

BILVAVI

Revealing  
Your Unique  
Path of Avodah

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## The General & Specific Paths of Our Sages In Reaching Greatness

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Hashem created a person with two parts – an internal and external part. The inner part of a person is covered over by the external part. Generally these two layers are referred to as the *neshamah* (soul) and the *guf* (body), but if we get more specific, it is the *nefesh Elokus*, G-dly soul, versus the *nefesh habehaimis*, animal soul. The animal soul covers and blocks our G-dly soul.

Our Sages had two different paths [of how to get past our animal soul and reach our G-dly soul]. They had a path that was based on a general formula, and a path based on a more specific formula.

The general formula is basically “*mesirus nefesh*”, giving up the soul, and the sage who exemplified this was Elazar ben Dordaya (when he said, “The matter is only dependent on me.”) In the times of Chanukah, the Chashmonaim fought the Greek army with *mesirus nefesh*, where they were outnumbered and there was no logical plan for them to win. There were no steps and no details to follow to win against the Greeks. Rather, they used the general power of *mesirus nefesh*. That was one path, and it is very general – *mesirus nefesh*.

Another path of our Sages was to work with details, steps, and order.

In the first way, *mesirus nefesh*, a person gives himself up, for whatever his heart is more pulled towards, and one person will give himself up for Torah, another sacrifices himself for kindness, and another for davening. A person can be *moser nefesh* for any aspect of serving Hashem, for any of the *mitzvos*. But the way of *mesirus nefesh* is only for individuals. The second way, which is the root way for most souls, is to work in a step-by-step plan, to build one part and then another part, in order.

However, even within this step-by-step plan, there is also a general way and a more specific way.

The general path within the step-by-step plan is to follow the order of steps laid out by the sage Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair, which the sefer *Mesillas Yesharim* explains. There are 10 levels in it, beginning from Torah, then *zehirus*, *zerirus*, *nekiyus*, etc. all the way until *Ruach HaKodesh* and *techiyas hameisim*.

So there is a general way called *mesirus nefesh*, where a person uses one single power called *mesirus nefesh*, and there is a way of specifics, of following a step-by-step plan, building stage after stage, and this way itself can be traversed in a way of generality. In this path, all people begin from Torah, and from there, to *zehirus*. People go to *vaadim* (groups of self-improvement) and they work on a point for some time, they all work on it together, and they grow step-by-step. That is one way of traversing the “specific” approach.

## The Individual's Path

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But there is also another way to traverse it, which is even more individualized. Every person has his own unique soul, his own inner makeup that he's comprised of, and therefore each person has his own individual *avodah* that's unique only to him and which doesn't apply to anyone else.

The source for this way of *avodah* is the statement of Chazal, "Man was created individual." (*Sanhedrin 38a*). Every person is unique. Every person has his unique *avodah* being the unique person that he is. No one else can do exactly like him. Chazal also said that each person has a different face and different *de'os* (ways of thinking). Each person has his own "portion" on this world. A person has to clarify what "his" personal obligation on this world is.

A person's eternal place in the next world is reached through reaching his unique share on this world, through his own unique *avodah*. But in order for a person to reach it, he needs to recognize what his own inner world is. If he doesn't know what his inner world is comprised of, he cannot do his unique *avodah*. Now, if one takes the path of *mesirus nefesh*, he doesn't need to know his own uniqueness and what his personal *avodah* is. Even if he makes mistakes about his path and he has *mesirus nefesh* for areas that are not meant for him to invest himself in, the spiritual light of the *mesirus nefesh* is so powerful that it will penetrate past his "I" and bring him to a revelation of the Creator, whom he is being *moser nefesh* for and 'dying *al kiddush Hashem*' for, not caring about himself at all and only living for the Creator.

But if a person is taking the other path – to know his unique path and also taking the general path of Torah, *zehirus*, etc., with the more he recognizes his share in Torah, he is more likely to get further. And even if he doesn't, the general path of learning Torah and *zehirus*, etc. will all enlighten the way for him, as he grows step after step. That is why we can set up groups of people who take on the same resolution and work on the same topic for one week, one month, one period. All will work on the same topic, and progress. In this kind of growth, there is less of a necessity for individual self-recognition. But in the third path mentioned – the individualized path – there, a person needs to act according to his personal energies, based on who he truly is.

## Each Individual Is On A Different Level and Has His Own Soul Root

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In order to act in a way that's based on who you truly are, there are two parts to know.

The first part to know is that every person is on a different level. If 10 people gather together and work on something, each of them are on a different level. If we are working based on each person's

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level, then each person's level is different from his friend's, so they cannot all be working on the same point. The level of one person is different than another's and he cannot reach the same exact place that his friend is at.

But even more so, it is because each person has a different role in the world, based on his unique inner structure and soul root. Hashem gave certain parts to him which certainly are not equal to another's. He has his own personal soul. So there are 2 reasons why one is different from another. It is because he is at a different level than his friend is, and even more so, his soul is different.

Therefore, in this path, a person is building his *avodah* based on recognizing his unique parts, and that's how he recognizes his current level too.

### Individual's Path Entails Becoming Clear About Your Unique Aspects

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Here we come to two totally different systems of how we begin to do *avodah*. If we start with *mesirus nefesh*, we can begin from wherever we begin, from a general path. In this path, Torah brings to *zehirus*, etc. Everyone here starts from the same point, and it's clear where to start from. But if we are building our path of *avodah* based on recognizing ourselves, then we cannot start to actually do *avodah* right away. We cannot begin if we haven't yet figured out what our unique parts are, what our current level is, and what point to aim for next.

For this reason, there is need for a person to first clarify – and it is not a short process – to clarify “Who am I? What is my soul? What are the parts that Hashem gave to me?” There are many different points to clarify of course, there are general clarifications and more specific clarifications.

### Different Ways of Our Sages

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Here is one fundamental and clear example of this concept.

The world stands on three pillars: Torah, *avodah* and *chessed*. Throughout the generations, the sages of the generation exemplified any of these three traits. There were those who mainly learned Torah, there were those who mainly did *avodah*, and there were those who mainly did *chessed*. Avraham's main trait was *chessed*, Yitzchok's main trait was *avodah/tefillah*, and Yaakov's main trait was Torah. Each one had his soul root. Now, the Jewish people come from Yaakov Avinu strictly [whereas the other nations come from Avraham, through Yishmael and Keturah's children, and from Esav, who was from Yitzchok], and since Yaakov's main trait was Torah, the main path in *Klal Yisrael* is through Torah.

But certainly there were those who took other paths. A clear example of this is the *Chassidim Rishonim*, who would spend an hour preparing for davening, another hour after davening, and another hour during davening (*Berachos 31a*). They spent 9 hours a day immersed in *tefillah*. How much time did they spend on doing chessed? It doesn't say. The Gemara asks, "When they did they learn Torah and when did they work?" The Gemara answers, "Their work was blessed, and their Torah was protected." But certainly their daily schedule was very different than most Sages, because they were davening much more. Most of Chazal learned Torah most of the day, and they also had times for *tefillah*, but the *Chassidim Rishonim* – many of them, we can't say most of them but certainly many of them – were mainly *davening* for most of the day.

At the opposite end of the spectrum was Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai and his colleagues, who only interrupted their learning for Shema and not even for Shemoneh Esrei. By them, *tefillah* did not have much of a place in their lives. They didn't *daven*, they only said Shema. They were entirely about Torah study.

We also find those of our Sages who mainly did *chessed*, and those who were looking to do *mitzvos* all the time. Each of them had their unique portion on the world.

So there are three main soul roots – those who are rooted in Torah, those who are rooted in *avodah*, and those who are rooted in *chessed*. These three general roots subdivide further. Those rooted in Torah will also be different from each other, those rooted in *tefillah* will be different from each other in certain ways, and the same goes for those rooted in *chessed* – there are different types even within the general soul-type.

## There Is No One Way For Everyone

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So if we want to tell everyone how they should serve Hashem, there is no general way that will fit every soul. Each person has to serve Hashem according to his soul root and according to the level he's found at.

Someone asked me: What should a person do when he's waiting by the doctor in the waiting room? Should I learn? Should I think about *emunah*? Should I think about loving people and having *ahavas Yisrael*? What's the answer to this question? There is really no one answer to the question. It depends on who's asking it, what his level is, what he's involved with right now. And, that very same person five years ago would have to do something different. Even by the same person, he doesn't always have to do the same thing. Because it depends on what time period he's in, what stage he is at. And even during the same day, it will depend. Sometimes he is able to learn Torah during the

day, but if he's busy and haggled, it would be better for him not to learn Torah right now. It all depends on the current moment and according to what the person needs right now.

When a person only takes a general path, he constricts himself. His individual soul is ignored and he gets involved "in a world that is not his", at least to some extent. That is why the inner path to take, which is correct, is for a person to figure out, "Who am I really? What are my capabilities that I'm meant to pursue? What natures has Hashem given me, to assist me in this?"

## We Need Basic Self-Awareness Before Reaching Higher Levels

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Now we can return to what we were discussing originally.

We mentioned that a person is comprised of 2 parts, a soul and a body. This is a very general description. Getting more specific, we are comprised of a G-dly soul and animal soul. We understand generally that we need to get past the body and reveal our soul. That is a very sparse definition, though. We need to get past the hold of our animal soul and reveal the G-dly soul – this is also very general and sparse. But after all we've been explaining here until now, our attitude should be that it's not that we're merely trying to get past our animal soul. Certainly we need to minimize the hold of our animal soul and increase our G-dly soul: "*My soul thirsts for G-d*". But it's deeper than that.

We need to recognize where we can get to with our animal soul, its capabilities, and we need to also recognize where our G-dly soul can get to. Part of how the animal soul blocks us from the G-dly soul is because the animal soul is animalistic while the G-dly soul is G-dliness – that's clear. But it's more. Part of why it blocks the G-dly soul is, because a person doesn't even recognize his animal soul and what's in it. He is confused even at the level of his animal soul. If he's confused at a basic level, he certainly won't be able to be clear about his G-dly soul is, what his unique spiritual capabilities are, and that is how the animal soul blocks him from revealing his G-dly soul.

So the clarification process starts from a very basic step, from knowing the abilities and limits of our animal soul that Hashem has given to us.

## Recognizing Our Physical Capabilities and Limits

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Here is an example. How much physical strength does a person have? Is he stronger or weaker? How much time does he need for sleep? Is there one answer to this question? Clearly, no. The *Gra* slept for 2 hours, Dovid HaMelech woke up between every 60 breaths. If a person would sleep even

half the day like this, he still wouldn't be well-rested because he keeps interrupting his sleep and this makes it harder for the body. A weaker person needs more sleep, a stronger person needs less sleep. Everyone has to go according to their physical capabilities.

