First we need to remove the obstacles that hold us back from what we want to achieve, and after that we can begin to do positive actions that will enable us to get to the goal.

The first step we will have to do – to remove ourselves from evil – is to nullify our “I”. Then we can reveal the true “I”, Who is Hashem. Let us begin with the first step.

The sefarim hakedoshim explain that whenever a person sees something, he sees it through his “I.” A person doesn’t just see himself as his “I” and worry for himself, tending to be selfish toward others; his ego goes even further than that. He sees himself in everything! *Chazal* say also that “Just as all faces are different, so are all *de’os* (opinions) different”. This is because people see their “I” through everything.

To give an example, *Chazal* state (*Avos 2:4*), “Do not judge your friend until you get to his place.” The Kotzker Rebbe explained that you will never be in your friend’s situation anyway, so don’t judge him. A person never really understands another’s situation, because since each person has his own individual outlook, he never understands another’s outlook. Everyone sees things differently.

Why did Hashem create the world this way? Simply speaking, it is because Hashem wants many different faces in the Jewish people. But another reason, a deeper reason, is because Hashem wants each person to realize that his view isn't everything, and there are other views to a situation.

If a person would never realize that another person can have a different opinion than him, everyone would be very haughty. We see that there are a lot of arguments in the *Gemara*, such as Beis Hilel and Beis Shamai, who never agree. Yet, the students of Shamai still married the students of Hilel, because they respected each other, and their arguments were not personal. Although *machlokes* (arguing) is known for its evil, it can be good and holy as well, when it serves to reveal how each person's opinion doesn't have to be the right one. Hashem purposely sets up in situations where we will meet others who disagree with us, and this is all to show each person that his opinion isn't the only one.

The Purpose of Different Opinions

Let us explain this a bit more.

When any two people meet, they have to each realize that you need to accept others' way of thinking. Each person needs to discover that he is not the only one in the world who has an opinion on a matter, and he isn't always right.

Why did Hashem make the world like this, that people always disagree with each other? It wasn't so that the world should be full of confusion or doubt. The reason for this is because there is so much depth to life – depth within depth.

This concept is not an "*Avodah*". It is an attitude to have on life. When someone disagrees with you, it is an opportunity for you to realize that your way of thinking is not the only way to think. Although Hashem gave you the power to think for yourself, He also gave others this power, and there is no one correct way to think; each person has his own way of thought. For this reason, two people can take opposing sides, yet they are both right, because "Their words and their words are both the words of the living G-d."

The only undisputed fact is that we must all do the will of Hashem and give Him pleasure.

Two Ways To Reach Hashem

In *Chazal*, there are two approaches brought on how to reach Hashem. One approach is to begin with love for the Creator, which will then lead one to reach love for Jews. The other approach is to begin with love for the Jewish people, and from that, a person comes to love Hashem.

In more simple language, a person has to make room for Hashem in himself, and let go of his "I." There are two ways how this can be accomplished.

One way is that a person has to allow room for others in his life, and that he shouldn't live a selfish existence. However, this is not yet the purpose; it is only the means to a greater goal. The goal of not being selfish is that a

person should get used to giving up his “I”. By getting used to Ahavas Yisrael (loving other Jews), a person learns how to make room for Hashem in himself. That is one approach.

The other approach, which is a straighter approach, is to first make space for Hashem in oneself, and that will get a person to leave his “I” (and thus come to love others as a result).

Which approach should a person take? It depends on each person; both ways are correct approaches, and each person has the way that is meant for him. Let us try to understand, however, the underlying concept of these two differing ways.

A person’s job is to learn how to remove his ego from all situations. We can give an example on how one can work on this. Let’s say a person is standing and thinking who is standing here. A simple, superficial response would be that he is standing there by himself, but if you think about it, this can’t be, because we know that Hashem is everywhere, so how can it be that Hashem and you are standing in the same exact place? If Hashem is here, then how can I stand where I am standing, if Hashem fills everything in existence?

That is the way to start thinking. It is not upon a person to understand this intellectually how it can be that he stands where Hashem is; rather, the approach should be that if Hashem is here, it must be that I am not here at all!

Of course, we don’t mean to imply that we do not exist. We exist, and we have Torah and *mitzvos* to keep. But we mean that a person should think to himself: Who made me have such a question in the first place? Hashem. How do we know this is true? It is because *Chazal* (Sotah 5a) state that Hashem says about a *baal gaavah* (a haughty person), “I and him cannot dwell under one roof.”

Maybe one will counter that this is only true about a *baal gaavah*. But upon deeper thinking, all people have *gaavah* by their very essence, because there is no one who does not think how it is possible that he and Hashem can be in the same place at once. Hashem causes each person to have this question at some point: How can it be that I and Hashem can be at once in the same place? The point of this questioning within is so that a person will realize the truth: Since Hashem is here where I stand, it must be that “I” am not really here!

Such a conclusion is a fact that cannot be comprehended. But it is supposed to make a person think, “Am I trying to discover where I fit into Creation, or did Hashem make me think about this question so that I should realize that I need to stop thinking about my ‘I’?”

Leaving Your “I”

This is a deep and subtle matter. Whatever you encounter, get used to forgetting about yourself and how you fit into the picture. Get used to the attitude of, “It’s not about you.” Instead of seeing how something has to do with you, see how the matter comes to make you leave your “I.”

We can give another example on how one can work on this. *Chazal* state (Chagigah 12b) that the world exists due to the merit of a *tzaddik*. The *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* also brings from *Chazal* that if there would be one second in the world in which there is no study of Torah, the world would cease to exist.

This seems to be a contradiction. Who upholds the world – a *tzaddik*, or someone who learns Torah? What happens if the *tzaddik* doesn't learn Torah – does the world still stand on his merit? We will not go into this discussion. Our aim here is to approach the question, not to get into the answers.

Chazal state (*Sukkah 45b*) that the world cannot survive unless there are at least thirty-six *tzaddikim*. The world needs to stand on some foundation, and the *tzaddik* is that foundation. Which of the thirty-six *tzaddikim* does the world truly stand on? There are those who say that there is one *tzaddik* who is the most righteous of all of them, and on him the world stands. This is true, but again, we are not looking for answers to our question. What we want to get at is how we look at the question.

Let's say this *tzaddik*, whom the world stands on, is thinking that the world stands on his merit. If he were to have such a thought, he is wrong. No one should be thinking that the world stands on his merit. First of all, no one should consider himself a *tzaddik*, because *Chazal* say (*Niddah 30b*) that even if everyone tells you are a *tzaddik*, you should consider yourself to be a rasha. Even if someone really is a *tzaddik*, he can still be aware that there are another thirty-five *tzaddikim*, so the world doesn't necessarily depend on him alone. Even if he is indeed the greatest *tzaddik* from all of them – like if Eliyahu HaNavi came to him and told him so – he should still know that the world survives on Torah, not on him.

The point of this thinking is that a person has to get used to removing his “I” from the equation. A person needs to see how he is not in the picture – not how he is in the picture. When a person is sitting and learning Torah, he should not be thinking, “Baruch Hashem, the world stands on my merit.” (Sometimes a person does need to say this, because there is such a concept as *gaavah d'kedushah* – “holy arrogance”, to be proud of one's learning. But the more truthful viewpoint is that one should be aware that the world doesn't depend on him for survival. We see that *tzaddikim* die and the world continues to go on afterwards, so even a *tzaddik* has to be aware of that., that the world doesn't depend on him.)

Maybe a person will ask, “If so, why did Hashem create people, if He doesn't need them anyway?” The answer to this is, that's the whole point of why were created – to be able to realize that there is nothing besides for Hashem! The purpose of our existence is to reveal Hashem, and how He is perfect – which is essentially to realize that He doesn't need us.

We have the power of free will, though, and this makes us believe that we are in control of things, which makes us feel in turn that we are needed. But the true attitude to have is that since Hashem is perfect and He lacks nothing, it is our purpose in Creation to reveal this truth – *Ain Od Milvado*, There is nothing besides for Hashem.

Hashem Is The Sole Provider

Another example of how we can work on nullifying our self is as follows.

A person usually feels that he is in charge of supporting his family. He is afraid to die, because he worries for his family: Who will feed them if I'm not here? There are some people who, unfortunately, are told that they will die soon, and they are immediately filled with complaints on Hashem: “If I die, what will be with my family??”

People naturally think that they control their family's livelihood. It seems to be this way, because we can see that those who become orphaned need to depend on others for survival, because they have no one to worry for them.

This is one of the examples of how our senses delude us. The true attitude we are supposed to have is that we all have one Father, and He is the father of orphans and widows. He is also the Father of all of us as we live. *Chazal* say that a person has three partners – his father, his mother, and Hashem. Even if a father dies, Hashem can still take care of his family, and nothing can get in His way.

When people feel that their families won't be able to survive without them, it really comes from the ego, which doesn't want to accept that Hashem doesn't need him.

If Hashem is in charge of everything, why, indeed, did He give us responsibilities on this world if He doesn't need us anyway? It is because we are supposed to feel our responsibility, but after we take care of our responsibilities, we are supposed to feel that Hashem still didn't need us to do it. When we learn Torah, we should feel how important it is for the world to survive, but after that, we should remember that Hashem can still upkeep the world even without us.

This feeling of humility towards Hashem should not cause us to feel sad that we are not needed. Hashem doesn't need us, but He created us so that we can come to recognize this. The problem is that our soul by nature doesn't want to accept this so easily, because it is very hard to undermine your whole existence. People always want to see how they are in everything and how they are needed, and this natural part of our psyche holds us back from nullifying ourselves to Hashem.

Let's say a person travels somewhere to go to an act of chessed, and when he arrives, they tell him that he isn't needed anymore, because it was taken care of already. His reaction will likely be, "I came here for nothing...at least *Chazal* say that you get reward for traveling for a mitzvah."

Although that is a true statement of *Chazal*, this shouldn't be the inner perspective to have on the situation. His reaction should really be, "Hashem did this to show me that He doesn't need me."

Anything we encounter serves one purpose alone: there is a Creator here, and He is perfect and lacks nothing. Hashem created us so that we can reveal Him, that He alone is in charge. If so, why do we do anything, if He doesn't need us? It is because our actions serve to clarify this very point: Hashem doesn't need me.

This is how we perfect ourselves – when we realize how Hashem is perfect, because He doesn't need us, and He can run the world without us.

See Hashem In Everything

The point of this discussion is so that a person can come to see Hashem in each thing, and not himself.

We only gave a few examples of this concept, but it can be applied to an endless amount of details in our life.

A person naturally either sees Hashem or himself in everything. Those are the two possibilities. How can one come out of seeing himself in everything and instead to see Hashem in everything? The tool one can use for this is Ahavas Yisrael. By loving other Jews, you come out of yourself. The goal of this, though, is to see Hashem in everything.

Take this point we are saying and expand upon it, and keep seeing how one has to always see Hashem in everything, not himself.

Think About Hashem

Until now, we addressed the first stage of this concept, which is to “remove yourself from evil.” The next step is to “do good” – to actually do positive actions that bring about the goal. This part is simpler.

After one has learned to let go of his “I”, now what? Now a person has to think simply about the fact that Hashem exists. Believe in His existence, and this very thinking will help your soul be able to nullify yourself.

You don’t have to reflect deeply about Hashem for this; just think about the simple fact that He exists. This will reveal the true “I”, who is Hashem, and it will slowly remove your ego more and more.

If a person jumps straight to this stage without working on the first part we mentioned, we cannot say that this is pointless, but it won’t do much.

When a person works on both of these stages, he will receive *siyata d’shmaya* (Heavenly assistance) to erase his “I”, and he will come to reveal the simple truth of *Ain Od Milvado*.

05 | *Time & Above Time*

Everything Teaches Us Something

Torah comes from the word *horaah*, which means “a teaching.” Every piece of knowledge we have really teaches us something. This is because “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” Everything which is in the world is rooted in the Torah, and since the Torah is our teachings, everything on this world teaches us something about how to serve the Creator.

A fundamental point which the Baal Shem Tov taught is that all events on this world, as well as movements – even thoughts – teach us something about *Avodas Hashem*. Let us thus examine a statement of *Chazal* and see what teaching we learn from it.

Time and Non-Time

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimeoni, Mishlei, 944*) states that “All festivals will disappear in the future, but Purim will never disappear.” Some also say that Chanukah will be forever.

Why did *Chazal* reveal this to us? What is the point of us knowing that we won’t have to keep Yom Tov after *Moshiach* comes? What will be then will be then; how does this affect us now?

It must be that *Chazal* are trying to tell us something from this, and we will try to understand it.

Another point regarding this is the following. There is a concept² called “*Olam, Shanah, Nefesh*” – “World, Time and Soul.” This means that everything as we know it takes place in three dimensions: in a place in the world, in a certain time, and in our own soul. If something is in the world, we can find it in time as well, and something which is in a time can also be found in our own soul.

Let’s take the time of Chanukah, for example. Before the miracle of Chanukah, was there such a concept of Chanukah? The time for Chanukah never came into existence yet. There was a point in time in which Chanukah never existed. If so, just like there is a time for Chanukah, so is there a concept in which there is no Chanukah. That point in time, in which there was no Chanukah, is also a point in our own soul. Our soul has in it Chanukah, as well a time in which there is “no Chanukah.”

What does that mean for us? We know what we do with Chanukah; there are many halachos. But what do with the part in our soul that has “no Chanukah” in it?

² Sefer Yetzirah

Chazal (Shabbos 151b) state that the days of *Moshiach* will be “days in which I (Hashem) have no desire for.” This time has not come yet, but in our own soul, this time can be accessed – the time of *Moshiach*. (This is because everything that takes place in time also takes place in our soul.)

He Creates World And Destroys Them

In order to fully understand this concept, we need to get to the root of the matter.

This concept is not just with regards to time. It applies as well to all the dimensions in our universe .

Chazal (Beraishis Rabbah 3:7) state that “Hashem builds worlds and destroys them.” Since this takes place in the actual universe, it takes place in our soul as well, because everything that takes place in the world takes place as well in our soul. Therefore, there is a place in our soul in which “Hashem creates worlds and destroys them.”

This is not something that happened only in the past. It is going on even in this present moment: Hashem is creating worlds and destroying them.

With time, we can see this concept more revealed. We have three festivals – Pesach, Shavuos and Sukkos. When we were redeemed from Egypt, we received the Yom Tov of Pesach. What happened before we were redeemed from Egypt? There was no Pesach. This shows us that there was a point in time in which there was no Pesach – and this has ramifications with regards to our own soul. Shavuos came about because we received the Torah; if so, before we received the Torah, there was no Shavuos. Sukkos came to us as a remembrance for the sukkah that we put up in the desert; before the desert, there was no Sukkos. All of the three festivals are all a result of a certain event; this shows us that before that event took place, there as a point in time in which there is no Pesach, no Shavuos, and no Sukkos. In the future, all the festivals will disappear. So we find this concept of “no festival” both before it comes into being, as well as after it comes into being – when it disappears in the future.

The same goes for the fact that Hashem builds worlds, and then destroys them. Before Hashem created these worlds, they did not exist, and after He creates worlds, they again cease to exist.

As we mentioned in this chapter, everything is a *horaah* (teaching) to us, so we must see what all this teaches us when it comes to serving the Creator.

Before Creation

In *Shemoneh Esrei* we say, “You were before the creation of the world, and You exist after the creation of the world.” What is the point of mentioning that Hashem was around before He created the world?

Simply speaking, it is because we all believe that Hashem always existed, and that nothing precedes Him. Yet the sefarim hakedoshim tell us that there is more to this. Not only is this true about the past, but it still affects us in the present. What does it have to do with us presently? We will soon explain how.

If there was a point in time in which there was no world, then in our own soul as well there is a point that is also “You existed before the creation of the world.”

The post-world state is essentially the fact that the world cannot survive unless Hashem sustains it, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes, that if there would be one second in which there is no Torah study, the entire universe would cease to exist.

Hashem was also around before the world, so there as a pre-world state. This is a point in time in which there is no world, and it is reminiscent of Tisha B’Av, in which it is forbidden to learn Torah.

Two Ways To Connect To Hashem

These words need to first be absorbed by your mind, on an intellectual level. Then they need to be clarified by your soul so that one can connect to Hashem through them.

In the previous chapters, we explained that there is a way to connect to Hashem through one’s “I”, and there is also a way to connect to Hashem when there is no “I”.

The first way, which involves one’s “I”, is one method, and it is rooted in the fact that Hashem also calls Himself “I”, such as “I am Hashem, your G-d.” The “I” of Hashem can be reached through one’s very “I”. This reflects Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who is the root of the power of da’as in the soul. In every soul, there is a “Moshe *Rabbeinu*” – the power of da’as. This is when one realizes that his “I” can be used as a tool to reveal the true “I”, Hashem. That is one approach in *Avodas Hashem* – to use your “I”.

The other approach, which is the more inner method, is to not be involved with your “I”. The source of this approach is that “Hashem came down upon Har Sinai.” Before we received the Torah from Hashem, Hashem first came onto the mountain, and there was total silence in Creation. This came before the Torah, so it is a higher level.

In terms of our soul, in simple words, this relates to us as follows. One way how a person can serve Hashem is through his “I”. Another way, though, is when there is no “I” – when a person focuses just on *Ain Od Milvado*. With this approach, a person doesn’t work with his I – he instead focuses on the fact there is no I.

If we reflect, we can find this concept in the words of *Chazal*, that in the future, all the festivals will disappear. This shows us that in order to have a complete connection with Hashem, everything as we know it has to cease – even Yom Tov – so that we can see *Ain Od Milvado*, how there is absolutely nothing besides for Hashem!

In our current state of affairs, however, we cannot take this path. We definitely must recognize our “I”, because Hashem gave us the Torah to keep. We are thus not saying that our current situation (which is the first way to serve Hashem) isn’t a true way. Both ways are true.

If a person only knows of connection with Hashem through Yom Tov, then although he is connected to Hashem, he is still involved with his “I”. That is why we also need the second way, which is to connect directly with Hashem, with no intermediaries involved.

Lishmah and Shelo Lishmah

We need both ways. We need to connect to our Hashem through our “I”, which reflects how we must begin serving Hashem *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motives). Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained that we must start with *shelo lishmah* because it is impossible for a human being to have entirely pure motives from the start. We cannot skip over our “I”, and we need our “I”. Yet, we have to eventually arrive at *lishmah*, and this is the goal.

The first stage is *shelo lishmah*, when we involve our “I.” This can be when we have any reason why we want to serve Hashem – either we want honor, *Gan Eden*, or the sheer bliss in being close to Hashem. The Mesillas Yesharim (in the chapter about Chassidus) writes that even such a desire is not considered *lishmah*. Of course, it is a very lofty desire to have, but it is still not *lishmah*, because it is still about a personal reason.

However, we need this first stage. If a person skips over his “I” and wants to begin with *lishmah*, like if he sits down to learn Torah entirely *lishmah*, it’s like heresy! We cannot go against our design. Hashem made people this way, that we have personal interests. No one can deny this, and Hashem willed it this way that we should be like this. If Hashem would have wanted us to immediately begin serving Him *lishmah*, He would have made it possible for us to do so, but He didn’t. That is not the way we were designed. So no one is able to start out *lishmah*.

So on one hand, we need to be aware that we have an “I” and work with it to reach closeness to Hashem, and this is the *shelo lishmah* aspect that we need. On the other hand, our goal is to reach *lishmah*, which is to forget about our “I” and instead cling directly to Hashem, with no ego involved whatsoever. We need both stages.

We are repeating this important point, because if one tries to ignore his “I” and begin by nullifying himself, he will come to ignore halachos in the Torah *chas v’shalom*, because he has no “I” to do *mitzvos* with! Chas v’shalom that one should ever stray from keeping the Torah. That is why we must first work with our “I”, and not attempt to nullify our “I” too soon.

The Difference Between Today and the Time of Moshiach

The period which we are in, which will last for 6,000 years, is a period in which we are mainly involved with *shelo lishmah*. This is because in the current state of affairs, our body is considered the main thing, with our soul being regarded as something hidden in us. *Lishmah* is a very hidden point in our current situation. But in the future, in the time of *Moshiach*, *lishmah* will become more revealed, because the soul will be considered the main thing, with the body being secondary. This is explained in *sefer* Daas Tevunos.

In either case, there is always *shelo lishmah* involved. In the future it will be secondary to *lishmah*, but it will still exist. Before the sin of Adam, there was no such thing as Yom Tov. Had Adam not sinned, he would have gone straight to eternal bliss, and there would be no need for Yom Tov. The sin created a need for Yom Tov – the need to connect to Hashem through something else, unlike before the sin, when there was nothing but direct connection with Hashem. However, deep in our soul there is a point that remained unaffected by the sin, and thus there is a part in us which can have a direct connection with Hashem, and it doesn’t depend on any certain time for this. This is a concept brought in *sefer* Adir B’Marom (written by the Ramchal). Now that we are after the sin, we need Yom Tov,

as well as the *mitzvos*, in order to become close to Hashem. We have both abilities in us – we have an ability to connect with Hashem based on certain times or actions, and we also have an ability to connect to Him regardless of any time or action; to be above time.

We need both ways, and Hashem made it this way. We need both our connection to Him through time, as well as our connection to Him “above” time. To disregard time is basically denying the Torah, *chas v’shalom*. Yet, if we are only dependent on certain times, actions and Yom Tov in order to be close to Hashem, then we will be held back by our “I”. Thus, we need to first connect to Hashem through our “I”, and only after that can we connect to Him by going above our “I.”

Now that we have learned this, we can understand a whole different attitude about Yom Tov. We cannot come into Yom Tov only thinking about how it will renew us, because then we are depending on Yom Tov to be close to Hashem and losing our recognition of how Hashem doesn’t need anything.

The concept we have discussed here will be understood more and more as we continue throughout our *Avodas Hashem*. We have only laid the map here that we need to have: where our “I” fits in to all this, and where our nullified state must come into the picture.

The words here need a lot of explanation, and we have only said the roots. It is hoped here that they be of help to those who fear Hashem and think about His existence – with the help of Hashem.

Lishmah – The G-dly Element in the Soul

Chazal (*Pesachim 50b*) state that “one should always learn Torah *shelo lishmah*, because *shelo lishmah* leads to *lishmah*.” Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained that there is always some *shelo lishmah* involved in a person. We will try to understand why this is so, and this will help us, b’ezras Hashem, understand the inner meaning of “*lishmah*” and “*shelo lishmah*.”

Shelo lishmah, upon a superficial perspective, seems to differ depending on the situation. There are many different kinds of ulterior motives that a person can have. However, the inner point of it always remains the same, and it contains everything we need to know about *shelo lishmah*. The same goes for understanding what *lishmah* is. There are many sefarim that give definitions of *lishmah*, but there is one inner point that always remains true about *lishmah*, and it contains the whole essence of *lishmah*.

What is that inner point? The inner point is that our “I” in us represents our *shelo lishmah*, while the ability in us to go above our “I” – to reveal our power of *elokus* (Godliness) – represents our *lishmah*. In our “I”, there is no *lishmah*. The more and more we reveal Hashem within ourselves, though, the more we reveal *lishmah*.

In other words, the inner desire of a person who really seeks Hashem to leave *shelo lishmah* and enter into *lishmah* is essentially a desire to leave one’s ego, and to instead integrate with Hashem. *Shelo lishmah* thus is when we are separated from Hashem, while *lishmah* is all about connection with Hashem.

When a person only thinks superficially, it appears to him that he really wants to learn Torah and do *mitzvos lishmah*, and that it is just the *yetzer hora*, bad *middos* and other deterrents that hold him back. But upon reflection, one can discover that his very “I” is all about *shelo lishmah*, and that is what is holding him back from *lishmah*. It’s not that a person has both good and bad desires. It is that his whole essence is to only be involved with his “I”, and thus he is at the level of *shelo lishmah*.

Where do we find in ourselves a desire for *lishmah*?

This is the power of *Elokus* (Godliness) that is deep within us. There is a spark of Godliness in everything, and in a person, it is mainly manifest in our heart. The *lishmah* in us is not found in our “I”, but in our Godliness – the fact that we are a *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a “piece of Hashem.”

There can be two underlying motivations when a person desires to leave *shelo lishmah* and instead be *lishmah*.

If it is for a truly spiritual reason, then it is coming from his spark of G-dliness that is found in every Jewish soul, the part which is pure, nullified from any sense of self, and thus totally *lishmah*.

But it can also be coming from an unrefined motive – a motivation that comes from *gaavah* (haughtiness), to feel exalted that one is on the high level of *lishmah*. If a person is just desiring *lishmah* because he wants to be on a high level, it’s really *shelo lishmah*. His haughtiness is what is spurring on him to be “perfect”. Such a motivation will prevent a person from reaching *lishmah*, because the person is desiring a high level for his own personal esteem, to feel that he has reached a high level – and it’s just a desire to feel as if he’s G-d.

We do not know where motivations are coming from in our soul. If we feel a desire to be *lishmah*, is it coming from the pure spark of G-dliness in us, or is it coming from haughtiness? It’s possible that a person claims for many

years that he wants to be *lishmah*, but he really just wants himself. It's all about himself, and this is *shelo lishmah*. The true desire for *lishmah* is when a person makes room in his heart for Hashem to be revealed there.

Lishmah Is Above Logic

These words are about how we use the power of our soul, and to what we are aspiring to. Logically speaking, it doesn't make any sense why a person would want to be *lishmah*. We will explain why.

There are situations in which it seems as if the person is acting *lishmah*, but really he's acting *shelo lishmah*. To give an example, a person gives up worldly desires so he can get Olam HaBa. He can really be just exchanging a "cow" for a "donkey", because he's giving up one high level for another high level. It might be more *lishmah* than what he is ordinarily, but he's still not doing anything for Hashem. Why, indeed, would a person ever want to be *lishmah*?

The real answer to this is that it cannot be explained; it is above logic. The essence of a person, his very "I", is one's daas – the knowledge which we can comprehend. But the point that is above our "I" is above our daas, and thus we cannot comprehend matters that have to do with going beyond our "I", which is the matter of *lishmah*.

The "I" of a person is not just mixed with ulterior motivations (*shelo lishmah*); our very "I" is in essence *shelo lishmah*. This is not a weakness in a human being; it is the entire idea of a human being – we do things only for ourselves. We are all about *shelo lishmah*.

A person, by definition, is all about *shelo lishmah*. The desire that a person can have to give up his ego is not a logical matter. Why on earth would a person want to give up his ego? What do we get out of this? What's in it for us...? This is the first thing we should understand. The fact that we are human beings makes us be *shelo lishmah*, by very definition. The power to act *lishmah* is not a human ability – it comes from a point of G-dliness deep within our soul.

What Can Spur Us On To Act Lishmah

We have just said that it not humanly possible to act *lishmah*. If so, what can spur us on to leave our *shelo lishmah* state and enter *lishmah*? If someone merits to reveal the G-dliness within himself, then he doesn't have this question. All he has to do is expand that G-dliness more and more, but he doesn't have this issue.

How can a person awaken himself to leave *shelo lishmah* and instead enter *lishmah*? This is when we make use of "yirah". There are levels in yirah, but the depth of yirah is to bring a person to nullify himself. This is a level of yirah which is even above ahavah, love of Hashem, as the sefarim hakedoshim explain.

Really, it is impossible to escape *shelo lishmah*, because Hashem has willed it this way, that human beings are *shelo lishmah*. The only thing that can make us leave *shelo lishmah* is the yirah, the fear, of remaining at *shelo lishmah*. First of all, one should be afraid to remain at this level, and secondly, a person is permitted to act *shelo lishmah* if he eventually wants to arrive at *lishmah*, but without this intention, it is forbidden to remain at *shelo lishmah*. Thus,

one should be afraid lest he remain forever at *shelo lishmah*, and this fear will be able to help him nullify his ego. Without this fear, one has no hope in breaking his ego.

Reaching Lishmah

That is only one side of the coin – *yirah*, to be afraid that one will remain at the level of *shelo lishmah*. Along with this one needs also *ahavah*, and that is to actually have a desire for *lishmah*. This is the power of G-dliness in a person, and it is the ability in a person to go above his “I”.