So while it's true that we need to get past the body in order to reveal our soul, that is a very general definition, because how much do we need to get past the body and weaken its hold? And how? We need to recognize what our body's capabilities are. In order to know it, you need to give it exactly what it needs, not more and not less. If a person weakens his body too much, the Baal Shem Tov said that a small crack in the body is a big crack in the soul. He will become sick. The *Shechinah* comes to a sick person, it hovers above him, but he's stuck and it's hard for him to serve the Creator.

Part of serving the Creator is to take care of our body. It doesn't mean we should make the body's needs more important than our soul's needs, we shouldn't overdo it, but our body needs to be strong so that we can properly serve the Creator, it needs to be fit so that it can help our soul.

## Recognizing Our Basic Needs

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And the same goes for taking care of our *nefesh habehaimis*, the “animal soul”. If a person isn't calm or relaxed, his animal soul is not healthy. Before we even consider how to recognize the *nefesh Elokis* (G-dly soul) and work with it, the fact that a person is missing basic calmness in his animal soul will make him anxious. He will have an anxious animal soul and it will hamper him from getting any further.

A very large amount of people have an anxious animal soul. They are not calm. They are bogged down from life, they are busy in whatever they're busy with, each person has his challenges, and it is hard to find someone who properly satisfies his animal soul. That means that the person's animal soul isn't calm, and when that is the case, it will clearly block him from reaching his G-dly soul, that's clear and simple.

## The Ability of Hakarah - Recognizing

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The inner way to go about it is, that first of all we need to understand a fundamental perspective. Inner work is not based on *avodah*, on inner work of serving the Creator, alone. It is based on precise recognition of something. This is called *hakarab*, “recognizing.”

Whatever a person is doing always has to be aligned with his particular capabilities – exactly and precisely. Or else, the person will fail. To illustrate, if a Posek is asked about a question if something



is forbidden or permissible, in many cases the question is not simple and therefore the answer is not either simple. The issue has to be taken apart with all the factors considered and weighed, and then we can understand what the answer will be comprised of.

Every soul is different, with different capabilities, and therefore, all inner work is based on learning the art of *hakarah*, “recognition”. Inner work is the second half that comes later. The first step which is the basis is, that everything is based on “recognizing”.

This is actually a very, very deep perspective, and let us explain why. We shall first discuss a higher stage and then come back to the current point after. When a person seeks Hashem, there is a lot of truth to this aspiration, there’s a “holy fire” in the soul. A person wants to become a servant of Hashem, to serve Hashem. So he thinks: “I have to become an *oved Hashem* (a person who serves Hashem).” This is certainly a quality. It seems that this is the right way to go in. He wants to do what Hashem wants from him – this seems like the truth. We can’t say that it’s not true. But, let’s analyze this deeper.

If we are learning *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*, we see that this sefer is not based on reactivity and getting emotional. It is based on a certain calmness, it requires quiet thinking and reflection. The point which the *Chovos HaLevovos* is bringing us to, with all of these intellectual discussions, is to bring us to the point of recognizing, *hakarah*. The most complete form of recognition is to recognize Hashem. So, what is the purpose of everything? To become “someone who serves Hashem”? No – that is just a means to a greater end! The purpose of serving Him is only to come to “recognize” Him.

Certainly in order to get to that recognition, we need to get to work and serve Hashem, and without *avodah* we won’t get to recognizing Hashem. Recognition doesn’t come on its own. It is only given to us as a gift, for one who tries hard to get to it. It begins with work and comes as a gift. But what is a person trying to reach? Is his ultimate goal to become someone who serves Hashem? Or, is his goal that he wants to recognize Hashem?

## Are We Here Just To Work Hard At Serving Hashem, Or To Recognize Him Better?

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“*A person was born for toil*” – and he was born to toil in Torah, in general. But what is the inner perspective of where a person needs to try to reach, where does a person want to end up? Does he want to mainly become someone who is an *oved Hashem* – or does he want to become someone who

wants to reach recognition of Hashem? *Avodah* is only the step in between, to get to recognition of Hashem.

Now we will consider this also in deeper terms. Does our soul have the viewpoint that we need to do is to “do” and “achieve”? Or does it want to arrive at a true and precise “recognition” of a matter? Which of this is a deeper and more truthful goal?

We explained at the beginning that our *avodah* is not just based on generalities, it is mainly based on recognizing our soul in detail. The art of “recognition” itself takes up half of our inner work, no less than actual and practical *avodah* must take up half our work. Usually, a person will want to skip over the stage of recognition and he wants to immediately enter into *avodah*. Not only will he be missing recognition and his *avodah* won’t be accurate, but even at the end when he reaches his goal, he still doesn’t realize that the point is to recognize Hashem better. Instead, he thinks that the main thing is to become “a person who serves Hashem”, a “servant of Hashem” [and other such titles]. Whereas if he would have started by realizing that everything is based on recognition, gradually he would realize that recognition is the main thing, and then at end when he is at the goal, he will be shown how the main thing was to arrive at recognition.

## The Cycle of Recognizing, Effort, and Recognizing

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Now we can complete the picture. The first half of our *avodah* is really to get better at “recognition”, and the second half is actual *avodah*. The endpoint is to arrive at recognition. We are meant to begin with recognition and end with recognition – and in between all that, we have *avodah* to do.

In more inner language, there are 2 different time zones. There is the weekday and Shabbos. The week is for *avodah*, while Shabbos is *menuchah*. Do we begin with *avodah*, with the weekday, and then we come to recognition? The inner way to look at it, as *Raboseinu* explain, that there is Shabbos, then the weekdays, and then Shabbos again. So we begin with *menuchah* on Shabbos – recognizing what we have – then we continue with *avodah*, the weekday, and then we arrive again at recognition, Shabbos. We have to start with the perspective of Shabbos and end with the perspective of Shabbos. But in order to reach recognition at the end, we need to really do *avodah*. Do we think we are here for work, for *avodah*? Or do realize we are mainly here for recognition?

In other terms which mean the same thing, we have Torah and mitzvos. The mitzvos are actions, to either do mitzvos or refrain from doing a sin, while the Torah is all about recognizing. It requires exertion, but the goal of exertion in Torah is to come to the goal, which is to recognize what the Torah is, to have clarity through the Torah, to know the Torah, to be clear. When we do *avodah*,

this is action. When we learn Torah, this is recognition. But when a person isn't purified, he needs exertion to purify his body and soul and that is how he can reach recognition through the Torah. If a person puts in effort and he is purified, he receives *ruach hakodesh* – he gets knowledge, he gets recognition, from the root. The Torah is about knowing it and being clear about it, and the way to reach it is through exertion. Why we do need to have exertion in Torah? To get to recognition through the Torah.

If a person has the perspective of only mitzvos, he thinks that Hashem just wants from him to become an *eved Hashem*, to do, to try hard, to exert himself, to take on *kabalos* (resolutions), to hold strong, to withstand challenges. But if someone has the view of “Torah” which is above the *mitzvos*, he knows he is on the world so that he can aim for recognition, to recognize Hashem, to recognize His wisdom which is by knowing the Torah, and to recognize himself. We need to do *avodah* for this, but it's all based on recognizing.

This is the difference between a Talmid Chochom's view and the view of an *am ha'aretz* (ignoramus). The *am ha'aretz* thinks that everything is about doing, while the Talmid Chochom knows that everything is about *daas* and recognizing. Of course, the Talmid Chochom isn't exempt from the mitzvos, and he has to do *avodah*. But his mindset is focused on recognition, not only on working, action, *avodah*.

## Recognizing

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Here we come to a crossroads when it comes to entering into the inner road of serving Hashem, with what perspective we are entering into the ways of serving Hashem.

When you learn *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*, which requires a lot of reflecting and contemplating, this is the perspective of recognizing. The most fundamental recognition is to recognize Hashem, and the product of this is to recognize what the Torah is, and a person who serves Hashem has to recognize himself well and then he can serve his Creator properly. The *Chovos HaLevovos* teaches us how to use the *seichel*, the intellect, to recognize oneself, to recognize our *middos*, and how to refine them, on how to identify the *yetzer hora* inside us. It's all about “recognizing”.

These words are really the root and fundamental introduction to the entire inner perspective about the world of *avodah*, of serving Hashem. There are 2 paths in front of us.

Are we entering into a path where we basically skip self-recognition and we just want to take a generalized path, to know which practical points are expected of us to work on, where it's all about

action? And when we self-probe, we are checking each day if we acted correctly or not, and that's how we grow? That is all one path of *avodah*.

But there is a second path of *avodah*, in which we enter into a path of recognition, of recognizing matters, and it's just that we need to work hard in between all of these recognitions. We need exertion in Torah, as well as exertion in working on our *middos*. But it's all based on going from one recognition to another. When we work hard in our *middos*, it's not just about seeing "I used to be a much angrier person, today I didn't get as angry as I used to. I used to be much more arrogant, now I'm less arrogant, etc." Instead, the person sees, "What did I recognize before, and what do I recognize now?" Before working on doing *chessed*, did a person understand and recognize what *chessed* is? And now that he has worked on doing more *chessed*, how has his recognition towards *chessed* become clearer? If he has improved his *chessed*, he is definitely clearer about what *chessed* is. If he is not clearer about what *chessed* is, then he is simply working at it but he isn't recognizing it.

With this inner mindset, a person can keep exerting himself and purifying himself, reaching clearer recognition, and from reaching more and more clarity, he can keep seeing what points are now appropriate for him to work on, until he reaches greater recognition of a matter and then once again he can re-organize his *avodah*. He needs to clearly recognize the capabilities of his soul, as well as clarity in what he has learned in Torah, as well as clarity of perceiving Hashem's presence, Hashem's conduct, Hashem next to him, and Hashem's very Reality. And he can gradually have clearer and clearer recognition.

This is how a person builds another path of *avodah* for himself. If a person only does *avodah* because he wants to do action and *avodah*, this is based on superficiality, of reactivity, of feelings at the moment. The inner way is to go about it with calmness. It involves exertion too, and each person has to have exertion based on his own capabilities and limitations, but it's all based on clarifying and recognizing, going from one recognition to another. This is how a person slowly recognizes himself more and more. "*My soul knows very well.*" The more one grows, he recognizes his soul better.

How does one begin? He first works hard to understand himself, and based on what he recognizes, he then organizes for himself his personal *avodah* that's appropriate for him to do. When he becomes even more purified, he recognizes himself even better. The same goes for Torah learning – one works hard at his learning and reaches clearer recognition of what he has already understood and reached in his learning. This makes him more connected to the Torah. The clearer he becomes in his Torah learning, the more he will be connected to his learning. Chazal teach on the verse, "*Say to wisdom, you are my sister*" – "If the matter is as clear to you just as your sister is forbidden to you, say, and if

not, do not say.” With clarity about something, we become more connected to it, it becomes like “your sister.”

And this certainly applies to the purpose of everything which is to recognize Hashem. Every step is another step towards clearer recognition of Hashem. There is general clarity of believing that Hashem exists, but when we work hard at this recognition and we are purified, we begin to recognize Hashem better. First we see His Divine Providence, then we can recognize Him even deeper, in our hearts, feeling Him more and more. The more we feel Him, the harder we will work and connect to Him more, our yearning to work hard will sharpen, and with this we become more and more connected to Hashem’s reality.

## In Conclusion

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This was all described very generally. We explained that there is a general path of serving Hashem with *mesirus nefesh*, and there is also a more individual path within this general path, which is to begin from Torah, *zehirus*, etc. We also explained that there is a third path, which is based on serving Hashem according to our unique parts, and we explained that the depth of this is not to be *avodah*-focused but to be *hakarah*-focused – the goal is to come to more recognition, and hard work and *avodah* is merely the means to get there, but it is not the goal. We explained the need to recognize our body, animal soul, G-dly soul (*middos*), and to recognize the Torah and Hashem.

This is all the inner structure that is so fundamental, the purpose of Creation, to know and recognize Hashem, to reach the recognition that the *Chovos HaLevovos* describes. It is to have an inner perspective, and it begins with working hard to understand what your personal role and capabilities are, to recognize your personal natures and *middos*, the parts which Hashem gave to your personal soul. For all of one’s life, he needs to be involved with “recognizing”. What should we be involved with all the time? With recognizing. What should we be aiming to “recognize”? To recognize our true self, to recognize the Torah, to recognize Hashem, and to recognize *Klal Yisrael*. It is entirely about “recognizing”, *hakarah*.

## Q&A

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### Topic 1 - Hakarah, D'veykus, T'mimus

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

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

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

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

Now here's a more spiritual example. Two people are learning Torah. One of them learns 7 pages of Gemara a day and reviews it too. He's connected to his learning. Another person learns Torah by clarifying each thing he learns, becoming clear about each matter, beginning from the *psukim* in the Torah about the matter all the way down to the *halachah l'maaseh*. These 2 people are both connected to their Torah learning, but whose connection is stronger? The one who's clearer about his learning. The

one who is learning 7 pages of Gemara has a desire to learn Torah, and that certainly connects him to his learning, but his connection isn't yet subtle because he hasn't yet become clear about what he learns. The one whose clearer about what he has learned will feel a subtler connection to his Torah learning.

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

**A:** Very good question! Now that we just explained that *hakarah* brings *d'veykus*, you are asking what the goal is, *hakarah* or *d'veykus*. Right now you are viewing *hakarah* as some external form of connecting to Hashem and you are viewing *d'veykus* as something else, and therefore you are asking right now if the main thing is *d'veykus* or *hakarah*.

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

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

Compare it to a child's stages of growth. First a child doesn't know anything, then he develops his feelings, and finally, he develops his thinking. The first stage is *tmimus* (earnestness, not knowing anything), the second stage is *hargashah* (feeling) and the last stage is *mochin* (intellect). So too, in our connection to Hashem, there is a way to connect to Him through *tmimus*, which is actually a very deep connection to Him. There is also a way of connecting to Him through *hargashah*, feeling, and there is also a way of connecting to Him through *mochin*, intellect. But with feeling alone, there is just reactivity, and the reactivity soon diminishes, it doesn't last. You can't hold on to an emotional state constantly. The emotion goes away at some point. Sometimes you feel inspired, and later the inspiration wanes, like a fire that dies down. The fire leaps up and later the fire shrinks. Connecting to Hashem through *tmimus* is a deep, deep connection that comes from the root of the soul. Connecting to Hashem by way of the *mochin* is the second-to-strongest connection, while connecting to Hashem

through feelings is the third-to-strongest connection. A small child when he begins to get older, he loses his *tmimus*. He gains emotion and he hasn't yet developed his mind. He is found at an immature level.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**A:** Because you need to build the entire inner structure of the soul. A person has to build his deeds, his emotions, and his power of recognition, and he also needs to build his power of *p'shitus* (simplicity) which is also called *emunah* or *tmimus*. A person has to build all of these powers. If one builds only part of these, that is where he be found and limited to. If one builds all of these, then he will be found at



whatever power his “soul root” is rooted in. But when a person has the complete inner structure, he develops also his *tmimus* which is above every quality: “Be simple with Hashem your G-d.”

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

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

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

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

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

## Topic 2 – Questions About The Avodah In Sefer “Bilvavi”

**Q: Regarding the Rav’s sefer “Bilvavi” (Part One), is this an *avodah* for every individual, or does each person have a different *avodah* based on his own level?**

**A:** It is impossible to write one sefer that will work for every single individual. No such sefer can be written.

**Q: If a person learns how to recognize himself better will he know which points he needs to work on?**

**A:** Correct, exactly. The better a person recognizes himself, he can work in the particular order that’s needed for him. The words written in sefer Bilvavi are written very generally.

**Q: The *avodah* which the Rav describes in Sefer Bilvavi, which was written two decades ago – is this the main *avodah* even in our current times? Or – as some people have asked the Rav lately, that there are souls of “Rochel” and souls of “Leah” who each have different paths, with some people who don’t have the patience for long paths, whereas other people are more designed for *avodah*? Has the *avodah* of the generation changed, or does it always remain the same?**

**A:** The sefer was not written before 5760 (2000) but after that. So it was written in the last generation [which begins from 5760]. I want to emphasize that it is not the only way to serve Hashem. The words of the sefer have definitely taken on greater sharpness as time continues. The actual inner structure doesn’t change.

**Q: If the time period we are in is a factor that changes what our current *avodah* must be, then do we need to be focused on something else now (other than the *avodah* in sefer Bilvavi), now that the “50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity” is in the world?**

**A:** This is a complicated point. On one hand, each person has their specific *avodah*. Each person today is found in a time period where the 50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity is pulling the entire world into it. Before 20 years ago, we could say that a person can focus only on his own personal *avodah*, and the time period of the world wasn’t such an important factor. But in today’s times, if a person doesn’t halt himself from the flow of all that’s going on in the world, he will certainly end up *chas v’shalom* getting pulled to the other side. So we cannot ignore today the fact that we are found in a time where there is the 50<sup>th</sup> level of impurity which dominates in the world today. Any person today has to separate from the 50<sup>th</sup> level of impurity, as part of his *avodah*. It has to be. Along with this, one needs to continue his personal *avodah* that’s aligned with his particular soul. But he can’t ignore the fact that he is surrounded today in a bad environment, and therefore as part of his *avodah*, he has to go against this flow, so that it shouldn’t engulf his soul.

## Topic 3 - How To Reach Greatness

**Q: Is the *derasha* here an answer to how a person can reach *gadlus* (greatness) today?**

**A:** Correct, exactly. It could be that everyone here wanted to hear of a different way of how to reach *gadlus*. The answer to it is that every person needs to clarify on his own how to get there. If a person wants to get there through the general path, *mesirus nefesh*, then the answer to this question (of how to reach greatness) is very general. If he wants to get there through the second path, it is also very general. If he wants to get there in a very specific way, he needs to go from one recognition to another and to recognize his own soul. This is a long path, but eventually it ends up being short. That is the way to define it.

**Q: What should a person begin to focus on “recognizing”? His qualities, or his shortcomings?**

**A:** It is for this that we gave the series on “Self-Recognition”, which is for most people, who need to focus on their qualities and not on their shortcomings. If most people would begin based on dealing with their shortcomings, they would just become unhappy from this. So they need to begin by discovering their qualities, to name their qualities in order of strongest, second-to-strongest, etc. In the series of “Self-Recognition” we explained how to do this in detail and also why it’s needed. In that series, we explain how to learn about our abilities, but in order to get into the details we need to learn the “4 Elements” series where we get into all the subtle details. Learning how to recognize one’s soul is the first, basic step in order to know where to begin one’s personal *avodah* suitable to his personal soul.

## Topic 4 - Questions About 4 Elements

**Q: A general question regarding working with our “4 elements”. If a person sees that he has a certain *middah* (i.e. laziness) and he knows which element it comes from (earth), does that mean he has to balance it out with a different element? How does one actually do this? How does merging together 2 different elements create a balance?**

**A:** This is a very general question, without getting into any of the details about the elements. It depends on which element we are dealing with, because each element works differently when combined with another element. Since you didn’t ask about anything specific, here is a general answer. Any 2 elements will always have opposite aspects from each other as well as areas in which they work together. Any 2 elements will have differences and similarities, from each other. Integrating any 2 elements usually depends on finding the connecting point, where the 2 elements share a similarity with each other. Now, getting more specific, it will depend on which elements we are dealing with. But the general rule is that each element has its unique aspect, in how it differs from another element and in how it’s similar to another element. For example, if we take an element that is dry and cold and also an element that’s dry and warm, these 2 elements are different because one is cold and the other is warm, but they both share a relationship of being dry elements. It is their dryness which will connect them

together. In any case we always need to see how they are similar and that is how we can connect them together.

Now, sometimes there can be a small percentage of people who have a soul root that's rooted in opposite elements. They have a soul that is comprised mainly of two opposite elements – either fire and water, or earth and wind. There are those with souls who have similarities between their earth and wind, but there are those who have an inner makeup that's comprised of two opposite elements. Either they will have very multi-faceted personalities, or, many times, they are very confused about themselves because they have deep contradictions within their own personality, and this can get so bad that they can become mentally ill from this, depending on how difficult they feel about their inner contradiction. While most people need to work with their 2 dominant elements by finding the connecting point (similarities) between their 2 dominant elements, there are a few people whose souls are comprised mainly of 2 contradicting elements. Their *avodah* is not to find similarities between their opposite elements, and instead, their *avodah* is to learn how to properly combine/harmonize their contradicting aspects together.

## Topic 5 - Questions About The Role Of *Tefillah*

**Q: Rebbi Nachman says that many *tzaddikim* reached all that they reached through *tefillah*, while he reached everything through *hisbodedus* together with *tefillah*. Does every person need to do this? Does a person need *tefillah* in order to gain self-recognition?**

**A:** Statements of Rebbi Nachman are the “illumination of Mashiach”, and Mashiach is linked with *tefillah*, because Mashiach is from the word *masiach*, “to converse”, to talk to Hashem through *tefillah*. So there were *tzaddikim* who built their *avodas Hashem* largely through *tefillah*. But it makes perfect sense that other *tzaddikim* did not begin with *tefillah*, though they did make use of *tefillah*. There was no *tzaddik* who ever reached anything without *tefillah*, but does that mean that every *tzaddik*'s main aspect was *tefillah*? Certainly there were *tzaddikim* who didn't. For example, the Chazon Ish. The Chazon Ish didn't mainly reach his growth through *tefillah*. Did he not *daven*? Of course he *davened*. He himself writes that a person has to daven before he wants to understand anything. But did he base everything on *tefillah*? It's hard to say that *tefillah* was his main aspect. He based everything on working hard at learning Torah, with *mesirus nefesh*, and along with this he also *davened* from the depths of his heart. But he didn't base everything on *tefillah*, he didn't make everything hinge on *tefillah* alone.