However, a person is apt to become mixed up and attempts to reach *lishmah*, by doing actions to reach *lishmah*; but although he is doing deeds of *lishmah*, he has never reached his “I” yet. When a person hasn’t yet reached his “I”, his desire for *lishmah* is simply a desire to reach high levels. It is coming from a self-love. Even if he acts with *mesirus nefesh* (altruism for G-d) and he tries to awaken *lishmah* in himself, he is just doing it all to reach levels, and when he finally reaches *lishmah*, he will discover that he isn’t being himself. When a person hasn’t yet reached his own “I” yet and he attempts to reach *lishmah*, he will not reach it, and he will become very broken in the process.

Even if he reaches *lishmah* and he feels that “This is what I am”, he is really confused. He might have some spark of *lishmah* here, but because he hasn’t yet clarified who he is yet, he has confused “*lishmah*” with his “I”, and this is wrong, because “*lishmah*” is really beyond the “I” of a person.

To summarize, *Lishmah* is the point in which one removes his “I”, and *shelo lishmah* is when one’s “I” is revealed.

Lishmah is D’veykus

Chazal revealed to us that the purpose of learning Torah – and our entire mission in general – is to reach *lishmah*. “One should always learn Torah *shelo lishmah*, because *shelo lishmah* leads to *lishmah*.” On one hand, it appears that *lishmah* is our goal on this world.

Yet, we also find that the goal of Creation is *d’vekyus* to Hashem, for it is written, “As for me, closeness to Hashem is good.”

This is a seeming contradiction. What is our purpose on this world – *lishmah*, or *d’veykus*?

However, upon analysis, they are really one and the same concept. A person has to reveal Hashem in his life – in other words, he has to nullify his ego.

When a person nullifies himself, that itself is the concept of *lishmah*. This is also essentially the same thing as *d’veykus* with Hashem – being close to Hashem is to reveal Hashem in one’s heart.

Shelo lishmah, though, directly contradicts *d’veykus*. A person either has *d’veykus* or *shelo lishmah*. In order to reach *d’veykus*, one needs *lishmah*, like the words of Reb Meir. This is not just a “*segulah*” to reach high levels. It is the very concept of *lishmah* – to remove one’s “I”, which brings one to have *d’veykus* with Hashem.

It is written, “I stand in between Hashem and you.” This alludes to how the “I” of a person holds back connection with Hashem. When a person is at *shelo lishmah*, he is still in his “I”, and he will not be able to have *d’vekyus* with Hashem.

This is the inner structure of all of our *Avodas Hashem*. The Ramchal writes in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim* that “man was not created except to bask in the pleasure of Hashem”, and later in the chapter about Chassidus, the Ramchal writes that if spiritual bliss is one’s sole desire in serving Hashem, then he is still not reaching perfection, because it is still *shelo lishmah*. Perfection, writes the Ramchal, is to act selflessly for Hashem, and not for a person to think what he will get out of it. He shouldn’t be in it for the pleasure.

On one hand, we have a part in us that only wants to serve Hashem for personal gain. This is our element of *shelo lishmah*, and this is a desire to experience spiritual bliss. On the other hand, there is an element of *lishmah* in us that only wants to reveal Hashem.

It is not possible for a person to totally nullify his ego. There is no such thing. The only thing we can do is raise the amount of our non-ego over the amount of our ego. But our “I” will not be totally nullified until the end of the year 10,000.

So there are altogether three levels:

1. Total *shelo lishmah*. This is when a person doesn’t have any motivation whatsoever for G-dliness or even for spiritual pleasure.
2. *Lishmah*, mixed with *shelo lishmah*. The *lishmah* in a person wants G-dliness, but the *shelo lishmah* in a person is it for the pleasure.
3. Total *lishmah*. This is when a person removes his ego, and this level will only be revealed in the future.

Which Comes First?

A person’s mission, then, is to first clarify to himself what *lishmah* is, and what *shelo lishmah* is.

Lishmah is the point of G-dliness in the soul, while *shelo lishmah* is a person’s “I.” The most refined kind of *shelo lishmah* there is the desire to have spiritual delight, (as described in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim*.) A person should keep clarifying his motivations more and more and see how much *shelo lishmah* he still has left in him, until he finally begins to reveal some *lishmah*.

After this becomes clarified to the person, he now has in front of him two options.

There are two forces in us – our point of G-dliness, our ability of non-ego, and our “I”, which is our ego. From where in our soul do we start to serve Hashem – by trying to reveal Him more within us (which implies that we need to build our “I”, by seeking to reveal Hashem more in our life) or by nullifying our “I” (which is to first attempt to break our ego)?

On one hand, it is written, “Remove yourself from evil and do good,” so it seems that first we must remove ourselves from evil by nullifying our ego, and only then should we “do good” by using our “I.”

On the other hand, there is an opposite approach to take: the Baal Shem Tov explains this *possuk* to mean that through doing good, that is how we come to remove our evil.

So, where do we start? Should we first remove our ego – and that will help us reveal Hashem within us - or should we first attempt to reveal Hashem within us, and only after we should attempt to purify ourselves from our ego and nullify it?

Our sefarim hakedoshim have different approaches to this. Some of the ways brought in them is to break our *middos*, enduring physical suffering, and fasting. The common denominator between all paths, though, is to somewhat nullify the ego, to get used to giving up a little of the self. If a person bears in mind this point, this will help him clear space in himself for Hashem to enter and be revealed, and from this he will come to have spiritual delight in Hashem. That is one approach: breaking the ego.

The second approach is the opposite: don't start by breaking your *middos* or by fasting. Instead, draw upon yourself spiritual light by thinking about the Creator, such as thoughts of love toward Him. This is the approach brought in many works of Chassidus.

Either way has its dangers. The first approach has a danger in that a person is focused on breaking his "I", and if he breaks his "I" without having a source from where to draw his vitality from (since he hasn't yet merited to reveal Hashem in himself), he will have no vitality.

The second approach also has a risk, because if he is focused on revealing Hashem more and more inside himself, then even if he does arrive at that point, he still has bad *middos*, because he hasn't worked on himself yet. What will happen is that his bad *middos* will only get fueled on more from all his spiritual revelations.

(This is reminiscent of a story told about a certain person who was known as a "big *tzaddik*", who one time cursed someone who wronged him, and the curse took effect. When someone told this to Reb Yisrael Salanter, he said, "This person damages people with his mouth.")

When we hear this story, there are two different reactions one can have. A person might hear this and say, "Wow. What a high level this person was on, that he was able to curse people, and Hashem carried out all his curses... he must have been so close to Hashem." But Reb Yisrael Salanter did not look at it this way. He felt that this story showed that the person lacked good *middos*, because he was using his high spiritual level as a weapon to hurt people with.

What is the depth of Reb Yisrael Salanter's view of this person?

In the spiritual realm, there are *oros* (Heavenly lights) as well as *keilim* (containers that receive the light). If a person is worthy, he merits to draw forth Heavenly lights upon the world, *oros*; but if he hasn't yet purified his *middos*, he might even be capable of performing miracles, yet his *keilim* are still dirty, because they haven't been purified of bad *middos*. The person will receive the *oros* with *keilim* that are dirty, and who knows what will become of him...?

Thus, it is clear that we both need to reveal Hashem within us, as well as break our "I." We can start with one way and then work on the other way, but the point is that we need to do both. One of these alone will not get us to our goal. We all have these two forces within us: the power to be *lishmah*, which is to be G-dly and have no ego, and the

power of *shelo lishmah*, which is to have a sense of self. It is a person's mission to try to leave his *shelo lishmah* as much as he can and reach *lishmah*.

Even if a person has purified his *shelo lishmah* and he has more earnest motives - such as the desire to have spiritual bliss in Hashem - he still has to purify his motives even more, until he's totally not focused on his personal gains at all from *Avodas Hashem*.

A person has to always check if he has any G-dliness revealed in him, that he is not in the category of the statement, "I and him cannot dwell under one roof." Even if a person sees that has revealed some more *lishmah* in himself, he still has to see if his *shelo lishmah* aspects have become more purified as well with this.

Daven For Help About This

The truth is that everyone has to daven special about this to Hashem, and to beg Him that he be shown the way how to begin.

However, *sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah* – "the end of the actions is first with thought", and thus we have to be aware of our goal - where it is exactly that we are striving towards.

The purpose of our existence is to become close to Hashem; "And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good." That unbelievable closeness has to ultimately be felt by our "I", and so we have to purify our "I" more and more³ until we merit to truly connect and integrate with Hashem.

³ By always seeking to reveal Him more and more in our life.

07 | *Lishmah, Part Two*

“Shelo Lishmah Leads to Lishmah”

In the previous chapter we quoted *Chazal* that “A person should always learn Torah and do *mitzvos* even *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motives), because from *shelo lishmah*, he will come to act *lishmah* (pure motives).”

From here we learn that *shelo lishmah* and *lishmah* have to be integrated, and they are not two separate concepts. They go hand in hand with each other. In order to understand how they connect, we need to first reflect about the very concepts of *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*.

Chazal say that a person should “always” act *shelo lishmah*; the word “always”, *l’olam* in Hebrew, has the same root letters as the word *he’elam*, which means “hidden”. This alludes to the fact that *shelo lishmah* conceals our true purpose, which is to utterly sense Hashem’s existence. As long as a person is still involved with *shelo lishmah*, his very existence conceals him from revealing Hashem in his life. *Lishmah* is about revealing Hashem, while *shelo lishmah*, which is a human being by essence, conceals Hashem from the person.

A Human Is “Shelo Lishmah” By Essence

On a more subtle point, it’s not truthful enough to say that a person serves Hashem originally *shelo lishmah*. It is much more than that; a person by essence is *shelo lishmah*! Our very existence is to act *shelo lishmah*.

Shelo lishmah is not a matter that one thinks about. If *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* were something I can think about, then I could just “think” to act *lishmah*; but it’s not a thought. It is our very essence as human beings to be *shelo lishmah*. The “I” in a person allows for *shelo lishmah* and conceals Hashem from being revealed.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained that “a person should always act *shelo lishmah*”, that it is impossible for a person not to begin with *shelo lishmah*. This is because the very existence of a person makes one act *shelo lishmah*, and there is no away to avoid this.

If we absorb this, then instead of looking at the concept of *shelo lishmah* with disdain, we can see that it is a required human weakness. It is not to be looked down upon. Our mission is to eventually negate our *shelo lishmah* and become integrated with Hashem, so *shelo lishmah* serves a purpose: it helps us reach *lishmah*.

When we describe what the “essence” of a person is here, we are not referring here to the deepest point in the soul, which is the selfless part in us that is the *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a “piece of Hashem.” There are different meanings of the “essence” of a human being, as we will explain.

Three Kinds of Existence

We explained that *lishmah* is when we reveal Hashem into our life, and *shelo lishmah* is when we still live within our ego and Hashem is concealed from our life. *Shelo lishmah* is actually always describing the “lower” level, depending on the situation. *Lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* are different with each person, because what is a higher level for one person is a lower level to another person.

To be general, there are three different dimensions of existence (“*havayah*” in Hebrew.) –we can exist on three different kinds of planes. There is the physical world, and the spiritual world – and beyond that, Hashem Himself. The physical world is the world we see in front of us, and it is the lowest kind of existence. The spiritual world includes all the upper realms above the physical world, including angels and souls. Higher than that is Hashem – His actual existence and reality.

This has applications to our own soul as well. We can want three different kinds of desires: a desire for physicality, a desire for spirituality (which is not necessarily a desire to be close to Hashem as we will see), and a desire that comes from the deepest place in our soul (called “*Yechidah*”) which seeks to become integrated with Hashem. This deep desire in our soul already recognizes that it is one with Hashem, and thus its sole yearning is to always remain integrated with Him.

These are the three general desires that a person can have: material desires, spiritual desires (but not yet necessarily focused on bonding with Hashem), and the desire to become integrated with Hashem. This deep desire is in the *possuk* (*Tehillim* 73:25), “Who do I have in heaven, and when I am with You, I do not desire this earth.” A person is not meant to search for the physical, and his search does not end with the spiritual either; the real search of a person is for Hashem Himself, to become close to Him. (This is written as well in *Mesillas Yesharim*, Chapter 16.)

Three Levels of Shelo Lishmah

The same can be applied to *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*. If a person has desires for the physical, this is clearly *shelo lishmah*, because he doesn’t have any pure motivations yet. But even if he desires spirituality, this is still *shelo lishmah*, because it is not yet the deeper motivation, which is to strive for a bond with Hashem.

Just like the body conceals the soul, so can “spirituality” also be hampering one’s connection with Hashem! This is when a person wants more “spirituality” in his life, but “Hashem” is not necessarily in his picture.

We have learned so far that there are two levels of *shelo lishmah*. One is simply *shelo lishmah*, like when a person has material desires (and in this there are levels too. There is a simple desire for materialism, as well as deeper desires such as the desire for honor and glory, which is also materialistic). Then there is a higher kind of *shelo lishmah*, and this is when a person wants spiritual levels, such as a desire for ruach hakodesh and heavenly revelations.

There is also a third kind of *shelo lishmah*, and it is the highest kind of *shelo lishmah*. This is when a person has the will to become attached to Hashem, but for ulterior motivations. Even the desire to become close to Hashem can be *shelo lishmah*, as the Mesillas Yesharim writes (Chapter 19).

Closeness to Hashem for Ulterior Motivations (Shelo Lishmah)

The first two levels of *shelo lishmah* are more or less clear to us. We all recognize what it means for a person to have desires for materialistic reasons, as well as desires for spirituality that aren't about connecting to the Ein Sof (Infinity) of Hashem. We understand that these desires are *shelo lishmah*. But the third kind of *shelo lishmah* – a desire to connect with Hashem, but for ulterior motivations – is hard to recognize as ever being *shelo lishmah*.

But it means as follows. Why does a person strive to be close to Hashem? It is because (as is written in the beginning of Mesillas Yesharim) the greatest pleasure that exists is “to bask in the pleasure of Hashem and enjoy His radiance.” If so, a person can want to be close to Hashem, but he's only in it because of the sheer enjoyment of it; he wants to receive pleasure, and he's not yet focused on recognizing the reality of Hashem. As long as a person still wants to be a receiver, it is still *shelo lishmah*. It's a very subtle kind of *shelo lishmah*.