**Q: But perhaps we can say that the Chazon Ish reached *mesirus nefesh* in Torah only because he *davened* so much. Especially because someone said that the Chazon Ish emphasized *tefillah* even more than learning Torah, and in addition, the Chazon Ish wrote in a letter, “I put more effort into *tefillah* than into my Torah learning.”**

**A:** That is true, but it was only a result of something else. The reason why he put more effort into davening than learning was because he testified on himself that because he is so immersed in his learning, he can't focus as much on his davening, because his mind is immersed in whatever area of

Torah he was learning about, and therefore he had to overcome his love for the Torah in order to be able to *daven* properly. All of his davening and crying were a result of his Torah learning. Did he have a very strong ability of davening? Yes. And it seems that as the years continued, he *davened* even more. But what was it all based on? His Torah learning. Why did he have to put more effort into his davening than into his learning? It was because his Torah learning came natural to him, it was more his nature to learn than to daven, and therefore he found it difficult to daven. That is why he had to put in more effort to his davening, but not because tefillah was more important to him than Torah.

Sometimes people read stories of the Gedolim, and not always are the stories accurate. Even when the story is accurate, it is hard to understand the meaning of the story, and it is this lack of understanding which changes the whole picture.

**Q: But he would often cry with tears when he *davened*. It seemed that this was because of his feelings and *d'veykus*, not because he had difficulty concentrating on his *davening* due to his learning.**

**A:** His power of thinking was even stronger than his emotions. It's true that he *davened* and cried, but his strong point was his power of thought and being immersed in learning, much more than his power of davening.

## Topic 6 – Recognizing The Neshamah

**Q: How do we attain “recognize” and become familiar with the abilities of our *neshamah*, just as we are able to recognize and become familiar with the capabilities and limitations of our *guf* (body) and *nefesh behaimis* (animal soul)?**

**A:** This is difficult to describe in the language of the body, but we will try to explain it in simple language. Before a person was born, he was a *neshamah*, and after he leaves the world, he will become a *neshamah* again, where he will be sitting in Gan Eden as a *neshamah* (or, *Rachmana Litzlan*, he will be found somewhere else.) So a person had a certain perspective – the *neshamah's* ability to recognize certain matters – and he had this before he entered into the materialistic perspective of the body.

**Q: Is that equally true for everyone on the same level, is it always the same recognition for each person? Or does each person have a different ability of recognizing the *neshamah*?**

**A:** There is a concept of the *ilan*, the “soul tree”, and each soul has its place in that tree, so there are different soul roots. There are different ways of thinking for each soul, based on his soul root, and *Raboseinu* discuss this a lot. So each soul has a different power of recognition that is unlike another's. The recognition of the “soul” really means the ability to recognize from our higher intellect. If there are different ways of intellectual recognition of a matter, certainly each person's soul has a different power to recognize, based on his soul root.

**Q: Can a person go straight to the soul's ability of recognition and skip the recognition of the body and animal soul?**

A: It is possible, but it won't help a person if he ignores recognizing his body's and animal soul's capabilities and limitations, because he hasn't yet purified himself and he won't be able to handle the revelations of the soul properly. He will only get "sparks" of the soul's radiance, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* discusses, that sparks of the soul are in the intellect. With his mind, he can get "sparks" of the soul's light and attain soul recognition on some level. But it's not yet the full recognition of the soul.

**Q: Is that because it's a very hard thing to reach?**

A: Most of *Raboseinu* don't discuss recognizing the *neshamah*. The matter is dispersed every here and there throughout their words. For example, the *Shaarei Teshuvah* says that the ability to regret one's sins comes from the purity of the soul. *Raboseinu* spoke every here and there of different points in which the soul is revealed in. Also, usually they are describing inspiration and not soul recognition. The only place, it seems, which discusses soul recognition in an organized manner, is in the sefarim of *Chabad*.

**Q: Is there anything a person can do practically to purify the *neshamah*? We heard in the name of the Rav that if someone wants to learn *pnimiyus haTorah*, he should recite a lot of Zohar. Is there anything practical a person can do to purify himself, in order to reach "recognition"? Or is it that "recognition" itself is what purifies a person?**

A: Recognition (*hakarah*) is another stage of purifying oneself, but this is a very general question, certainly anything holy will purify a person, but every person individual speaking needs to do different things to get purified, and it depends on the person and on the situation, so there is no one answer to this.

**Q: If someone has more *seichel* (intellect) does that mean he has a bigger *neshamah*?**

A: This is a fundamental question, and the answer is very clear. Not always is there a compatibility between one's inner layer and outer layer. There are people who have a lot of intellect, but it's all external, because they don't have a rich inner world inside them. The intellect itself is certainly a spark of the *neshamah*, and if a person has better thinking abilities, it's certainly the spark of the *neshamah* that is contributing to this. In the words of *Raboseinu*, there are those who have a "soul root" above that is small, but down on the world they appear to have greater souls, whereas there are those who have a greater soul root above but down on the world their souls appear as small. If someone has a great mind, this does not always mean that his *neshamah* will be greater. But sometimes we can see that a person's mind is able to hold much more than the norm, and this is beyond the intellect. There are people who have great thinking abilities. There are high-level souls who have a low amount of intellect, but it's still recognizable on them that their soul is on a higher level. There are even *goyim* who are very smart and wise, but this does not mean that they have a high-level soul. Not always does a great, wise mind mean that their soul is very high. When it comes to *middos* as well, there are high-level souls who have fallen to a low level of *middos*, while there are souls of lesser stature which were born with more purified *middos*. So having a high-level soul or low-level soul does not automatically mean that one's intellect or character will be on a higher level.

## [Topic 7 – Applying Lofty Concepts]

**Q: What is the concept of “choosing to have *yediah*” (choosing to believe that Hashem knows everything already)?**

A: There is a well-known issue discussed in the Rishonim: Did Hashem “pre-set” everything that will happen, since He does everything and will do everything without exception? Or is this limited by the choices that we make with our free will (*bechirah*), and Hashem doesn’t interfere with our free choice and He lets people do as they wish (being that He created a novelty, Creation, in which He allows man to also be in control, as it were)? There are 2 parts to free will – a lower part and a higher part. The lower aspect of free will is that Hashem left over an area for man to choose. There is also a higher aspect of free will, in which man choose the foreknowledge (*yediah*) that Hashem knows and does everything, and in this way, *bechirah* serves as a bridging point to *yediah*. Hashem gave man free will to “choose” who will be in control: “Do I choose for Hashem to be in control, or am I choosing that I will be in control?”

Now let’s explain this in deeper terms. In the future, Hashem will be One and His Name will be one, and there will be no more free will. The *yediah*, which is above *bechirah*, will be revealed. The simple understanding of this matter is that from then onward, man will no longer have free will. But the deeper way to understand it is that it will become revealed “retroactively” that Hashem was in control, and not man. Therefore, one can choose right now to have that revelation in which Hashem is completely in control from now and onward, and also retroactively.

These are really 2 stages of choosing. According to the first way that we explained, our free will is to choose either *bechirah* (free will) or to choose to have *yediah* (foreknowledge of Hashem). According to the second way mentioned, our choice is if we will choose to connect ourselves to the revelation of the future, in which it becomes from then onward and also retroactively that only Hashem is in control of everything, and therefore we are choosing right now to let Hashem take over “retroactively.”

**Q: Does that mean that one has to choose to live in such a way [in which he lets Hashem run his life and he is not the one choosing anything]?**

A: It means to choose to connect yourself to that level, and then be default you will be living like that. Meaning to say, this is not a way to act in the active sense. It just means that you connect yourself, truly, to that level, and that is exactly the *bechirah* that we have. The word “choose” is **בחר** (*bachar*), from the word **חבר** (*chibur*), connection. We can “connect” ourselves through our *bechirah*, to the level of the future in which there is no *bechirah*. It is not a decision of how you will “act”, it is rather a decision of becoming inwardly connected to the state of the future [where Hashem is running everything].

**Q: What about if a person has gained the light of *yediah* and being that he knows that Hashem is running everything, he doesn’t *daven* as much and he doesn’t get emotional anymore when he *davens*, he’s just calm and serene all the time because he knows that Hashem is running everything? Is such a person acting in the wrong way?**

**A:** There is always a concern that when a person gains a high level of light (in this case, the light of *yediah*), his “container”, his body and his animal soul which are meant to house the light, will misinterpret the light. In this case, the body and animal soul can misinterpret the concept of *yediah* as “Since Hashem is running everything anyway, I can be lazy”, and he allows his emotions and heart to become hardened like a stone. This is not because he has *emunah*, it comes from turning his heart into a heart of stone that doesn’t feel. The danger of using a high level of light when the container isn’t yet pure (whether his body or animal soul isn’t purified) is not a problem at the root (the high level of light) but a problem with the branches that are below on the world (the person’s body and animal soul), which will use the high level of light for its own self-serving purposes.

Here is a simple, clear example. On Shabbos, there is *menuchah* (serenity), a person doesn’t work on Shabbos, so he rests. From the inner perspective, a person rests on Shabbos because he is connected to the fact that Hashem rested on Shabbos. But it’s clear and simple that most people aren’t on this level, and they sleep on Shabbos simply because it’s pleasant for them to sleep. The animal soul of a person enjoys sleeping on Shabbos, and this is no different than if a person would be sleeping during the weekday, except that now he’s sleeping on Shabbos. Now, if a person is in touch with the G-dly spark in him, he is serene on Shabbos because Hashem rested on Shabbos. But a person isn’t found at this level entirely. A big part of his motivation is coming from his body and animal soul which use the serenity of Shabbos for self-serving purposes. This is an example of a high level of light – in this case, the serenity of Shabbos – which is misused by the “containers” that are below on the world – the body and animal soul – and using the light for the exact opposite of its intended purpose, to gratify the body instead of the soul.

**Q: So what is the solution to this problem?**

**A:** To give a general definition, a person has to be engaged at such a time with “opposite movements” at once, to make sure that he gives up some small percentage of his self-serving motivations. If he doesn’t do this, he will completely misuse the intended purpose of the light. He has to go a little bit “against” the reality of the body and animal soul. So for example, when sleeping on Shabbos which he enjoys to do, he should try to minimize a bit of his sleep on Shabbos with the conscious intention that he wants to uproot the pleasure of the animal soul in this act.

**Q: And how can a person get himself to daven with more feeling when he feels very relaxed that everything’s okay because Hashem is running everything – how can he push himself to daven more, and with feeling?**

**A:** The same idea. He should *daven* about something he needs, even though he knows that from the perspective of *emunah* he doesn’t need to daven for it. He should daven, so that his “animal soul” will be able to get what it needs. So the rule is that whenever a person is making use of a high level of light (i.e. the serenity of Shabbos, or a very high level of *emunah*) and his body or animal soul isn’t purified enough, the higher the light is, the more of a danger there is, and his body or animal soul will misuse the light for its own purposes.



**Q: And that will make him become a lazy person?**

**A:** Yes, because he is being aided by a high level of light and his lower aspects are misinterpreting the light and using it for its own convenient purposes.

Now, there are also people who do not have any light at all, but they imagine that they do have a lot of light. This is a deeper issue – they are delusional about what level they are on. But even if a person does have light and he’s making use of it, in most cases, the person hasn’t purified himself enough so he’s not able to use the light properly. And this is a common error which is found by *ovdei Hashem* (those who serve Hashem with great devotion), where they do have a connection to inner perceptions and high levels of light, which is good – but they are making heavy use of the light and they don’t restrict it, and it becomes to their detriment. It ruins their lower aspects. We can sometimes see people who are on a very high level, but then they fall into bad *middos* or they stumble in areas where it’s difficult to grasp how such a thing could happen to a person on such a high level – after all, this is a person who has higher perceptions. The answer to this is because they are using the high level light but they didn’t yet purify their baser aspects, and they had thought that they were aligned with the high level of light while in reality it was only “surrounding light” (*ohr makif*) to them which didn’t yet enter them. Their lower aspects use the high level of light for self-serving purposes. A high level of light is only permissible to “see them alone” [just as it is said of the Menorah lights] and not to use them for personal benefit.

**Q: What is the way for people who have gained high levels of light but it hasn’t yet penetrated into them – how can they absorb the light properly? A person can be learning all kinds of topics of a very high level, and suddenly he falls into bad middos like when he’s home with his family, or he falls into all kinds of unbecoming behavior for him. So what can a person do to allow the light to get fully and properly absorbed into him, to affect him at his deepest levels?**

**A:** *Raboseinu* have a term, “There will always be a part that remains which is not pure.” Whenever we discuss growth, we are always discussing how we can minimize this impure part that remains. We can’t explain how to reach a state where there are no traces of impurity in us at all. But part of the difficulty is – here’s an example – people will make use of certain concepts that are of a very, very high level of *avodah*, and this awakens even their baser aspects to reach these high levels. This is either because they reach higher levels of “recognition”, or because their emotions were deeply touched by the concept they learn about and make use of, and then it seems to the person that even his lower, baser aspects are also aligned with these high level concepts. But he is fooling himself.

What the person really needs to do is to **take on small resolutions in order to go against his nature.** He should not be only making use of high level concepts that are from higher worlds. “The older ones must warn the younger ones” – the word “warn” is from the word *zohar*, which also means to “shine”, meaning that the radiance of a high level of light, which is like the ‘adult’, can be shined onto a lower level, but as for the lower level itself, which is like a ‘child’, the lower level (the person himself, who is below on this world and receiving the light from above) has to take on very simple resolutions, as if he is a simple person who doesn’t know of any of these higher perceptions. Of course, the higher perceptions can help a person effectively take on these small resolutions. But practically speaking, he must continue

to keep to these small resolutions that he will take on, so that he can purify his lower aspects (his animal soul).

As an example of this, the sefarim of *Raboseinu* teach that even if a person has the higher level of fear of Hashem, which is called *yiras haromemus* (awe of His exaltedness), one should still not let go of his fear of punishment. Although the higher and more desired level is to be in awe of Hashem's exaltedness, this doesn't have as much as an influence on the "animal soul" as the simple fear of punishment does. This is a very clear example of the concept here. We can use this fundamental concept when it comes to any area of avodah. A person always has to **take on very small points of practical improvement**, anything that's within his reach right now to start working on, so that he can reach the more immature parts of his soul and improve them.

**There are those who feel, "I'm involved with such high matters, I don't need to work on these small little things."** But this is like a person is involved with doing great *chessed* for people, so he feels that giving someone a little cup of water is not called doing *chessed*. **There has to always be the little things that we do that we're able to start with, and we must always be doing these little acts of improvement which anyone on any level can do. This point is very, very, very fundamental.** People who skip this point and try to get around it, they'll fall into behavior that's beneath their stature, even if they're on a very high level and they understand very deep things.

There was a well-known story where the Netziv was showing his yeshivah in Volozhin to the Alter of Kelm, and suddenly the Netziv started to cry out of deep emotion for his yeshiva that was so dear to him. The Alter of Kelm quipped at him, "If this was someone else's yeshiva, would you also be crying?" I am not *chas v'shalom* saying the Netziv did anything wrong, I am just saying this story to bring out the point that the Alter of Kelm was saying to him. It is relevant to any person who benefits many people. He has to always suspect himself that maybe all the pleasure he's getting from the Torah being learned in the yeshivah that he runs, maybe it's all coming from some *negios* [a personal self-serving interest that's subtle and hard to be conscious of].

In order to counter this problem, one needs to take on small resolutions so that he can go against any subtle *negios* that he may have. An example which *Raboseinu* bring is that if a person writes a sefer and then he publishes it and he receives his first copy, he should wait a few days so that he doesn't quickly give in to his enjoyment of seeing his new sefer. Why? Because maybe when he's enjoying the sefer, he's not enjoying the truthfulness of the words of the sefer, rather he's enjoying the pleasant feeling that it was him who published and printed this sefer. Although he knows that the sefer is good, he should suspect himself that maybe his lower and baser aspects, his "animal soul", is somehow misusing his enjoyment for self-serving purposes. So he has to do one small thing to go against that possible fallacy of human nature. There are so many more examples that we can give of this, but the idea of it is very clear.

**Q: Is it really enough for this to just to do one small little action of improvement...?**

**A:** One small little action, by itself, is of course not enough. But **if we keep repeating that one small little action, again and again, from a deep awareness that we want to uproot the baser aspects in our animal soul (*nefesh habehaimis*), this will gradually purify our animal soul.** Even if a person is the greatest person in the world, he must never stop doing these small little acts of improvement, and he must do it **on a regular basis**. To emphasize – this is not something to do every here and there, it has to be done consistently.

As an example, the Alter of Kelm, on the day of his death, wanted to get out of bed to drink a cup of water. He was very weak, but he forced himself to get out of bed. He said, “I suspect that that the reason I’m not getting up to get the cup of water is because I’m being lazy.” He said that this on his day of death, where he was certainly very weak, and not only that, but it’s known that he had always been physically weak, even before that. Even on his day of death, he suspected that his lack of strength is coming from laziness, so he went against it. Any other person in such a situation would say to himself “I’m not that thirsty”, or “I’m so immersed in my *avodah* that I don’t need to drink right now” – who would suspect himself on his day of death that he’s being lazy? After a person has reached all his high levels, he still has to keep doing small things to go against any unrefined aspects that he may still have.

However, there’s also another error that people make. People may think that they should just remain with small little points to work on, and they don’t aim to go higher. They remain with a low level of improvement and they’re satisfied with that. This is the opposite kind of problem than what we’ve been describing until now. On one hand, a person has to aim for the Heavens, to be like the ladder footed on earth that reached into the Heavens, but after one’s head is in the Heavens, he must make sure that he is keeping his small acts of improvement, and he must continue doing this until his last day on earth. No matter how high a person reaches, he must always remain with his small resolutions of improvement that he takes upon himself – they should be very small, practical acts of improvement, and he must do them consistently, and it must be an inseparable part of his life.

**Q: Is this because the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul) is always unrefined?**

**A:** The *nefesh habehaimis* is never completely refined, and if we sometimes let it remain completely unrefined and we don’t try to improve it all, its unrefined aspects will fester and gets worse.

**Q: Is it only resolutions of improvement that help us overcome our unrefined aspects? Or can a person just learn mussar for this or use other ways?**

**A:** Learning *mussar* is helpful either if a person learns it calmly and he is arriving at certain recognitions of matters from it, or, if he is learning it aloud and with passion, as Reb Yisrael Salanter introduced, and this is a method that can awaken one’s feelings. However, if we just remain with inspiration alone, the animal soul loses its inspiration eventually. Reb Yisrael Salanter said that every time a person learns *mussar* with excitement, it is penetrating more and more into his soul, like water dripping on a rock which can eventually shatter the rock. But, this is not enough. A person also needs to do actions of improvement. Just like we can’t suffice with our intellectual insights alone, and just like we can’t remain with inspiration alone. We need to be enlightened, we need to be inspired, and we also need to act in

the practical sense. Only actions of improvement will uproot negative behaviors. An enlightening thought or ideal isn't able to uproot a negative behavior, and even a powerful emotion cannot totally uproot a negative behavior. In order to uproot a negative behavior, we need to do an actual action, even if it's something very small. And in fact, this is the depth of all wisdom, when it's able to penetrate into even the tiniest action. A person is the entire spectrum, from the highest level down to the lowest level. Certainly one has to place his head in the Heavens [to enlighten his mind with Torah insights and learning about all the high levels described in the sefarim], but one also has to have his ladder footed on the earth, where it will reach all the way down to the tiniest details. Of course, the main thing is not these tiny little details, the main thing is the greatness [that we learn about and which we try to reach], but within all of this striving for greatness, we must never leave behind the small little acts of improvement that we have to keep doing regularly.

**Q: Why can't learning mussar with emotion and passion be enough for this? Why does a person need to also do actual acts of improvement?**

**A:** Action is a power of the body, and emotions and thoughts aren't able to counter actions. **Actions have to be countered with actions.** Even learning *mussar* passionately will not be enough to do it, though it will certainly affect a person for the better and inspire him to act better. But the 'final-hammer blow' of really being improved can only happen when one is engaging in acts/behaviors of improvement in order to counter his acts/behaviors that are negative. Passionate emotions and inspiration is not enough to improve one's actions/behavior.

**Q: So [in order for a person to improve his negative behaviors] a person has to act in a way that goes against his personal natures and dominant elements?**

**A:** Exactly. That's as true as can be.

[translated from the original Hebrew shiur עבודה-הכרה תשפ"ב 136 דרשות]

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## The General & Specific Paths of Our Sages In Reaching Greatness

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Hashem created a person with two parts – an internal and external part. The inner part of a person is covered over by the external part. Generally these two layers are referred to as the *neshamah* (soul) and the *guf* (body), but if we get more specific, it is the *nefesh Elokus*, G-dly soul, versus the *nefesh habehaimis*, animal soul. The animal soul covers and blocks our G-dly soul.

Our Sages had two different paths [of how to get past our animal soul and reach our G-dly soul]. They had a path that was based on a general formula, and a path based on a more specific formula.

The general formula is basically “*mesirus nefesh*”, giving up the soul, and the sage who exemplified this was Elazar ben Dordaya (when he said, “The matter is only dependent on me.”) In the times of Chanukah, the Chashmonaim fought the Greek army with *mesirus nefesh*, where they were outnumbered and there was no logical plan for them to win. There were no steps and no details to follow to win against the Greeks. Rather, they used the general power of *mesirus nefesh*. That was one path, and it is very general – *mesirus nefesh*.

Another path of our Sages was to work with details, steps, and order.

In the first way, *mesirus nefesh*, a person gives himself up, for whatever his heart is more pulled towards, and one person will give himself up for Torah, another sacrifices himself for kindness, and another for davening. A person can be *moser nefesh* for any aspect of serving Hashem, for any of the *mitzvos*. But the way of *mesirus nefesh* is only for individuals. The second way, which is the root way for most souls, is to work in a step-by-step plan, to build one part and then another part, in order.