So altogether, there are three kinds of *shelo lishmah*.

Lishmah – Focused Only On Hashem

Now we need to understand: What is *lishmah*, which is a higher desire than any of the above?

It would seem to imply that *lishmah* is to want to be close to Hashem, without any thought of trying to receive pleasure from this. But what we still need to know is, what would bring about that desire in us? What can we do to motivate ourselves in the first place to have a motivation that is entirely pure?

The truth is that it can indeed be spurred on by *shelo lishmah*, as follows: a person recognizes that human perfection is only achieved by being close to Hashem, and since the person has a desire to become perfected, he wants to connect himself to perfection and integrate with it. If so, we can see that even the desire to become integrated with Hashem can still be coming from a subtle kind of *gaavah* (haughtiness) in a person, and so there is really a fourth kind of *shelo lishmah*.

What, then, is the perfect kind of *lishmah*?

Lishmah is that a person can have a will to integrate with Hashem without any reason!

How can a person know if such a desire is coming from an entirely pure motive, or if it is perhaps coming from his *gaavah*, or a desire for spiritual pleasure? How are we able to know where our motivations are coming from?

The answer is called “the secret of *hishtavus* (nullification)”. If Hashem would come to a person and ask him if he is ready to give up his soul level and exchange his soul for a lower level soul, would the person be willing to accept that? If the person is truly willing to become close to Hashem, then he is able to nullify himself to the will of the Hashem,

who (for some unbeknownst reason) wants now that he should receive a lower level soul. If it's about "what Hashem wants", and not what "I" want – that is the true litmus test of what the real motivations in the person are.

If a person is ready for this, this shows that he truly wants to become close to Hashem, because his main concern is about fulfilling the will of Hashem.

A person must thus clarify to himself why he wants to become close to Hashem: is it coming from my *shelo lishmah*, or from my *lishmah*? If it is coming from any desire for some personal gain, it is *shelo lishmah*, but if it is coming from a desire to do the will of Hashem, then it is coming from *lishmah*. There are many kinds of personal reasons why a person would want to become close to Hashem, and we mentioned four different possibilities. There are other personal motivations as well besides for what we mentioned, but these are the general four personal kinds of *shelo lishmah* that can exist.

Shelo lishmah is all about one's "I", the focus on personal interests. *Lishmah* is all about revealing Hashem in a person's life. When a person removes his "I", Hashem can then be revealed in his life.

Now that we have explained what *shelo lishmah* is, we need to understand how *shelo lishmah* can lead to *lishmah*. How does *lishmah* result from *shelo lishmah*?

The Self Is Expressed In The Emotions and In The Thoughts

There are two implications of the "I", a person's self. One part of a person worries for himself in an emotional way, and another part in a person is his mind, the da'as, which is also called the "I" of a person ("I" stand between Hashem and between them.)

To explain this a bit more, there are two expressions of the "I". A person loves himself and does things for himself, which is a result of his "I". This is how the "I" is expressed – through emotions: a person worries for himself, either because he loves himself or because he fears for his safety.

The fact that a person does things for his own survival doesn't yet define a person's self, only the actions that result from the self. For example, a person can still act kind to another person, so we see that it's possible to act when it's not for himself. We can never define an act of a person as being all about *lishmah* or all about *shelo lishmah* - because there are always two possibilities. So when it comes to our emotions\ *middos*, there can be *shelo lishmah* involved, or *lishmah* involved.

But higher than our emotional aspect is a deeper part of our self, and this is our mind. The mind is also called one's "I", as is written, "I stand between Hashem and between them." A person is called a "*bar daas*" – someone capable of a thinking mind; and his very daas is identified as the actual "I."

So if we are trying to define how the process works of leaving *shelo lishmah* and entering *lishmah*, it must be that there are two ways how one must leave his "I." We have already clarified that *shelo lishmah* is one's "I", and *lishmah* is to nullify the "I." If so, we have to nullify our "I" in two ways – both our emotional aspect (*middos*) and our mental aspect (*daas*) – if we are to leave our *shelo lishmah* and reach *lishmah*.

The Lesson from Parah Adumah

We can find a concept that brings out the idea of nullifying the emotional aspect of one's self, from the law of *parah adumah*. When a Kohen uses the *parah adumah* (red heifer) to purify those who have become contaminated from a corpse, he purifies the person who comes to him as he sprinkles him with the blood, and the Kohen himself becomes contaminated in the process. Here we see the concept that a person is willing to do something to help someone else yet give up himself in the process.

We can also see from *parah adumah* how a person can nullify the mental part of himself, to nullify his very daas. This is because Shlomo HaMelech said of *parah adumah* that it is the only mitzvah which his great wisdom didn't allow him to understand: "I said [to myself] that I will try to understand it, but its matter far from me."

"It Is Better Had Man Not Been Created"

The Sages say (*Eruvin 13b*), "It is better had man not been created, but now that he has been created, he should examine his deeds."

What's the point in telling this to us? What happened already happened; we exist now, so why should we know that it would have been better for us had we not been created?

Chazal are telling us, though, an inner revelation about people: We must begin serving Hashem from a lower path and ascend to the higher path (*m'lisata l'eila*). First a person begins to learn Torah and do *mitzvot shelo lishmah*, and from *shelo lishmah* a person arrives at *lishmah*. That is the way to go from the "lower" path to the "higher" path. There is another path, though, and that is when a person works his way downward, beginning from the upper path (*m'leila l'sata*). This is when a person begins with *lishmah* and shines its light upon *shelo lishmah* - by beginning with selfless closeness to Hashem, which is *lishmah*, and ending up by perfecting our "I", which reflects *shelo lishmah*.

If so, when *Chazal* say, "It is better had man not been created," they are revealing to us that that there is a way for a person to begin serving Hashem from the point of "it is better had man not been created" – to begin with total selflessness.

Of course, the simple meaning of *Chazal* still remains true (that *shelo lishmah* is the beginning, which leads to *lishmah*). But there is also an opposite approach contained in their words which is no less true, that "it is better had man not been created." This is when a person begins from selflessness - when all he is concerned about is revealing the reality of Hashem in his life; and his *shelo lishmah* is just like a garment upon his *lishmah*.

The Mission of the "End of Days" Era

We still need to understand, though, how this does not contradict the words of the *Nefesh HaChaim*, who wrote that a person is "always" *shelo lishmah*, and that every person has to start with *shelo lishmah* in order to reach *lishmah*. How we can say the opposite of this, that there is a way to begin with *lishmah*?

However, herein lies the secret to our inner mission. Until the end of this 6,000 year period we are in, we must start with *shelo lishmah*. We are headed towards the end of this era, which will be the true “*olam*” (world), and it will serve as a *he’elam*, (concealment) of this current world. As we head towards that “*olam*”, it can be said of us that we are “*l’olam*” – towards that world.

We are thus currently in “*l’olam*”, and not yet in “*olam*.” Of *l’olam*, our current state, the Mishnah in Avos states that “A person, *l’olam* (should always) learn Torah and do *mitzvos shelo lishmah*, because from *shelo lishmah* will come *lishmah*.”

The current state of affairs is thus to begin with *shelo lishmah*. However, at the very same time, if we reveal already now the light of the future Redemption – of which Hashem said, “For My Sake, I will do it” – then Hashem is revealed in our life, and the “I” in us becomes nullified; the *lishmah* in us is then revealed.

In previous generations, they were far from the redemption, and their *Avodas Hashem* did not permit them to begin with *lishmah*, because the light of the Redemption wasn’t yet close by. They were deeply hit by the exile, and the light of the Redemption was very hidden from them. Thus, they were not allowed to serve Hashem starting from *lishmah*, and they had to start with *shelo lishmah*.

But in our current era, which is the End of Days (*acharis hayomim*), the light of *Moshiach* has already begun to ignite, as the sefarim hakedoshim have written about long before. If so, our *Avodah* now is the opposite, and we can begin from the point of “Better had man not been created” - the point of selflessness in us, the point of *lishmah*. We can begin our *Avodah* by recognizing the truth of Hashem’s existence and to radiate that light downwards, shining it onto our *shelo lishmah*.

To summarize, we have two forms of *Avodas Hashem*. One way is to go upwards starting from the lower point, which is called *m’lisata l’eila* (from the bottom up), and this is the main *Avodas Hashem* of this 6,000 year era. A second way is to start from the higher point and bring it downwards, *m’leila l’sata* – from the point of selflessness, the point of *lishmah* that we can radiate downwards onto our *shelo lishmah*.

We can use both aspects at the same time – on one hand, we are living in this current 6000 year era, but on the other hand, the light of *Moshiach* has begun to shine, so we can utilize the higher point at the same time.

The ability to serve Hashem selflessly has begun to take form as the Redemption draws closer – its light is able to be accessed by us, even in our times.

08 | *Mesirus Nefesh: To Sacrifice for Hashem*

The Message of Death

To continue the discussion begun by the previous chapters, we will give a short introduction to the root of these matters.

When Adam was first fashioned, Hashem placed him in *Gan Eden*, and he had a clear recognition, felt in his heart, that Hashem was in front of him. There was an open revelation of Hashem, and nothing was hidden from man. The first sin came and allowed for the recognition of Hashem to become concealed and hidden, and since all souls were once contained in Adam's soul, every soul became affected from this and thus faces a test in recognizing the reality of Hashem. After the sin, confusion about the truth entered the fabric of Creation, and now each person according to his level is somewhat affected – in his mind and heart – and the truth is now somewhat hidden from people.

Hashem warned Adam that if he eats from the *eitz hadaas*, “For from the day you eat from it, you will surely die.” Here we see that death is in essence a concealment of recognizing the truth of Hashem's existence. “You will surely die.”

However, even where He is concealed from us, it is precisely there where He can become even more revealed to us. The *posuk* says, “For no man can see Me and live,” and the Zohar comments on this, “In life no one can see Him, but in death, they can.”

On one hand, sin resulted in the curse of death, which is essentially the concealment of Hashem from us. On the other hand, death is the time in which Hashem is the most revealed to a person, because a person can't see Him when he's alive, but when he dies, he can then see Him.

The first sin is the root of all concealment about the truth of Hashem's existence. This can get fixed through “death”. There is a power in our soul called “death” – the ability to die *al kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify His Name. Rabbi Akiva awaited his whole life to reveal this ability and be able to die *al kiddush Hashem* (see *Berachos 61a*).

There are two ways to die *al kiddush Hashem*. One way, as we know, is to literally be killed in order to sanctify Hashem's Name, as Rabbi Akiva and the other sages who were martyred by the Romans. But there is another way to “die” *al kiddush Hashem* – this can happen in our very own soul, when we accept upon ourselves something that is very hard to accept.

Before the first sin, Hashem was totally revealed to a person. After the sin, the truth became concealed; the amount of concealment differs with each person, and thus some people have more doubts about Hashem than others. The common denominator between all people after the sin is that all people became somewhat doubtful about the reality of Hashem in their hearts.

If a person has a will to want to feel Hashem, it is thus essentially a will to leave the situation caused by sin and to want to enter the level that existed before the sin of Adam.

When we enter the “pre-sin” state, we are essentially removing the “death” caused by sin. In order to fix up our state of “death”, we instead need to “die” *al kiddush Hashem* – in our soul. We will explain what we mean.

Being Ready To Sacrifice For High Levels

When we speak about dying *al kiddush Hashem*, it seems like something very far from us. In previous generations, this topic was very relevant, but to us, it seems way too far-fetched to talk about.

In this chapter, we will try to explain how it is still very much applicable to us, in our very own life as we know it. We will give a brief introduction.

There are many details in our *Avodas Hashem*. But there is one matter which is all-inclusive; if we have it, then we can acquire all perfection.

If you think about it, a human being by definition cannot ever acquire anything perfectly. A human can never be perfect; only Hashem is perfect. All people have deficiencies.

If one’s “I” is still involved in his *Avodas Hashem*, then he will never be able to acquire any gain perfectly, because since one’s “I” is never perfect, the “I” will always get in the way of reaching perfection.

How, then, can one ever hope to become perfected in any area?

Here is where the secret of “*mesirus nefesh*” comes in: the ability in a person to be self-sacrificing towards Hashem. This matter is written about in the *sefarim hakedoshim* and it has many ramifications. The Rashash wrote that all qualities are gained only through *mesirus nefesh*. It is also brought that if a person wants to make sure he never accidentally eats *treif* (non-kosher), besides for being careful in the regular Halachic sense, he should have *mesirus nefesh* when it comes to keeping kosher. In other words, he should decide that if *chas v’shalom* he ever comes across food that is *treif*, he’d rather die than eat it.

This is just one example, but the concept can be applied to everything in *Avodas Hashem*. *Chazal* say that “the words of Torah only exist by one who dies over them” (*Berachos 63b*). The way you “die” over Torah is by having *mesirus nefesh* for it – by being prepared, in your soul, to die over it if you must.

We don’t mean to actually give up your life; there is almost no one who has to do this. We mean to potentially give it up – to be prepared for such a thing and develop in yourself the potential ability to do it. For example, if Hashem would come and give you either the choice to live without a certain spiritual attainment, or to reach a certain attainment but to die for it – what would you choose?

An Internal Examination: What Is Our Life Worth If We Are Missing Some Ruchniyus?

The truth is that this matter needs an inner clarification. If someone claims that he’s already ready for this immediately upon seeing these words, it’s highly doubtful if he will practice what he preaches if he is tested, and he’s just imagining that he’s already at the level of *mesirus nefesh*.

A person has to come to an inner decision to be prepared to even give up his current level in *Avodas Hashem* in order to receive a higher level – if he knows that has more to improve on, then he should want to give up his current life rather than remain on his current level. This should not be done out of feeling morbid about one’s life or as an escape from the stress of life. It should come from recognition that this is really what life is all about, and that a life without this acceptance is really death. In other words, don’t think you’re giving up anything for this! You’re instead gaining the real kind of life. That is the real attitude to look at it.