However, even within this step-by-step plan, there is also a general way and a more specific way.

The general path within the step-by-step plan is to follow the order of steps laid out by the sage Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair, which the sefer *Mesillas Yesharim* explains. There are 10 levels in it, beginning from Torah, then *zehirus*, *zerirus*, *nekiyus*, etc. all the way until *Ruach HaKodesh* and *techiyas hameisim*.

So there is a general way called *mesirus nefesh*, where a person uses one single power called *mesirus nefesh*, and there is a way of specifics, of following a step-by-step plan, building stage after stage, and this way itself can be traversed in a way of generality. In this path, all people begin from Torah, and from there, to *zehirus*. People go to *vaadim* (groups of self-improvement) and they work on a point for some time, they all work on it together, and they grow step-by-step. That is one way of traversing the “specific” approach.

## The Individual's Path

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But there is also another way to traverse it, which is even more individualized. Every person has his own unique soul, his own inner makeup that he's comprised of, and therefore each person has his own individual *avodah* that's unique only to him and which doesn't apply to anyone else.

The source for this way of *avodah* is the statement of Chazal, "Man was created individual." (*Sanhedrin 38a*). Every person is unique. Every person has his unique *avodah* being the unique person that he is. No one else can do exactly like him. Chazal also said that each person has a different face and different *de'os* (ways of thinking). Each person has his own "portion" on this world. A person has to clarify what "his" personal obligation on this world is.

A person's eternal place in the next world is reached through reaching his unique share on this world, through his own unique *avodah*. But in order for a person to reach it, he needs to recognize what his own inner world is. If he doesn't know what his inner world is comprised of, he cannot do his unique *avodah*. Now, if one takes the path of *mesirus nefesh*, he doesn't need to know his own uniqueness and what his personal *avodah* is. Even if he makes mistakes about his path and he has *mesirus nefesh* for areas that are not meant for him to invest himself in, the spiritual light of the *mesirus nefesh* is so powerful that it will penetrate past his "I" and bring him to a revelation of the Creator, whom he is being *moser nefesh* for and 'dying *al kiddush Hashem*' for, not caring about himself at all and only living for the Creator.

But if a person is taking the other path – to know his unique path and also taking the general path of Torah, *zehirus*, etc., with the more he recognizes his share in Torah, he is more likely to get further. And even if he doesn't, the general path of learning Torah and *zehirus*, etc. will all enlighten the way for him, as he grows step after step. That is why we can set up groups of people who take on the same resolution and work on the same topic for one week, one month, one period. All will work on the same topic, and progress. In this kind of growth, there is less of a necessity for individual self-recognition. But in the third path mentioned – the individualized path – there, a person needs to act according to his personal energies, based on who he truly is.

## Each Individual Is On A Different Level and Has His Own Soul Root

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In order to act in a way that's based on who you truly are, there are two parts to know.

The first part to know is that every person is on a different level. If 10 people gather together and work on something, each of them are on a different level. If we are working based on each person's

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level, then each person's level is different from his friend's, so they cannot all be working on the same point. The level of one person is different than another's and he cannot reach the same exact place that his friend is at.

But even more so, it is because each person has a different role in the world, based on his unique inner structure and soul root. Hashem gave certain parts to him which certainly are not equal to another's. He has his own personal soul. So there are 2 reasons why one is different from another. It is because he is at a different level than his friend is, and even more so, his soul is different.

Therefore, in this path, a person is building his *avodah* based on recognizing his unique parts, and that's how he recognizes his current level too.

### Individual's Path Entails Becoming Clear About Your Unique Aspects

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Here we come to two totally different systems of how we begin to do *avodah*. If we start with *mesirus nefesh*, we can begin from wherever we begin, from a general path. In this path, Torah brings to *zehirus*, etc. Everyone here starts from the same point, and it's clear where to start from. But if we are building our path of *avodah* based on recognizing ourselves, then we cannot start to actually do *avodah* right away. We cannot begin if we haven't yet figured out what our unique parts are, what our current level is, and what point to aim for next.

For this reason, there is need for a person to first clarify – and it is not a short process – to clarify “Who am I? What is my soul? What are the parts that Hashem gave to me?” There are many different points to clarify of course, there are general clarifications and more specific clarifications.

### Different Ways of Our Sages

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Here is one fundamental and clear example of this concept.

The world stands on three pillars: Torah, *avodah* and *chessed*. Throughout the generations, the sages of the generation exemplified any of these three traits. There were those who mainly learned Torah, there were those who mainly did *avodah*, and there were those who mainly did *chessed*. Avraham's main trait was *chessed*, Yitzchok's main trait was *avodah/tefillah*, and Yaakov's main trait was Torah. Each one had his soul root. Now, the Jewish people come from Yaakov Avinu strictly [whereas the other nations come from Avraham, through Yishmael and Keturah's children, and from Esav, who was from Yitzchok], and since Yaakov's main trait was Torah, the main path in *Klal Yisrael* is through Torah.



But certainly there were those who took other paths. A clear example of this is the *Chassidim Rishonim*, who would spend an hour preparing for davening, another hour after davening, and another hour during davening (*Berachos 31a*). They spent 9 hours a day immersed in *tefillah*. How much time did they spend on doing chessed? It doesn't say. The Gemara asks, "When they did they learn Torah and when did they work?" The Gemara answers, "Their work was blessed, and their Torah was protected." But certainly their daily schedule was very different than most Sages, because they were davening much more. Most of Chazal learned Torah most of the day, and they also had times for *tefillah*, but the *Chassidim Rishonim* – many of them, we can't say most of them but certainly many of them – were mainly *davening* for most of the day.

At the opposite end of the spectrum was Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai and his colleagues, who only interrupted their learning for Shema and not even for Shemoneh Esrei. By them, *tefillah* did not have much of a place in their lives. They didn't *daven*, they only said Shema. They were entirely about Torah study.

We also find those of our Sages who mainly did *chessed*, and those who were looking to do *mitzvos* all the time. Each of them had their unique portion on the world.

So there are three main soul roots – those who are rooted in Torah, those who are rooted in *avodah*, and those who are rooted in *chessed*. These three general roots subdivide further. Those rooted in Torah will also be different from each other, those rooted in *tefillah* will be different from each other in certain ways, and the same goes for those rooted in *chessed* – there are different types even within the general soul-type.

## There Is No One Way For Everyone

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So if we want to tell everyone how they should serve Hashem, there is no general way that will fit every soul. Each person has to serve Hashem according to his soul root and according to the level he's found at.

Someone asked me: What should a person do when he's waiting by the doctor in the waiting room? Should I learn? Should I think about *emunah*? Should I think about loving people and having *ahavas Yisrael*? What's the answer to this question? There is really no one answer to the question. It depends on who's asking it, what his level is, what he's involved with right now. And, that very same person five years ago would have to do something different. Even by the same person, he doesn't always have to do the same thing. Because it depends on what time period he's in, what stage he is at. And even during the same day, it will depend. Sometimes he is able to learn Torah during the

day, but if he's busy and haggled, it would be better for him not to learn Torah right now. It all depends on the current moment and according to what the person needs right now.

When a person only takes a general path, he constricts himself. His individual soul is ignored and he gets involved "in a world that is not his", at least to some extent. That is why the inner path to take, which is correct, is for a person to figure out, "Who am I really? What are my capabilities that I'm meant to pursue? What natures has Hashem given me, to assist me in this?"

## We Need Basic Self-Awareness Before Reaching Higher Levels

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Now we can return to what we were discussing originally.

We mentioned that a person is comprised of 2 parts, a soul and a body. This is a very general description. Getting more specific, we are comprised of a G-dly soul and animal soul. We understand generally that we need to get past the body and reveal our soul. That is a very sparse definition, though. We need to get past the hold of our animal soul and reveal the G-dly soul – this is also very general and sparse. But after all we've been explaining here until now, our attitude should be that it's not that we're merely trying to get past our animal soul. Certainly we need to minimize the hold of our animal soul and increase our G-dly soul: *"My soul thirsts for G-d"*. But it's deeper than that.

We need to recognize where we can get to with our animal soul, its capabilities, and we need to also recognize where our G-dly soul can get to. Part of how the animal soul blocks us from the G-dly soul is because the animal soul is animalistic while the G-dly soul is G-dliness – that's clear. But it's more. Part of why it blocks the G-dly soul is, because a person doesn't even recognize his animal soul and what's in it. He is confused even at the level of his animal soul. If he's confused at a basic level, he certainly won't be able to be clear about his G-dly soul is, what his unique spiritual capabilities are, and that is how the animal soul blocks him from revealing his G-dly soul.

So the clarification process starts from a very basic step, from knowing the abilities and limits of our animal soul that Hashem has given to us.

## Recognizing Our Physical Capabilities and Limits

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Here is an example. How much physical strength does a person have? Is he stronger or weaker? How much time does he need for sleep? Is there one answer to this question? Clearly, no. The *Gra* slept for 2 hours, Dovid HaMelech woke up between every 60 breaths. If a person would sleep even

half the day like this, he still wouldn't be well-rested because he keeps interrupting his sleep and this makes it harder for the body. A weaker person needs more sleep, a stronger person needs less sleep. Everyone has to go according to their physical capabilities.

So while it's true that we need to get past the body in order to reveal our soul, that is a very general definition, because how much do we need to get past the body and weaken its hold? And how? We need to recognize what our body's capabilities are. In order to know it, you need to give it exactly what it needs, not more and not less. If a person weakens his body too much, the Baal Shem Tov said that a small crack in the body is a big crack in the soul. He will become sick. The *Shechinah* comes to a sick person, it hovers above him, but he's stuck and it's hard for him to serve the Creator.

Part of serving the Creator is to take care of our body. It doesn't mean we should make the body's needs more important than our soul's needs, we shouldn't overdo it, but our body needs to be strong so that we can properly serve the Creator, it needs to be fit so that it can help our soul.

## Recognizing Our Basic Needs

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And the same goes for taking care of our *nefesh habehaimis*, the “animal soul”. If a person isn't calm or relaxed, his animal soul is not healthy. Before we even consider how to recognize the *nefesh Elohis* (G-dly soul) and work with it, the fact that a person is missing basic calmness in his animal soul will make him anxious. He will have an anxious animal soul and it will hamper him from getting any further.

A very large amount of people have an anxious animal soul. They are not calm. They are bogged down from life, they are busy in whatever they're busy with, each person has his challenges, and it is hard to find someone who properly satisfies his animal soul. That means that the person's animal soul isn't calm, and when that is the case, it will clearly block him from reaching his G-dly soul, that's clear and simple.

## The Ability of Hakarah - Recognizing

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The inner way to go about it is, that first of all we need to understand a fundamental perspective. Inner work is not based on *avodah*, on inner work of serving the Creator, alone. It is based on precise recognition of something. This is called *hakarrah*, “recognizing.”