If a person wants to acquire a certain area in *Avodas Hashem*, he has to work very hard to get it. But the truth is that it’s not really within his reach to get it; after all, he is only human, and without the help of Hashem, nothing is possible. *Chazal* say (*Sukkah 52a*) “If not for Hashem helping a person, it would be impossible to overcome.” This doesn’t mean simply that Hashem gives a person help from some outer force; it means that when Hashem is revealed inside a person’s soul, He assists the person from within, and through that a person is able to achieve something.

We already brought the words of *Chazal* that Hashem says of a *baal gaavah*, “I and him cannot dwell under one roof.” As long as a person’s “I” is still in the picture, he doesn’t receive help from Hashem. If a person is willing to give up his ego, like to give up his current life that lacks a higher level – rather than live without that level – he has the key to acquire all spiritual attainments.

If a person wants to reach a higher level in *Avodas Hashem*, but he feels that he can still live without it – it’s as if he wants both the physical world and the world to come at once, which cannot co-exist, as the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes.

When *Eliyahu Hanavi* faced the false prophets at Mt. Carmel, there were two sides – truth and falsehood. Those who knew the truth sided with *Eliyahu*, and those who were swayed by falsity stood with the false prophets. Every soul as well has to go through a test to choose between the truth and falsehood. A person has to clarify to himself if his life is worth living without the higher levels he hasn’t yet reached. If he feels that he is able to go on his life even though he hasn’t attained higher levels yet in his life, then his “I” is getting in the way of his growth in *Avodas Hashem*. But if a person is prepared to give up his life in order to receive a higher level in *Avodas Hashem*, he has the key to it all.

Many people are trying to serve Hashem, but there are two kinds of people that serve Hashem. There are people who serve Hashem in an inner way, while there are many others who are just suffering and enduring the experiences of life, yet that doesn’t make them “servants of Hashem”. How can we tell the difference between them?

Those who are really serving Hashem are living a life of *mesirus nefesh*, every second. As long as a person isn’t ready yet to give up his life for Hashem, he never passed his true test in his life (and every person has to at some point pass the “test of the *Akeidah*” in his life...). *Yiras Hashem* (fear of G-d) is only reached if we pass the true test in life, just as *Avraham Avinu*’s greatness was only proved by his tenth and final test.

Without that sense of fear of Hashem in life – without realizing that it is better to be dead rather to be alive and not grow spiritually – a person will never be able to really acquire any matter in his *Avodas Hashem*.

The Inner Redemption

At first, these words seem very far from us, too difficult to work on, and perhaps way too lofty of a concept. But we cannot run away from the truth. When a person wants both this physical world and he also wants to grow spiritually, he must know that he is sorely mistaken.

Moshiach ben David is called “*bar nafli*” (*Sanhedrin 96b*). He will have no ego, and he will be entirely self-sacrificing for Hashem. This is the secret of the redemption. There will be a general redemption, in which we all await for *Moshiach* ben David to come; there is also a personal redemption, however, that each person can reveal in his very own soul – “My soul will be drawn close to her redemption.” There is a private redemption that can take place in every individual Jew’s soul.

Just like the *Moshiach* who will come in the general redemption will be someone who has no life to himself and he will be all about *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem, so can each individual Jew strive for his own personal redemption and have *mesirus nefesh* to give up what he wants for closeness to Hashem.

These words apply to all areas of *Avodas Hashem* – they can be applied to any area a person wants to attain.

Vitality of the Soul – Revealing G-dliness

Hashem breathed a soul into man, from His very own spirit. The nishmas chaim, “breathe of life” which Hashem breathed into us, is a G-dly source of vitality that is found in every soul. To what does this apply?

A person generally feels that he is in charge of his life, and it is upon him to give himself up for Hashem if he wants to acquire spiritual attainment, as we said.

But it is even more than this. Hashem breathed into us a spirit that comes from His own breath, so to speak – and this means that the vitality in our own soul is not our own; it is from Hashem! If so, *mesirus nefesh* really means that one is revealing that his vitality, the air he breathes, is really coming directly from Hashem. “And I will dwell in his innards.” Hashem is found in each person, and we only have to bring Him out from concealment and reveal Him.

That should be the true way to realize it: all our life-force is a revelation of the G-dliness which Hashem has placed in us, and in order to feel this, we need *mesirus nefesh*. After a person has decided with conviction that he will give up his lifestyle for Hashem, he will realize that really he isn’t giving up anything! He has only given to Hashem what was already His in the first place. After all, his very life-force is a piece of Hashem. All our life and vitality streams to us directly from Hashem, and when a person truly recognizes this, he realizes that the energy in him is not his own, but a G-dly vitality sustaining him.

The *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) is called a “strange god” who inhabits the body of a person (*Shabbos 105b*). On a very subtle note, perhaps it can be said that a person tends to view the G-dliness in himself as something strange and foreign to him, and this is really because a person feels his ego very strongly, thus he doesn’t feel the G-dly vitality sustaining him every second.

A person's *Avodah* is to clarify and recognize how each thing contains a G-dly vitality that sustains it. We do not mean for this to become mere intellectual information; any person who has read a little knows this. We mean that a person has to realize how the life-giving energy in each creation by essence comes from Hashem.

In order to clarify this concept, one has to clear away his own existence and give room for Hashem space to enter and be revealed in him.

There is also a more subtle kind of *Avodah* here.

From a superficial perspective, *mesirus nefesh* is that a person has to, let's say, give up some of his money to help someone out. If so, the attitude is that really the money is mine, but I'm giving it up for another, a good *middah* of being charitable. *Mesirus nefesh* in our *Avodas Hashem*, though, is much more than this. It is to feel that we're really not giving away anything for Hashem! We have to realize that our situation, without being prepared to give up anything for Hashem, is not really a life, but a deathlike kind of existence. So you're not really "giving up" your life for Hashem; you are instead gaining for yourself the true life, by being prepared to "give up" for Hashem.

If a person feels that he's giving up for Hashem, it will be very difficult for him to serve Hashem, because he will always feel like he is stepping on his ego and losing control over his life. He will always feel like he's depriving himself with all his *mesirus nefesh*. It is, of course, possible for a person to serve Hashem even with this attitude; but it will be very difficult. The simple way to do it is to realize that you don't really have anything of your own to give away to Hashem.

So altogether there are three levels:

1. That one feels like he is giving up "his life" for Hashem – and he feels deprived in doing so.
2. That he realizes that all of his life comes from Hashem.
3. That he realizes that he doesn't really have what to give away in the first place, because without *mesirus nefesh*, life is not a life, but death.

Above Free Will

Chazal (*Shabbos 151a*) state that when *Moshiach* comes, one of the changes that will happen is that there will be no more *bechirah* (free will).

Why are *Chazal* telling us what will be when *Moshiach* comes? Of what relevance does it have to us? What is the point in revealing to us that in the future our power to choose will disappear?

Chazal are revealing to us here that if a person reaches the inner point in himself – the ability of personal redemption, which can be reached even in today's times – he realizes the truth, that he is really not "giving" anything towards Hashem. We really have nothing to "give"; all we can do is reveal Hashem's existence.

That is how our power of free will disappears in the future. Free will means that I have what to give to Hashem, and I am choosing to give it for Him; “I’m in charge.” But in the future, we will “choose” not to “choose” – we will realize that all of life belongs to Hashem, not ourselves.

The true aspiration for perfection a person must have is to realize that there is G-dliness sustaining everything, and that means that Hashem is everything, as the Baal Shem Tov wrote. A person’s simple mission is to realize that everything belongs to Hashem, and that we have nothing to give to Him.

It’s possible that a person can know all this in his mind and even say these words over with his mouth, but that doesn’t mean he is there yet. If a person wants to live these words, he has to be prepared to die at any second for Hashem; otherwise, he still thinks he’s in charge of his life, and all these words will just be a superficial discussion.

This is the secret of the “light of *Moshiach*” which began to become revealed during the time of the Baal Shem Tov. It is for a person to really check himself and see if he’s ready to have true *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem – to be above the regular kind of *mesirus nefesh*.

“May He swallow up death forever.” In the future, there will be no more death, and this is because we will all realize that life isn’t possible without Hashem. When we realize that, there cannot be death, because then the “true life” will be revealed – the revelation of Hashem’s existence and how He sustains the world.

On one hand, these words are about a very lofty concept, but on the other hand, they should be so simple to every person, as simple as can be. If a person has matured in his *ruchniyus* (spirituality), he should know that one cannot want both. It’s either or. A person is either prepared to give his life for Hashem, or he isn’t, which means that he will just go through constant ups and downs in his *ruchniyus* and he will never really get anywhere.

These words are clear, simple, and well-known to anyone who serves Hashem in an inner way. This is how the earlier generations were able to readily give up their lives al kiddush Hashem; they were thus deserving of miracles, because they were in control of the tendency in people towards superficiality.

Every single person has the power to be able to give himself up for Hashem, to accept that he is prepared even to die (if he must) in order to attain more closeness to Hashem.

May Hashem merit the entire Jewish people that we be inclined to serve Him, and that we should quickly merit the truest revelation of all – “And Hashem will remain, alone” – as a personal revelation in each of our souls.

09 | *Emunah Together With Torah*

Four Approaches to Avodas Hashem

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt”l*, the Mashgiach of the Mir, said that “Reb Yisrael Salanter taught *mussar* (ethics), the Alter of Kelm taught the “chochmah” (wisdom) of *mussar*, and I (Reb Yeruchem) teach the “*daas*” (knowledge\applications) of chochmah and *mussar*.”

The truth is that after Reb Yeruchem Levovitz’s approach, there is a fourth level that can be added on, which was defined by Reb Chatzkel Levenstein *zt”l*: *Emunah* (faith). Reb Chatzkel, as is well-known, mainly spoke about *Emunah*.

The statement of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz meant as follows. Reb Yisrael Salanter revealed only *mussar*, which was comprised of two things: repeating the words of *Chazal* with enthusiasm, and the ability to imagine the punishments of Gehinnom. The writings of the Alter of Kelm, which are called “Chochmah U’*Mussar*”, reveal different matters – matters that require a lot of thought, and through absorbing it, one comes to an appreciation of the matters. Reb Yeruchem’s writings went beyond that, and described a deep look into Creation and into the ways of Hashem. This is described in his *sefer*, “*Daas Chochmah U’Mussar*”.

Reb Chatzkel *zt”l* focused mainly, though on *Emunah* in his talks. This was his innovative approach. Although it was based on what he had heard from his mentor, Reb Yeruchem Levovitz, it was his move to put the emphasis on *Emunah*.

Each soul is unique, and no two souls are alike. Although each of these great people received a method from their teacher, each of them still had their own unique approach, because each of their souls uncovered a unique point which was their focus.

In order for a person to use the approach of Reb Yisrael Salanter, he has to learn how to repeat a statement of *Chazal* with enthusiasm, and this requires a lot of strength of character. A person has to be very stubborn for this, and he also needs a powerful kind of imagination that will allow him to think about Gehinnom in an effective way that won’t harm him.

As for the Alter of Kelm’s approach, his language is very sharp in many places, and one needs a strong level of understanding, as well as a subtle sense, to get to the depth of his words. If someone doesn’t have highly developed feelings, he cannot understand or appreciate any of the words of the Alter of Kelm. The Alter of Kelm spoke of *mussar*, not about intellectual matters; if one isn’t pulled toward *mussar*, he won’t have the patience to get through his words.

The writings of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz often quote the works of the Ramchal, and one needs to have a lot of knowledge about the inner world in order to understand what he is talking about. Although Reb Yeruchem Levovitz spoke on a simpler level to people when he gave his talks, his words are very deep, and if someone doesn’t know the root of what he is talking about, he will only receive the external meaning of the words. He will receive the

“branches” of the discussion without the “roots” of the discussion, and therefore he doesn’t really understand what is being said.

If a person hears any of these great people’s words and he knows the root of the matters they spoke about, he is able to reach an astounding level of understanding about this world, and he knows about the deeper meaning of Creation. But if someone just hears or reads their words and doesn’t understand the root concept of what they were saying, he just sees this detail and that detail, and it is very difficult to add up all the details and come up with a plan in *Avodas Hashem* from them. Each point is something else, and they do not connect.

This is where the method of Reb Chatzkel Levenstein came in. By speaking about *emunah* peshutah, simple faith in Hashem – the root of all his words is always the same: that we need to return to *emunah*. Although he is also spoke about other concepts, such as the ability to imagine Gehinnom, the main point which he always spoke from was *emunah peshutah*.

We will explain in this chapter the fourth approach in *Avodas Hashem* – the way of Reb Chatzkel Levenstein *zt”l*: *emunah*. With the help of Hashem we will continue to explain the root and the depth of what we need to work on, and how everything else which we need to work on are only what results from it.

“The Whole World Is Sustained Through Chanina, My Son”

The most fundamental mitzvah we have upon us is *emunah*. The Rambam (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*) writes “the fundamental of all fundamentals and the pillar of all wisdom is to know that there is a Creator who first existed.” The root of all our beliefs is that there is a Creator, and from this we believe as well that He created this world, and that He runs everything; etc.

There are many kinds of *emunah* that result from the belief that there is a Creator. For example, we have *emunah* as well that we all stood by Har Sinai and received the Torah. This *emunah*, though, has to come after we firmly believe that there is a Creator, because without belief in a Creator *chas v’shalom*, Who gave us the Torah?

In other words, our *Avodas Hashem* – which mainly consists of learning Torah - has to be based upon the simple belief that we all accept, which is deeply rooted in every Jew’s soul – that there is a Creator. “I am Hashem, your G-d.” This is the clear fundamental point that any believer knows of.

That is the beginning point of everything, and everything else continues from there. Now that we believe that there is a Creator and that He gave us the Torah, we try to figure out what He wants. His main will from us is that we learn Torah, and the results that come from this are that we carry out what it says in the Torah.

So the root of all our beliefs – the simple belief that Hashem exists – is not something we actually do in our *Avodas Hashem*; rather, it is something which if one doesn’t have it *chas v’shalom*, all his Torah learning and *mitzvos* have nothing to stand on. A person who already believes in Hashem, then, has a clear job: to do His will, which is to learn Torah and do the *mitzvos*.