Whatever a person is doing always has to be aligned with his particular capabilities – exactly and precisely. Or else, the person will fail. To illustrate, if a Posek is asked about a question if something

is forbidden or permissible, in many cases the question is not simple and therefore the answer is not either simple. The issue has to be taken apart with all the factors considered and weighed, and then we can understand what the answer will be comprised of.

Every soul is different, with different capabilities, and therefore, all inner work is based on learning the art of *hakarah*, “recognition”. Inner work is the second half that comes later. The first step which is the basis is, that everything is based on “recognizing”.

This is actually a very, very deep perspective, and let us explain why. We shall first discuss a higher stage and then come back to the current point after. When a person seeks Hashem, there is a lot of truth to this aspiration, there’s a “holy fire” in the soul. A person wants to become a servant of Hashem, to serve Hashem. So he thinks: “I have to become an *oved Hashem* (a person who serves Hashem).” This is certainly a quality. It seems that this is the right way to go in. He wants to do what Hashem wants from him – this seems like the truth. We can’t say that it’s not true. But, let’s analyze this deeper.

If we are learning *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*, we see that this sefer is not based on reactivity and getting emotional. It is based on a certain calmness, it requires quiet thinking and reflection. The point which the *Chovos HaLevovos* is bringing us to, with all of these intellectual discussions, is to bring us to the point of recognizing, *hakarah*. The most complete form of recognition is to recognize Hashem. So, what is the purpose of everything? To become “someone who serves Hashem”? No – that is just a means to a greater end! The purpose of serving Him is only to come to “recognize” Him.

Certainly in order to get to that recognition, we need to get to work and serve Hashem, and without *avodah* we won’t get to recognizing Hashem. Recognition doesn’t come on its own. It is only given to us as a gift, for one who tries hard to get to it. It begins with work and comes as a gift. But what is a person trying to reach? Is his ultimate goal to become someone who serves Hashem? Or, is his goal that he wants to recognize Hashem?

## Are We Here Just To Work Hard At Serving Hashem, Or To Recognize Him Better?

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“*A person was born for toil*” – and he was born to toil in Torah, in general. But what is the inner perspective of where a person needs to try to reach, where does a person want to end up? Does he want to mainly become someone who is an *oved Hashem* – or does he want to become someone who

wants to reach recognition of Hashem? *Avodah* is only the step in between, to get to recognition of Hashem.

Now we will consider this also in deeper terms. Does our soul have the viewpoint that we need to do is to “do” and “achieve”? Or does it want to arrive at a true and precise “recognition” of a matter? Which of this is a deeper and more truthful goal?

We explained at the beginning that our *avodah* is not just based on generalities, it is mainly based on recognizing our soul in detail. The art of “recognition” itself takes up half of our inner work, no less than actual and practical *avodah* must take up half our work. Usually, a person will want to skip over the stage of recognition and he wants to immediately enter into *avodah*. Not only will he be missing recognition and his *avodah* won’t be accurate, but even at the end when he reaches his goal, he still doesn’t realize that the point is to recognize Hashem better. Instead, he thinks that the main thing is to become “a person who serves Hashem”, a “servant of Hashem” [and other such titles]. Whereas if he would have started by realizing that everything is based on recognition, gradually he would realize that recognition is the main thing, and then at end when he is at the goal, he will be shown how the main thing was to arrive at recognition.

## The Cycle of Recognizing, Effort, and Recognizing

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Now we can complete the picture. The first half of our *avodah* is really to get better at “recognition”, and the second half is actual *avodah*. The endpoint is to arrive at recognition. We are meant to begin with recognition and end with recognition – and in between all that, we have *avodah* to do.

In more inner language, there are 2 different time zones. There is the weekday and Shabbos. The week is for *avodah*, while Shabbos is *menuchah*. Do we begin with *avodah*, with the weekday, and then we come to recognition? The inner way to look at it, as *Raboseinu* explain, that there is Shabbos, then the weekdays, and then Shabbos again. So we begin with *menuchah* on Shabbos – recognizing what we have – then we continue with *avodah*, the weekday, and then we arrive again at recognition, Shabbos. We have to start with the perspective of Shabbos and end with the perspective of Shabbos. But in order to reach recognition at the end, we need to really do *avodah*. Do we think we are here for work, for *avodah*? Or do realize we are mainly here for recognition?

In other terms which mean the same thing, we have Torah and mitzvos. The mitzvos are actions, to either do mitzvos or refrain from doing a sin, while the Torah is all about recognizing. It requires exertion, but the goal of exertion in Torah is to come to the goal, which is to recognize what the Torah is, to have clarity through the Torah, to know the Torah, to be clear. When we do *avodah*,

this is action. When we learn Torah, this is recognition. But when a person isn't purified, he needs exertion to purify his body and soul and that is how he can reach recognition through the Torah. If a person puts in effort and he is purified, he receives *ruach hakodesh* – he gets knowledge, he gets recognition, from the root. The Torah is about knowing it and being clear about it, and the way to reach it is through exertion. Why we do need to have exertion in Torah? To get to recognition through the Torah.

If a person has the perspective of only mitzvos, he thinks that Hashem just wants from him to become an *eved Hashem*, to do, to try hard, to exert himself, to take on *kabalos* (resolutions), to hold strong, to withstand challenges. But if someone has the view of “Torah” which is above the *mitzvos*, he knows he is on the world so that he can aim for recognition, to recognize Hashem, to recognize His wisdom which is by knowing the Torah, and to recognize himself. We need to do *avodah* for this, but it's all based on recognizing.

This is the difference between a Talmid Chochom's view and the view of an *am ha'aretz* (ignoramus). The *am ha'aretz* thinks that everything is about doing, while the Talmid Chochom knows that everything is about *daas* and recognizing. Of course, the Talmid Chochom isn't exempt from the mitzvos, and he has to do *avodah*. But his mindset is focused on recognition, not only on working, action, *avodah*.

## Recognizing

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Here we come to a crossroads when it comes to entering into the inner road of serving Hashem, with what perspective we are entering into the ways of serving Hashem.

When you learn *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*, which requires a lot of reflecting and contemplating, this is the perspective of recognizing. The most fundamental recognition is to recognize Hashem, and the product of this is to recognize what the Torah is, and a person who serves Hashem has to recognize himself well and then he can serve his Creator properly. The *Chovos HaLevovos* teaches us how to use the *seichel*, the intellect, to recognize oneself, to recognize our *middos*, and how to refine them, on how to identify the *yetzer hora* inside us. It's all about “recognizing”.

These words are really the root and fundamental introduction to the entire inner perspective about the world of *avodah*, of serving Hashem. There are 2 paths in front of us.

Are we entering into a path where we basically skip self-recognition and we just want to take a generalized path, to know which practical points are expected of us to work on, where it's all about

action? And when we self-probe, we are checking each day if we acted correctly or not, and that's how we grow? That is all one path of *avodah*.

But there is a second path of *avodah*, in which we enter into a path of recognition, of recognizing matters, and it's just that we need to work hard in between all of these recognitions. We need exertion in Torah, as well as exertion in working on our *middos*. But it's all based on going from one recognition to another. When we work hard in our *middos*, it's not just about seeing "I used to be a much angrier person, today I didn't get as angry as I used to. I used to be much more arrogant, now I'm less arrogant, etc." Instead, the person sees, "What did I recognize before, and what do I recognize now?" Before working on doing *chessed*, did a person understand and recognize what *chessed* is? And now that he has worked on doing more *chessed*, how has his recognition towards *chessed* become clearer? If he has improved his *chessed*, he is definitely clearer about what *chessed* is. If he is not clearer about what *chessed* is, then he is simply working at it but he isn't recognizing it.

With this inner mindset, a person can keep exerting himself and purifying himself, reaching clearer recognition, and from reaching more and more clarity, he can keep seeing what points are now appropriate for him to work on, until he reaches greater recognition of a matter and then once again he can re-organize his *avodah*. He needs to clearly recognize the capabilities of his soul, as well as clarity in what he has learned in Torah, as well as clarity of perceiving Hashem's presence, Hashem's conduct, Hashem next to him, and Hashem's very Reality. And he can gradually have clearer and clearer recognition.

This is how a person builds another path of *avodah* for himself. If a person only does *avodah* because he wants to do action and *avodah*, this is based on superficiality, of reactivity, of feelings at the moment. The inner way is to go about it with calmness. It involves exertion too, and each person has to have exertion based on his own capabilities and limitations, but it's all based on clarifying and recognizing, going from one recognition to another. This is how a person slowly recognizes himself more and more. "*My soul knows very well.*" The more one grows, he recognizes his soul better.

How does one begin? He first works hard to understand himself, and based on what he recognizes, he then organizes for himself his personal *avodah* that's appropriate for him to do. When he becomes even more purified, he recognizes himself even better. The same goes for Torah learning – one works hard at his learning and reaches clearer recognition of what he has already understood and reached in his learning. This makes him more connected to the Torah. The clearer he becomes in his Torah learning, the more he will be connected to his learning. Chazal teach on the verse, "*Say to wisdom, you are my sister*" – "If the matter is as clear to you just as your sister is forbidden to you, say, and if

not, do not say.” With clarity about something, we become more connected to it, it becomes like “your sister.”

And this certainly applies to the purpose of everything which is to recognize Hashem. Every step is another step towards clearer recognition of Hashem. There is general clarity of believing that Hashem exists, but when we work hard at this recognition and we are purified, we begin to recognize Hashem better. First we see His Divine Providence, then we can recognize Him even deeper, in our hearts, feeling Him more and more. The more we feel Him, the harder we will work and connect to Him more, our yearning to work hard will sharpen, and with this we become more and more connected to Hashem’s reality.

## In Conclusion

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This was all described very generally. We explained that there is a general path of serving Hashem with *mesirus nefesh*, and there is also a more individual path within this general path, which is to begin from Torah, *zehirus*, etc. We also explained that there is a third path, which is based on serving Hashem according to our unique parts, and we explained that the depth of this is not to be *avodah*-focused but to be *hakarah*-focused – the goal is to come to more recognition, and hard work and *avodah* is merely the means to get there, but it is not the goal. We explained the need to recognize our body, animal soul, G-dly soul (*middos*), and to recognize the Torah and Hashem.

This is all the inner structure that is so fundamental, the purpose of Creation, to know and recognize Hashem, to reach the recognition that the *Chovos HaLevovos* describes. It is to have an inner perspective, and it begins with working hard to understand what your personal role and capabilities are, to recognize your personal natures and *middos*, the parts which Hashem gave to your personal soul. For all of one’s life, he needs to be involved with “recognizing”. What should we be involved with all the time? With recognizing. What should we be aiming to “recognize”? To recognize our true self, to recognize the Torah, to recognize Hashem, and to recognize *Klal Yisrael*. It is entirely about “recognizing”, *hakarah*.