That is the simple outlook one needs to have. But we also have to know something else. Just like “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”, so is learning the Torah the source of all sustenance in the universe. When a Jew sits and learns Torah, he is bestowing vitality upon people on this world.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner wrote extensively about this (in *sefer Ruach Chaim*, Avos 1:3): “At their root, all the *mitzvos* awaken much good and awesome effects throughout all the universes, and they bring about sustenance and other gains. But if few people do *mitzvos*, there are fewer channels to bring down the heavenly sustenance toward the universe; if this is the situation, Hashem, in His mercy, Who desires that all people be sustained, even those who aren’t worthy, takes away the sustenance from those who fear Him and instead splits it up amongst all people; He might even at times take it all away from one single person who is the one channeling down all the heavenly sustenance, and this person won’t even receive what he himself has drawn down to the world. This is like what is said of Rav Chanina ben Dosa, of whom Hashem said, “The entire world is sustained because of Chanina, My son...who can survive just on a measure of carobs”. Rav Chanina was a channel of heavenly sustenance, yet he himself didn’t receive it, because he was able to be satisfied with little.”

The “Rav Chanina” of every generation is those who learn Torah. Those who learn Torah are sustaining the world – they are the pipe that channels down all heavenly sustenance onto this world.

Every generation has its own unique form of sustenance – both physically and spiritually. Even the methods of learning Torah have changed throughout the generations. We can see this when we compare the words of the earlier generations with the words of later generations. They are all true, but each generation has its own unique expression in *Avodas Hashem*, according to the Torah.

In the way that the Torah is affecting the world, that affects the quality of how the world is sustained from it. Each generation was thus sustained in a different way, through the way that the Torah was revealed in that specific generation.

There is a “Rav Chanina” in every generation – in other words, there is a head of Torah in every generation who sustains everyone. This is also known as the “Moshe *Rabbeinu*” found in every generation.

The Level of Learning Is According To How Clear The Emunah Is

A *tzaddik* is the channel that brings heavenly sustenance down to this world. He is not just a channel; what he does actually fashions the nature of the sustenance!

We can explain this with a simple parable. When a person needs to drink water, it doesn’t make a difference what cup he uses; the water always tastes the same. But if someone is cooking food, the food will taste differently depending on if he cooks it in a pot of water, or in a frying pan with oil. Every kitchen appliance has its own way how it cooks, and the food comes out differently with each one.

This is how we can understand the inner point we are describing. The fact that we believe in the Creator and that the Torah comes from Him – this itself is the channel which with through it, we can receive the Torah. It is not just

that Hashem “gave” us the Torah, as we say in the blessings; it is more than that. The root of our Torah learning is the belief that there is a Creator, and that the Torah comes from Him.

In even clearer words: the clearer our belief is in the Creator and that the Torah comes from Him – the more we reveal this belief – the clearer our Torah learning becomes, and the higher of a level our learning will be on.

If *emunah* would just be a subject that is separate from learning Torah, than when a person is sitting and learning Torah, it wouldn't matter how strong his *emunah* is. The main thing would be that he's sitting and learning and applying all his energies to learning Torah.

But now that we have clarified that we only receive the Torah according to how powerful it has been channeled toward us – “For Hashem gives wisdom, and from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding” (*Mishlei 2:6*) – then it is clear that if a person really wants to understand the Torah in a true way, he needs to strongly reveal his *emunah*. According to the strength of one's *emunah*, that is how much truthful understanding of the Torah he will be revealed by Hashem.

This is the inner meaning of the statement of *Chazal* (*Berachos 20a*), “The earlier generations gave up their lives to sanctify the Name of Hashem, while we (the later generations) do not.” The greatness of the earlier generations was that their *emunah* was very clear, and it was very much revealed in their hearts.

In the writings of the Rambam, we can see how clear his *emunah* was. His great knowledge in matters of *emunah* all came from his own clarity in *emunah* which he achieved.

When a person believes in the Creator and that the Torah is from Him, he draws his soul toward the Torah. The less *emunah* a person has, though, the less true understanding of Torah he will merit.

Torah and Doing Teshuvah

This applies directly toward our own *Avodah*. The *Nefesh HaChaim* (4:7) writes, “It is proper for a person to prepare himself at all times, before he begins to learn Torah, to think a little about the Creator, with purity of heart and fear of Him, and to purify himself from his sins by thinking about *teshuvah* (repenting), so that he can be connected and cling to Him even as he learns Torah...and in the middle of his learning, permission is granted to a person that he take a short break and reinforce his fear of Hashem, which he took upon himself as he began to learn, that is shouldn't become extinguished; he should think again about his fear of Hashem.”

In other words, before a person sits down to learn Torah, he should do *teshuvah*, and even in middle of learning, a person is allowed to make short interruptions to remind himself about Yiras Hashem.

This was also the way of the Vilna *Gaon*, who would interrupt his learning four times a day to learn *mussar*. This doesn't mean that he began to suddenly work on his *middos* in middle of his learning. It is a much deeper matter, as we will see.

The *teshuvah* which the *Nefesh HaChaim* says to do in middle of learning needs some questioning. Teshuvah is indeed one of the *mitzvos*, but why do we need to do it in middle of learning? Is it because it's a mitzvah that can only be done by you and no one else, which it is permitted to interrupt learning for?

It is because the true way to learn Torah is together with *teshuvah*.

The Torah is something which we receive from Hashem; we need *teshuvah* to receive it because that cleanses us from sin, enabling us to return to Hashem. Doing *teshuvah* before we learn creates the right atmosphere in order to learn Torah, because it reveals to us from Whom we are receiving the Torah from.

When a person sins, his *emunah* is diminished; thus *teshuvah* does not only serve as regretting the sin, but it helps return one to the recognition that he has Whom to fear. This is why the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that *teshuvah* and learning Torah are intertwined. When a person does *teshuvah*, he purifies his heart, and from this he can recognize Whom he must be afraid of and Whom he receives Torah from.

Torah and Tefillah

Herein lies the secret of how *emunah* relates to our Torah learning and is necessary for it.

We know that learning Torah is the most important mitzvah. It is the root of all the *mitzvos*, and it must be based on *emunah* revealed in our heart. This does not mean that one should stop learning Torah in order to instill in himself *emunah*. It is rather that a person must sharpen his *emunah* with the more he learns Torah. This has to be done while a person is learning Torah – not separate from it.

The Chazon Ish wrote that learning Torah and davening are intertwined one with another. When he did not understand something he was learning, he would daven to Hashem about it. From a superficial sense, it seems that just as davening helps a person earn a living or get a *shidduch*, so does davening help one's learning.

That is true, but it is a deeper matter. All things have to come through davening, but the only thing that davening is really intertwined with is Torah. This is because Torah is an entirely spiritual matter, for “Hashem and the Torah are one.” Thus, the Chazon Ish wrote that when a person learns Torah and he wants to be connected with Hashem, on one hand he should be focused on his learning, but on the other hand, he should also be focused on the Creator.

“Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people are one.”⁴ When a person learns Torah and he makes sure to turn to Hashem in prayer as well when he learns, his soul is attached to the Torah as he learns, and in turn he is attached to Hashem.

How Teshuvah and Tefillah Are Needed In Order To Learn Torah

Herein lays a great fundamental. Both the *Nefesh HaChaim* and the Chazon Ish are saying that we need to add on things to our learning. The *Nefesh HaChaim* wrote that we must do Teshuvah as we learn Torah, and the Chazon Ish wrote that we must daven as we learn Torah.

⁴ *Zohar*

There seems to be a great contradiction, however. The Chazon Ish (Igros, Vol. I, Letter 3) himself wrote that “the main learning of Torah is when it is constant and uninterrupted. Constant learning is the secret to holiness, and if someone interrupts his learning, his learning is like torn pieces, and it is as if he has gathered air.”

How, then, is one allowed to interrupt his learning for *Teshuvah* and *Tefillah*?

Also, *Chazal* (*Avos 3:7*) warned that if someone interrupts his learning even to look at a nice tree, he is liable to death. Even though he has stopped to contemplate the greatness of Hashem, still, he was not allowed to interrupt his learning. How, then, can one stop in the middle of his learning to daven or to do *Teshuvah*?

It must be because the Torah is only continued through *Tefillah* and *Teshuvah*. So without *Tefillah* and *Teshuvah*, there is no Torah, because it can't continue without them.

This is because learning Torah requires a connection with Hashem. Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people are one; the Torah by itself is not one – it is only “one” when it is together with Hashem. So if a person learns Torah but he is far from Hashem – either because he isn't davening to Him or because he isn't doing *Teshuvah* – this will make his learning “like torn pieces to him.”

The words here were already written long before, and they are clear; it is just that we have to actually see them. We need to see that learning Torah is connected with a bond with Hashem, and this was always the way of our earlier leaders.

What Is The Main Thing – Torah, or Hashem?

We are speaking about *emunah*. We must know that Torah and *emunah* in Hashem are not two different subjects. They must be connected, by essence.

The *yetzer hora* convinces a person that *emunah* is more of an intellectual matter, while a person's actual heart and focus should be on his learning, and that one is allowed to be disconnected in this way. But there is no such thing! Such a mentality is not written in any place!

This mistaken attitude must come from the fact that a person is so used to forgetting about Hashem. We make a blessing before we learn Torah so that we can be reminded of Who gave us the Torah. We must be connected with Hashem both before we learn Torah and as we learn Torah. It is clear to all that we must learn Torah, but we must also never forget for Whom we are learning. *Emunah* and Torah have to be equally important to us. Our learning Torah has to also be nursed from our *emunah*, and not just from our intellect.

If a person learns Torah and tries to figure it out without any intention of deepening his *emunah*, *Teshuvah* or *Tefillah* through it, he is lowering the importance of the Torah, *chas v'shalom*.

“The Torah is precious to Hashem” – (chaviva oiraisa kamei d’kudsha berich hu). The Torah is precious to Hashem because He is one with the Torah; since the purpose of mankind is to become attached to Hashem, we must know our purpose and the tool that brings us to that purpose. If a person uses that “tool” (Torah) to get to Hashem, then he understands why the Torah is precious to Hashem; he understands that Hashem and the Torah are one.

For this reason, the *Nefesh HaChaim* wrote that one must include Hashem in his learning, even while he learns.

But if a person *chas v’shalom* is disconnected from Hashem in his heart and he is only involved in “learning”, he loses the value of Torah, and he insults it. The Torah is precious if it is “one” with Hashem, but without Hashem in the picture, it loses its value. Besides for the fact that such a person doesn’t have Hashem in his life, he also loses the worth of his learning.

The Jewish people are also precious to Hashem; we were chosen amongst all the nations. This is also because Hashem is one with the Jewish people.

If a person doesn’t have Hashem in his life, then he doesn’t either really have importance for other Jews. He has the “Shema Yisrael” part, but not the “Hashem elokeinu” part!

If a person wants to internalize how learning Torah is the most important mission he has on this world, what should be his mentality? What can he think to feel how special the Torah is from all the other *mitzvos*?

The *Nefesh HaChaim* lists many great things about learning the Torah: it can change decrees, it draws down heavenly sustenance, it sustains all the universes, it can revive the dead, and other things as well. But what is the deepest quality that is contained in learning Torah? What can we think about that will give us the most importance possible toward it?

To say that the deepest thing that learning Torah achieves is that it merits a person to get resurrected from the dead is still just being superficial. Yes, the Torah merits a person to be revived from the dead, but why? The answer is because the revival of the dead in the future will be a revelation of Hashem. Our purpose is to become attached with Hashem, and the tool that brings this is about is the Torah.

Our learning Torah has to be us “one” with Hashem. If one remembers this when he learns – if one learns Torah and he wants to get to that oneness with Hashem – then he must reveal his *emunah* in Hashem, and he must also firmly believe that Hashem gave us the Torah. Hashem said about the Torah that He cannot part from it; the whole purpose of learning Torah is so that we attach ourselves to Hashem through it.

Unifying With Hashem – Our Whole Life

Thus, Torah unifies us with Hashem, and in order to reach this unity, we need to reveal Hashem in our life. If we have sins on us, this holds back the revelation, and that is why we need Teshuvah.

If a person wants to internalize what the point of life is, he needs to be cautious of a certain mistaken mentality: it’s possible that a person always thinks that the purpose of life is Torah. That is true – utterly true. But why, indeed, is that the purpose? Why is Torah specifically our purpose in life? The *Nefesh HaChaim* says because there is nothing that connects a person more with Hashem than learning Torah.

Since this is so, we need to reveal this in our soul.

Let us clarify even more what is meant here: it's possible that a person knows in his mind that "Hashem and the Torah are one", but what is he thinking as he's actually learning? Does he want to connect with Hashem through his learning? If he does, he would do Teshuvah, because since he wants the connection, he will realize that he has to remove the barriers that are holding back the connection; and he would also daven to Hashem, as the Chazon Ish wrote.

A person needs to receive the proper outlook to have on life. Life is one thing alone: to unify with Hashem. How do we unify with Him? First of all, we need *emunah* - to believe He exists. Without knowing He exists, a person can't unify with Him.

Emunah does not mean an intellectual belief, but a recognition in one's heart! When *emunah* is in one's heart, and a person realizes clearly that the purpose of learning the Torah is to unify with Hashem – and that is why one must never cease from learning Torah, so that the connection is never broken – such a person always lives with the Torah as a way to be connected with Hashem.

These words are simple and clear, and they are already written in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*. But they must become to us a way of life, not as mere knowledge. We have to reveal this fact in our life – that Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people are all one.

May Hashem help all of us to truly serve Him, and that we should all soon merit the revelation of His glorious kingship.

2 *Matters of Intellect*

10 | *Unifying Everything Into One Point*

The Simple Approach Combined With the Intellectual Approach

When we come to speak about matters in *Avodas Hashem*, there are two ways how we can go about this. One way is to speak of it with a simple approach, and this is called peshitus (simplicity). The other way is to speak about it intellectually – to utilize our mind’s thinking abilities of Chochmah (wisdom), *Binah* (contemplation) and Daas (connection to our knowledge).

It is essentially a question of which path to take. Should we start with the simple approach so that we can get to the simple awareness of Hashem, or should we start by thinking about this very intellectually (so that we can arrive at this simple reality)? Either way, the goal is the same: we are trying to reach Hashem, Who is defined by the sefarim hakedoshim as the most simple Reality that there is.

If we take the path of simplicity, then our job is not complicating, because it is a simple approach. Simplicity is that a person thinks about Hashem – simply, at all times, verbally and mentally as much as each person can. The goal is to be able to live simply with Hashem throughout the day – in our words we speak, and in the thoughts we think. That is if we take the simple approach.

But as a person expands his mind more, his heart is still closed, and simplicity will actually become very difficult to work with. This is because the intellect, which has now grown, is the opposite of simple thinking, and when the intellect is mainly at work, the heart, which is the source of simple thinking, actually becomes concealed! If this is the case, it will be easier for a person to take the intellectual route and from that, to come to reach Hashem.

However, when it comes to *Avodas Hashem*, “all paths are dangerous.” If a person only involves his intellect in *Avodas Hashem* (and he only thinks deeply, never simply), then there is a danger that only intellect speaks to him, and he will never reach his heart, which is the ability to live simply with Hashem at all times. On the other hand, if a person only takes the path of simplicity, he won’t have this problem, but he will have a different problem: it will be very challenging for him to absorb these concepts, because he is dealing with facts that aren’t tangible at first, and his mind isn’t strong enough to comprehend these matters. What will happen is that because he can’t comprehend these matters, he is apt to think that he is just imagining these concepts, and the result will be that he will become very disconnected from himself.

Which path, then, do we take? Do we go with simplicity, or do we go with the intellectual approach? Such a decision really needs a prophet to decide; the Ramban writes that in the time of the prophets, everyone would come to them, and the prophet would tell him what his soul needed to accomplish on this world. If a person takes the wrong path of *Avodas Hashem* in life, he actually causes destruction to his soul in the process! If a person wants to be

successful in life, he really should cry to Hashem about this for days and nights, until he clarifies which path to take in how to serve Hashem.

Of course, there are many more paths in *Avodas Hashem* besides for the two which we mentioned, but these two are the root paths from which all other paths stem out of. There are two general ways how we turn to Hashem: either through simplicity (to simply think about His existence), or through probing the matter with our intellect.

The words in the coming chapters are the second way, which is the intellectual approach. If someone feels that his path to take is simplicity – he feels that simplicity is what speaks more to his heart – then he needs to hear something else other than the following words. It is not because he is incorrect; it is rather because each person has to serve Hashem according to the path that is appropriate for his soul.

We have given this introduction so that we can be clear which path we are taking, as we discuss the words in the coming chapters.

Wisdom Unifies

It is written (*Tehillim 104:24*), “You made them all with wisdom.” All of Creation is a wisdom! This is not by chance. The power of wisdom – *Chochmah* - really contains everything, and it can come and unify everything. If it wouldn't, we wouldn't be able to say, “You made them all with wisdom.”

Before the world was created, it was a state of “Hashem was One, and His Name was One.” After the world was created, this oneness still continues. Day and night are called “one day”. The day is a revelation of the oneness found in Creation; and the root of all creations, which is the Jewish people, are called “one”: “You are One, and Your Name is One, and who is like Your nation, Yisrael, one nation in the earth.”

This applies to our mission as follows.

Chochmah\wisdom is when we take details and connect them. *Chochmah* is supposed to bring us to come to unify everything. Anyone who realizes the inner essence of *Chochmah* can see that this is the whole point of *Chochmah*: to unify details, to reveal the root of all details.

This is also the power in Creation known as *achdus* (unity).

Anyone hearing this the first time will find it very strange. When a person isn't there in the point we are describing, it does seem very perplexing: What does *Chochmah*\wisdom have to do with *Achdus*\unity?! It sounds more like another detail about *Chochmah*, but how can unity be the entire essence of *Chochmah*?!

But if one understands the depth of Creation, he knows that all of Creation is really all about unity.

The Inner Source of Wisdom – The Power of Unity in the Heart

There are three levels of *achdus*: the first level is called *achdus* (unity), the higher level is called *echad* (one), and the highest level is called *yachid* (individual).

The first level, *achdus*, is when two things are separate, and they become unified. The higher level, *echad*, is when they are one to begin with. The highest level, *yachid*, is when there is nothing except Hashem – the recognition of *Ain Od Milvado*.

In order to aspire to reach Hashem, the tool to get to Him is by turning all of Creation into one unit. Only through this can we reveal the Creator of the world, Who is *yachid*, because there is none other besides for Him.

When the various forces in our soul are scattered and not connected into one unit – and when there is disparity among people – there is separation in the world, and the world cannot be a tool to hold the presence of Hashem.

We are living after the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, which was destroyed because of baseless hatred. This hatred “still dances among us” (*Yoma 69b*). Baseless hatred (*sinas chinam*) is a force of separation in the world, which is the opposite of the *Beis Hamikdash*, the place in the world that held the Shechinah. In each person’s heart, there can be a personal “*Beis Hamikdash*” – when we reveal Hashem inside us. Baseless hatred, though, holds back one’s personal *Beis Hamikdash* within, because the disparity within a person doesn’t allow the unity to enter.

The power of *achdus*\unity is located in the heart, and from it, the rest of the body thrives on. It is the power which connects all of Creation together. “There is nothing that is not hinted to in the Torah.” This is because Torah, the essence of all wisdom, contains everything. This is the secret that *Chochmah*\wisdom accomplishes.

Chochmah is also called “wisdom of the heart”, as it is written (*Shemos 35:10*), “And all those who are wise of heart.” It is also written (*Koheles 1:16*), “My heart has seen much wisdom.” When a person only has *Chochmah* in his intellect, it’s not really *Chochmah*, and such knowledge is just a scattered kind of wisdom; the facts to such a person don’t bear any connection to each other. *Chochmah* is only considered *Chochmah* when a person’s knowledge is in his heart – “wise of heart.” The power of *achdus*\unity found in the heart is the source of all wisdom, and all wisdom stems from this power.

The fact that we have 613 *mitzvos* seems to imply that we have many “separate” tasks to fulfill. But there is one root that unifies all this together: Rav Saadiah *Gaon* writes that the positive commandment “I am Hashem your G-d” is the root of all the positive commandments, and the commandment “You shall not have any other gods” is the root of all negative commandments. *Chazal* (*Makkos 24a*) tell us that these first two commandments were told to us directly by Hashem; if so, why do we need all the other *mitzvos*? It is because the entire Torah is about unity – to show how the first two commandments unify all 613 *mitzvos* together.

At the giving of the Torah, Hashem opened up all seven layers of heaven and showed us that there is nothing else besides Him (*Devorim Rabbah 7:9*). The root and source of all wisdom is this – *Ain Od Milvado*, there is nothing besides for Hashem. This is *yachid* – the deepest manifestation of unity.

Unifying Everything Into One

What is our inner mission that is hidden from us?

There are many works of *mussar* that have been written throughout the generations. When a person learns *mussar*, and surely when he learns a lot of *mussar* sefarim, he sees many points that he has to work on, and these are all

truthful points. They all come from one pure source, and all the advice that a person sees in the sefarim are holy and true. The problem is, though, that there are so many details, and it is overwhelming.

However, here lies the secret to success – or failure.

If a person sees one underlying point from all the *mussar* sefarim he learns, he will be successful. If he sees this point and that point, though, he is already on his way toward failure.

What we need to do is to learn how to see one point alone throughout all the *mussar* we learn. In this way, we will find ourselves in a world of *achdus*, because all the details will be unified into one point. This will serve as a tool for us to connect with Hashem.

But if a person learns *mussar* sefarim and he sees more than one point contained in them, and he looks at all this information as many pieces of knowledge and advice – this is already a viewpoint of separation, and it distances a person from connecting with Hashem.

It is not easy to see the one point that unifies all the information one sees in the *mussar* sefarim. We are not used to thinking this way. The very way we live contradicts this way of thinking, because life is full of vast details, and we are not used to taking all the information and unifying it into one. In addition to this, we are after the sin of Adam, after the sin of the Calf, and after the destruction of the second *Beis Hamikdash*, and all this has wreaked much havoc on our souls.

In order to build a house, you take a bunch of bricks and stack them up together, unifying them all into one piece. When the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, all the bricks of this “house” were separated, and each brick was now by itself. In our own soul, this can happen as well – when the structure of the soul is split apart and scattered around into parts, there is an inner destruction to the person, and a person cannot connect with Hashem like this; He cannot find Hashem or sense Him.

“With wisdom a house is built.” (*Mishlei 24: 3*). When a person wants to take all his knowledge and let it fill his heart, he needs to unify it all together. That is how his knowledge can become like “a pure heart G-d gave me, and a proper spirit He renewed in my innards.”

What we actually have to work on is small in comparison to our general mission. The general mission we have is to be able to acquire the proper viewpoint – to see how all of life is one piece, one unit.

“Hashem created man upright, but they seek many calculations.” (*Koheles 7: 29*). The “many calculations” which people have is the root of sin and is responsible for preventing one from finding Hashem in his heart. When a person has *yashrus* (straightness), he sees only one path in front of him, because he sees straight. But when a person has “many calculations”, he sees many paths in front of him.

In order to build anything, we need to get used to living with a “unified” outlook – to live in a world of unity. This is the foundation of the structure we want to build.

Ponder One Point For A Long Time

These words are the foundation of everything, but they will seem very ambiguous at first. What is this “unity” we are referring to? How do we reveal it in our soul?

The following story illustrates the concept.

There was a well-known method used by Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt”l* that a person should take one thought and then ponder it for a few months. One time Reb Yeruchem was talking to a student after he delivered a discourse, and he asked him, “How long do you think it took me to prepare this *shmuess*?”

The student replied, “Two hours.” Reb Yeruchem replied, “It took me more than that.” The student then guessed, “Four hours?” Reb Yeruchem again told him, “More than that.” Eventually, Reb Yeruchem told him, “You aren’t even close to how much time it took me. It took me half a year to prepare for this *shmuess*!”

What is the meaning behind this story? It did not take Reb Yeruchem Levovitz half a year to understand the material he was going to deliver; he was brilliant. It took him half a year to prepare because he had to think it over and live with it and breathe it, constantly probing its depths. Only after doing this for six months did he feel that it was ready to be given over.

What we learn from this is that being successful in *Avodas Hashem* is not about increasing the quantity of our actions. Our main job is to keep thinking about one point, and to live with it for a while.

Usually, when a person seeks inspiration, he goes to hear a lecture. The next week he hears another lecture about that week’s *parsha*. At best, all he remembers from any of these lectures is some mark that was left on him. He remains with some small inspiration from it, but that’s it. We don’t mean to poke fun at any of these lectures; they all contain points of spirituality that are true. But hearing this lecture and that lecture doesn’t build a person.

If we want to enter the inner outlook, which is the “unified” outlook – *achdus* – we need to have the tools in order to receive it. If a person tries to work on many different points depending on the time he’s at – on Purim he tries to improve on one area, on Pesach he tries to work on a different area, during Sefiras HaOmer he works on another area and on Shavuot he works on another area – if this is how he serves Hashem, he will be all mixed up, and he will never build himself! He might get inspired every here and there, but he will never build up anything for himself.

When it comes to knowing information, the more a person expands his mind, the more knowledge he can think about. But when it comes to building oneself into one unit, a person has to take one point and stick with it. “Doing more good deeds” isn’t the point here.

This is how a person can give himself the tool that is called “unity”. When a person works on many areas at once, not only will he become confused, but his outlook on everything is separated and scattered. He loses the outlook of unity, and he will not be able to truly serve Hashem.

Therefore, before we learn about the plan of *Avodas Hashem*, we must first be aware of the root of it all – we must make sure that we are immersed in one point alone. A person should take one point he knows about and think about it. “On my bed at night, I requested that which my soul loves.” When you go to sleep, think about the point

you have decided to stick with, and when you get up in the morning, continue to think about it. Let it become a part of your life.

Seeing How Everything Reveals Hashem

All of us have heard much and read much on how to better ourselves. All the information we have heard and read is true, but the question is, where to start??

How can we take all our thoughts and unify them?

It is written, “For My honor I created it.” Creation is a revelation of Hashem’s honor. Everything contains in it the honor of Hashem, and that is the depth of *Chochmah*. To see the wisdom in something is essentially to see the honor of Hashem in something – to see how something reveals Hashem’s glory.

To see how each thing actually reveals the glory of Hashem is already the second stage, but the first stage is to realize that everything reveals Hashem. After one comes to the conclusion that everything contains the glory of Hashem, he can then figure out how.

When a person looks around at his house, he sees a table, a chair, and other items. It seems that these are all separate items, but really, a person can see one thing alone in all of them: they were all created to give honor to Hashem!

From a superficial outlook, it appears that in a house there are many items, but if we have the inner perspective, we can see how they are unified. The unified outlook is to have a deep look at things, and not to use the childish outlook we are born with.

Our neshamah only sees the honor of Hashem in something. The neshamah is called “kavod”\honor. If a person wants to become connected to his neshamah, and to all the other souls of the Jewish people, he needs to see how Hashem is in everything, how each thing can reveal Him somehow.

Revealing the Neshamah

What is holding back all people from reaching inner perfection?

Chazal state that as long as Amalek lives, there cannot be a Redemption. Amalek detracts from the honor of Hashem. This evil nation epitomizes the evil trait of *leitzanus* (scoffing), which is the opposite of *kavod* (honor).

If we want to get rid of the “Amalek within” our soul, we need to utilize *kavod*.

A person with a superficial outlook, who isn’t used to these concepts, will think, “How do we reveal the *kavod* of Hashem in everything?!”

But there is an inner outlook which is totally different than this way of thinking. A person should go for three, four or five months of thinking about how we are all created to give honor to Hashem. We don’t know how, but we believe that everything somehow reveals His honor. One can repeat to Himself this fact, again and again, until it penetrates his heart.

We first have to think about how Hashem created the whole world and each thing in the world for His honor, and we need to live with this fact, constantly.

After one gets used to this, he reveals his inner self – his *neshamah* – which is a tool for Hashem to reside in him. On one hand, he gets used to thinking one thought and pondering it, and on the other hand, he looks for Hashem in everything. He becomes a tool for unity, and he searches for Hashem in everything. He is connected to Hashem.

These words are a small glimpse into the proper outlook we should achieve. The truth is that the words here are not for everyone. If someone feels that the words here speak to his heart, fine, but if the words here don't speak to you, then you will need a different way than what we have said here.

May Hashem give the *siyata d'shmaya* to each Jew that he find Hashem in his heart – each person, according to the path he needs to take.

11 | *Thought As Reality*

The Root Power of Thought is Hidden

A fundamental point we should know is that we need to get used to gaining a deep perspective on everything.

The truth is that what we think of as “simple” matters are actually the deepest matters possible. In order to truly recognize even simple matters, we need to ponder them deeply. We need to think deeply into a matter until we arrive at its inner point.

Our mind aids us in thinking deeply. A person is made up of body and soul; from the body’s perspective, our thoughts seem like imagination, not reality. Our thoughts don’t seem to be tangible. Thought is a spiritual force, and it is a power of our soul. When a person’s body has jurisdiction over him, thoughts seem to be something hidden and intangible. Although everyone knows that we are always thinking, not everyone views thoughts as something real. The reason for this is really because there are actually different kinds of thoughts, as we will soon explain.

By nature, our soul is more hidden from us, and therefore our thoughts, which are a spiritual power in our soul, are also hidden to us. The thoughts which we experience are a small illumination that radiates from our very soul, and the more we reveal the soul, the higher quality thoughts we will experience.

The neshamah is called *seichel*, intellect. However, the comprehension that our neshamah can give to us is very far from regular human intellect. It is a very hidden kind of comprehension.

The neshamah is pure spirituality. When a person is thinking about money or something materialistic, such thoughts do not reveal the *neshamah’s* thinking. Even if a person is thinking about something spiritual, such as learning Torah or doing *Avodas Hashem*, it can still be the same regular thinking he is used to, just that it is being used for a spiritual purpose. So it can be that a person is used to thinking about what he learns in the Torah, but the thoughts he is using don’t come from his neshamah.

When the *neshamah’s* thoughts remain hidden in a person, all of a person’s thoughts are material kind of thoughts. Non-Jews can also think a lot - a Jew who thinks a lot might just be like a very intellectual non-Jew. The fact that he thinks a lot doesn’t mean that he is very spiritual.

You can even have a person who always thinks holy thoughts, yet the quality of his thoughts is at the same level as a secular person’s thoughts (although there is no doubt that such thinking can definitely awaken and strengthen him to better himself).

If a person never reaches the root point of his thoughts, he never arrives at true concentration. A person can only concentrate with this mind when he is connected to the root of his mind, in which there is a unification of the thoughts.

When the root of thought is hidden from a person, his thinking comes from his body, and he cannot use such thinking for *Avodas Hashem*. The deeper thoughts come from a higher world, while the thoughts of our body come

from the lowest world (asiyah\action), and thus our regular thoughts cannot be used as a tool to work with spiritual matters.

This is why it is hard to arrive at true concentration with our thoughts. We can see this very manifest when we daven, when people try to concentrate, and they just can't gather their thoughts together. The same goes for learning Torah – people have a hard time concentrating as they learn. But suddenly when it comes to other matters, people have no trouble staying focused; what is the reason for this? It is because spiritual matters require a deeper kind of concentration than what we are used to.

The root of this lack of focus is because when a person hasn't yet revealed the root of his thoughts, the deeper thoughts of the neshamah remain hidden, and he cannot open up his power to stay concentrated - even on a simple spiritual matter.

Of course, there is an external solution that people have for this, and that is to train oneself to be able to concentrate. This can help somewhat, but it is a secular approach, and it is not the Torah way.

A Jew searches for the root, and from there he is nurtured. We aren't trying to "train" ourselves and teach ourselves tricks to learn how to stay focused. We are trying to reach the G-dliness in us, and from there, we can learn to unify our thoughts.

Entering A World of Real Thought

What can we do to reveal our root power of thought?

The Ramchal (in *sefer Derech Eitz Chaim*) writes that it is the way of the wise to always think, wherever they go. A person is a thinker. Who doesn't always think? We are always thinking; the only question is what we are always thinking.

There are people who think all the time, yet there is no connection between their thoughts. They are one second thinking about Torah, and then a second later they are thinking about something materialistic. Their thoughts are just fleeting.

Others have succeeded in concentrating their thoughts to think only about Torah. When we see these people who are connected in their thoughts all the time to Torah, or about serving Hashem, or about being close to Him all the time - it is not simply because they have trained themselves to think like that. It is because these people have reached a deep place in which thought is a very tangible reality, no less than how a physical action is tangible.

In the physical world we live in, we can only feel something physical. But the Vilna *Gaon* said that this is only a result of the sin of Adam. Before the sin, only spirituality was tangible, and physicality was actually not tangible.

Because we have a body, we can only feel something physical. But our soul feels a thought in a very tangible sense (especially those souls which are rooted in a higher world, "*Beriah*"). It is just that we have to reveal our soul from its potential state, into its active state.

In other words, our aim here is not to sharpen our power of concentration. Our job here is to realize that our thoughts are a tangible reality, no less than how we view this physical world as real. We are not changing anything here – we are simply revealing something that’s already here. It is hidden, but it definitely exists.

The more a person connects to Torah – which *Chazal* say is called the “soul of the world” – the more a person is connected to the reality of thought.

Torah is called “our life.” This is not simply that the Torah gives us life – it is more than that: Torah is reality itself! What we think is tangible on this physical world is really a lie. The realm of the intellect can be felt in a tangible sense, and it is no less real than the physical.

So what we must first clarify to ourselves is that it is not our job here to learn how to concentrate with our thoughts. It is rather about entering a world in which thought is very real.

The Sixth Sense

Let us give an example that brings out the concept we are saying.

We have five physical senses – touch, sight, smell, hearing, and taste. From all of the senses, the sense of the smell is the most spiritual, but all of the senses enable us to feel something physical. Already from our physical senses we can see that some of our senses are more spiritual than others. Our sense of touch is the least spiritual, while our senses of hearing and smell are perceived by us to be more spiritual than the sense of touch, which is a more gruff kind of sense. We can recognize clearly that our sense of smell is a whole different kind of sense than the sense of touch, that it’s a whole different kind of perception.

This is not in our imagination; no one doubts this. When we hear a sound, we are not imagining the sound, even though we can’t touch it or see it; we are definitely aware that the sound exists, in a tangible way, through our sense of hearing. So we can all admit to this a bit from our physical world, that there are some senses which are more spiritual – such as how our senses of hearing and smell are more spiritual kinds of senses than the senses of touch and sight. Maybe we can’t feel a sound with our hands, but we can definitely sense a sound and feel it as tangible.

This can show us that our power of thought is no less real and tangible than our senses of smell and hearing. Our thought is a whole different kind of sense, but it is still a sense – and it is the most spiritual kind of sense there is.

This is the first fact we should be clear in – thought is a reality, no less real than a table or a chair.

This is already written in *sefer* Shaarei Kedushah, of Rav Chaim Vital: a person should not dismiss his thoughts as something that isn’t real. Our thoughts are active, and they can do things no less than how a knife can cut meat. The only difference between our thoughts and our other senses is that our five senses can be tangibly felt through this physical world, while our sense of thought is something that affects a different world – the world of our thoughts.

Rav Chaim Vital writes that because of this, our thoughts can ascend to the Heavens, and this can become a tangible experience for a person. The sefarim hakedoshim describe the concept of souls that can ascend to the Heavens; this is not experienced through one's fantasies, but through one's actual thoughts. It is a total reality, and it can be experienced through one's thoughts.

The Sages⁵ say that “lewd thoughts are worse than the sin itself.” From this we can learn that just as the action of a sin has effects, so does sinful thoughts have an effect on a person. The *Nefesh HaChaim* (I:4) even writes that if someone thinks about committing a sin, it is as if he brought an idol into the *Beis HaMikdash*. This is not just a parable – it's an actual reality that happens. An idol brought in the *Beis HaMikdash* on the physical world is evil because it's an evil act; a sinful thought is no less evil, because it's an existing reality of something evil taking place - in the realm of thought.

The truth is that our inner world of serving the Creator involves abilities that are even beyond our thoughts. But since we are speaking about the roots of our inner work, it is necessary for us to realize this preliminary stage, which is to realize what our thoughts are, and how to use them. A person has to know that thoughts are not imagination; they are an existing reality called thought, and they must not be dismissed as nothing. Without knowing this, a person will not succeed in his avodah. If one realizes that his thoughts can indeed do things and have effects, then he should realize the following: we must never stop thinking, not even for a moment.

These matters are simply and clear to anyone who has entered the inner world of *avodah*. They are far from anyone who remains outside these matters.

This is the fundamental point which we need to enter into the inner world of *avodah*: we must totally believe that the world of thought is real and tangible.

Belief In The Concept Of Thought Enables It To Have Effects

What can help us believe that thoughts are a tangible reality?

We need to believe that we are revealing the potential of this concept. If we don't believe in a matter, then the matter remains dormant, and while it still exists, it remains inactivated. We need to reveal the potential of every concept. This is true when it comes to everything, but it is especially true with regards to the subject we are discussing, which is to believe in the reality of our thoughts.

The only issue is how we can bring out the potential of our thoughts; how we actually go about revealing the power of our thoughts from their hidden state. We mentioned this in the beginning of the chapter.

The external part of our job here is to concentrate more with our thoughts. But we also have more inner work to do here, and that is to use our *emunah*. Our *emunah* must accompany us throughout any step. Since we are currently discussing how we can bring out the potential of our thoughts – to reveal the thoughts forth from their hidden state – we need to strengthen our *emunah*, both in our heart and mind. We need to strengthen the belief that thoughts

⁵ *Yoma 29a*

are a reality, and that they are no less real than something physical you see. In fact, thoughts are more real than the physical world you see.

We do not yet have total *emunah*; there will not be total *emunah* in the world until the year 10,000. But the more we reveal our *emunah*, the stronger our thoughts will become – our *emunah* can fuel on our reality of the thought.

If a person would really believe that that his thoughts can have actual effects, it would really work the way it should. If a person doesn't believe in the effect that his thoughts can have, then his thoughts will indeed not do anything.

This is well-known concept in our sefarim hakedoshim: in order for anything to work, a person has to be there; if a person isn't there in the concept, he doesn't access a concept.

Let's take an example from the physical world for this. In order to get a car started, you have to turn the key in the ignition. Now, if you're not in the car seat to begin with, then you're not there, and you can't even get started.

The same goes for spiritual matters. You have to be there in order to access any of these matters. The only difference between the physical world and the spiritual world is that with the physical world, you use physical actions to get things done; but in the spiritual world, you don't use physical actions to get things done – you use your thoughts.

If a person really believes that he can indeed be found in a world of thought, then he will be able to use his thoughts and access their power. If a person doesn't believe that he can be there, then indeed, he will not access the power of his thoughts.

Thought Is The Basis of the Inner World

We will try to open up this concept a bit more.

The Ramchal writes that when a person receives *ruach hakodesh*, the lower kind of *ruach hakodesh* is that it comes to him as a thought, and he is unaware that it is being poured down from above. The higher kind of *ruach hakodesh* is that a person is aware that the thought is coming from a different place.

What we see from this is that just like you use your hands to receive an item, so can you use your thoughts to receive something spiritual.

It is brought in the sefarim hakedoshim that there were *tzaddikim* who were able to read others' thoughts and tell them what they were thinking. How did they do this? It is because just as your eyes see the physical, so can a person's thoughts see other thoughts in a tangible way.

This is not an exaggeration. The depth of our avodah is built upon understanding that our thoughts are real. From a superficial perspective, it appears that our avodah is based upon how much of a will we have to inspire ourselves and to gain levels, how much we daven to Hashem, how elated we feel, etc. But all of these things are just externalities in our avodah. The inner layer of our avodah is to realize what our soul can do – each of our soul's abilities, and how we use them. We have to know how to use different abilities in our soul and not confuse different abilities, just like you can't use a washing machine in the same way you use a dryer.

Avodas Hashem is not something we use our hands for, and we can't even use our emotions for it. Our entire *Avodas Hashem* can only happen if we use our power of thought. In order to use our thoughts, we have to realize what this power is – what its structure is, and what lays hidden in it. We must know what is holding it back from being revealed, and what we can do to reveal it.

The more a person recognizes something, the better he will know how to use it. Imagine a person driving a car who doesn't know what anything means on the dashboard; he won't be able to use the car at all. With just a small amount of effort, he would be able to figure it out and be helped.

The more we understand what power that is found in us, the more we can access it and succeed with it. We won't be able to access any power that we don't recognize well. So the way to enter our inner *Avodas Hashem* is by revealing our power of thought. The way to access this power, as we mentioned before, is by totally believing that it exists.

A Jew's Power of Thought

Let us say a point which expands upon this concept. There is a dispute in the *Gemara* when the world was created – Nissan, or Tishrei. Tosafos brings that in Tishrei, it “dawned upon the thoughts” of Hashem to create the world.

What does this mean? It didn't take Hashem half a year to create the world. What this statement means is that there is a power in a Jew's soul to use our thoughts.

Chazal also say that the word “*Beraishis*” (“in the beginning”) means “for the sake of the Jewish people, who are called “*raishis*” (the beginning). Targum adds to this that we were created with chochmah, wisdom. This is the essence of a Jew: wisdom.

A Jew lives in a whole different world than a gentile's world. Besides for the fact that we are commanded to be a sanctified nation, we are also living in a total different reality than a gentile's reality. Our reality is that we have a certain power of thought. A Jew who utilizes his power of thought isn't just gaining another quality – he's tapping into his essence. The fact that we were created with a power of thought isn't just another part of Creation. It is a creation unto itself, and it preceded the actual Creation.

We can bring many more statements in *Chazal* that open up this concept more, but one thing is clear: our thoughts can have actual, tangible effects. (The Ramban has written about this as well in a famous letter). This is a Jew's power, and it is our essence to be this way.

When a person realizes that thought is his reality, he is then able to connect to the power of thought – the root creation which preceded all creations; and he will be able to access the power of thought.

If a person really wants to succeed in his Torah learning and *Avodas Hashem*, he needs to reveal his belief that the reality of thought exists. May Hashem help us clarify these matters in our souls, and that each Jew should merit to reveal the point we have been describing here.