## Q&A

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### Topic 1 - Hakarah, D'veykus, T'mimus

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

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

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

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

Now here's a more spiritual example. Two people are learning Torah. One of them learns 7 pages of Gemara a day and reviews it too. He's connected to his learning. Another person learns Torah by clarifying each thing he learns, becoming clear about each matter, beginning from the *psukim* in the Torah about the matter all the way down to the *halachah l'maaseh*. These 2 people are both connected to their Torah learning, but whose connection is stronger? The one who's clearer about his learning. The

one who is learning 7 pages of Gemara has a desire to learn Torah, and that certainly connects him to his learning, but his connection isn't yet subtle because he hasn't yet become clear about what he learns. The one whose clearer about what he has learned will feel a subtler connection to his Torah learning.

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

**A:** Very good question! Now that we just explained that *hakarah* brings *d'veykus*, you are asking what the goal is, *hakarah* or *d'veykus*. Right now you are viewing *hakarah* as some external form of connecting to Hashem and you are viewing *d'veykus* as something else, and therefore you are asking right now if the main thing is *d'veykus* or *hakarah*.

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

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

Compare it to a child's stages of growth. First a child doesn't know anything, then he develops his feelings, and finally, he develops his thinking. The first stage is *tmimus* (earnestness, not knowing anything), the second stage is *hargashah* (feeling) and the last stage is *mochin* (intellect). So too, in our connection to Hashem, there is a way to connect to Him through *tmimus*, which is actually a very deep connection to Him. There is also a way of connecting to Him through *hargashah*, feeling, and there is also a way of connecting to Him through *mochin*, intellect. But with feeling alone, there is just reactivity, and the reactivity soon diminishes, it doesn't last. You can't hold on to an emotional state constantly. The emotion goes away at some point. Sometimes you feel inspired, and later the inspiration wanes, like a fire that dies down. The fire leaps up and later the fire shrinks. Connecting to Hashem through *tmimus* is a deep, deep connection that comes from the root of the soul. Connecting to Hashem by way of the *mochin* is the second-to-strongest connection, while connecting to Hashem

through feelings is the third-to-strongest connection. A small child when he begins to get older, he loses his *tmimus*. He gains emotion and he hasn't yet developed his mind. He is found at an immature level.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**A:** Because you need to build the entire inner structure of the soul. A person has to build his deeds, his emotions, and his power of recognition, and he also needs to build his power of *p'shitus* (simplicity) which is also called *emunah* or *tmimus*. A person has to build all of these powers. If one builds only part of these, that is where he be found and limited to. If one builds all of these, then he will be found at

whatever power his “soul root” is rooted in. But when a person has the complete inner structure, he develops also his *tmimus* which is above every quality: “Be simple with Hashem your G-d.”

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

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

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

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

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

## Topic 2 – Questions About The Avodah In Sefer “Bilvavi”

**Q: Regarding the Rav’s sefer “Bilvavi” (Part One), is this an *avodah* for every individual, or does each person have a different *avodah* based on his own level?**

**A:** It is impossible to write one sefer that will work for every single individual. No such sefer can be written.

**Q: If a person learns how to recognize himself better will he know which points he needs to work on?**

**A:** Correct, exactly. The better a person recognizes himself, he can work in the particular order that’s needed for him. The words written in sefer Bilvavi are written very generally.

**Q: The *avodah* which the Rav describes in Sefer Bilvavi, which was written two decades ago – is this the main *avodah* even in our current times? Or – as some people have asked the Rav lately, that there are souls of “Rochel” and souls of “Leah” who each have different paths, with some people who don’t have the patience for long paths, whereas other people are more designed for *avodah*? Has the *avodah* of the generation changed, or does it always remain the same?**

**A:** The sefer was not written before 5760 (2000) but after that. So it was written in the last generation [which begins from 5760]. I want to emphasize that it is not the only way to serve Hashem. The words of the sefer have definitely taken on greater sharpness as time continues. The actual inner structure doesn’t change.

**Q: If the time period we are in is a factor that changes what our current *avodah* must be, then do we need to be focused on something else now (other than the *avodah* in sefer Bilvavi), now that the “50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity” is in the world?**

**A:** This is a complicated point. On one hand, each person has their specific *avodah*. Each person today is found in a time period where the 50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity is pulling the entire world into it. Before 20 years ago, we could say that a person can focus only on his own personal *avodah*, and the time period of the world wasn’t such an important factor. But in today’s times, if a person doesn’t halt himself from the flow of all that’s going on in the world, he will certainly end up *chas v’shalom* getting pulled to the other side. So we cannot ignore today the fact that we are found in a time where there is the 50<sup>th</sup> level of impurity which dominates in the world today. Any person today has to separate from the 50<sup>th</sup> level of impurity, as part of his *avodah*. It has to be. Along with this, one needs to continue his personal *avodah* that’s aligned with his particular soul. But he can’t ignore the fact that he is surrounded today in a bad environment, and therefore as part of his *avodah*, he has to go against this flow, so that it shouldn’t engulf his soul.

## Topic 3 - How To Reach Greatness

**Q: Is the *derasha* here an answer to how a person can reach *gadlus* (greatness) today?**

**A:** Correct, exactly. It could be that everyone here wanted to hear of a different way of how to reach *gadlus*. The answer to it is that every person needs to clarify on his own how to get there. If a person wants to get there through the general path, *mesirus nefesh*, then the answer to this question (of how to reach greatness) is very general. If he wants to get there through the second path, it is also very general. If he wants to get there in a very specific way, he needs to go from one recognition to another and to recognize his own soul. This is a long path, but eventually it ends up being short. That is the way to define it.

**Q: What should a person begin to focus on “recognizing”? His qualities, or his shortcomings?**

**A:** It is for this that we gave the series on “Self-Recognition”, which is for most people, who need to focus on their qualities and not on their shortcomings. If most people would begin based on dealing with their shortcomings, they would just become unhappy from this. So they need to begin by discovering their qualities, to name their qualities in order of strongest, second-to-strongest, etc. In the series of “Self-Recognition” we explained how to do this in detail and also why it’s needed. In that series, we explain how to learn about our abilities, but in order to get into the details we need to learn the “4 Elements” series where we get into all the subtle details. Learning how to recognize one’s soul is the first, basic step in order to know where to begin one’s personal *avodah* suitable to his personal soul.

## Topic 4 - Questions About 4 Elements

**Q: A general question regarding working with our “4 elements”. If a person sees that he has a certain *middah* (i.e. laziness) and he knows which element it comes from (earth), does that mean he has to balance it out with a different element? How does one actually do this? How does merging together 2 different elements create a balance?**

**A:** This is a very general question, without getting into any of the details about the elements. It depends on which element we are dealing with, because each element works differently when combined with another element. Since you didn’t ask about anything specific, here is a general answer. Any 2 elements will always have opposite aspects from each other as well as areas in which they work together. Any 2 elements will have differences and similarities, from each other. Integrating any 2 elements usually depends on finding the connecting point, where the 2 elements share a similarity with each other. Now, getting more specific, it will depend on which elements we are dealing with. But the general rule is that each element has its unique aspect, in how it differs from another element and in how it’s similar to another element. For example, if we take an element that is dry and cold and also an element that’s dry and warm, these 2 elements are different because one is cold and the other is warm, but they both share a relationship of being dry elements. It is their dryness which will connect them

together. In any case we always need to see how they are similar and that is how we can connect them together.

Now, sometimes there can be a small percentage of people who have a soul root that's rooted in opposite elements. They have a soul that is comprised mainly of two opposite elements – either fire and water, or earth and wind. There are those with souls who have similarities between their earth and wind, but there are those who have an inner makeup that's comprised of two opposite elements. Either they will have very multi-faceted personalities, or, many times, they are very confused about themselves because they have deep contradictions within their own personality, and this can get so bad that they can become mentally ill from this, depending on how difficult they feel about their inner contradiction. While most people need to work with their 2 dominant elements by finding the connecting point (similarities) between their 2 dominant elements, there are a few people whose souls are comprised mainly of 2 contradicting elements. Their *avodah* is not to find similarities between their opposite elements, and instead, their *avodah* is to learn how to properly combine/harmonize their contradicting aspects together.

## Topic 5 - Questions About The Role Of *Tefillah*

**Q: Rebbi Nachman says that many *tzaddikim* reached all that they reached through *tefillah*, while he reached everything through *hisbodedus* together with *tefillah*. Does every person need to do this? Does a person need *tefillah* in order to gain self-recognition?**

**A:** Statements of Rebbi Nachman are the “illumination of Mashiach”, and Mashiach is linked with *tefillah*, because Mashiach is from the word *masiach*, “to converse”, to talk to Hashem through *tefillah*. So there were *tzaddikim* who built their *avodas Hashem* largely through *tefillah*. But it makes perfect sense that other *tzaddikim* did not begin with *tefillah*, though they did make use of *tefillah*. There was no *tzaddik* who ever reached anything without *tefillah*, but does that mean that every *tzaddik*'s main aspect was *tefillah*? Certainly there were *tzaddikim* who didn't. For example, the Chazon Ish. The Chazon Ish didn't mainly reach his growth through *tefillah*. Did he not *daven*? Of course he *davened*. He himself writes that a person has to daven before he wants to understand anything. But did he base everything on *tefillah*? It's hard to say that *tefillah* was his main aspect. He based everything on working hard at learning Torah, with *mesirus nefesh*, and along with this he also *davened* from the depths of his heart. But he didn't base everything on *tefillah*, he didn't make everything hinge on *tefillah* alone.

**Q: But perhaps we can say that the Chazon Ish reached *mesirus nefesh* in Torah only because he *davened* so much. Especially because someone said that the Chazon Ish emphasized *tefillah* even more than learning Torah, and in addition, the Chazon Ish wrote in a letter, “I put more effort into *tefillah* than into my Torah learning.”**

**A:** That is true, but it was only a result of something else. The reason why he put more effort into davening than learning was because he testified on himself that because he is so immersed in his learning, he can't focus as much on his davening, because his mind is immersed in whatever area of

Torah he was learning about, and therefore he had to overcome his love for the Torah in order to be able to *daven* properly. All of his davening and crying were a result of his Torah learning. Did he have a very strong ability of davening? Yes. And it seems that as the years continued, he *davened* even more. But what was it all based on? His Torah learning. Why did he have to put more effort into his davening than into his learning? It was because his Torah learning came natural to him, it was more his nature to learn than to daven, and therefore he found it difficult to daven. That is why he had to put in more effort to his davening, but not because tefillah was more important to him than Torah.

Sometimes people read stories of the Gedolim, and not always are the stories accurate. Even when the story is accurate, it is hard to understand the meaning of the story, and it is this lack of understanding which changes the whole picture.

**Q: But he would often cry with tears when he *davened*. It seemed that this was because of his feelings and *d'veykus*, not because he had difficulty concentrating on his *davening* due to his learning.**

**A:** His power of thinking was even stronger than his emotions. It's true that he *davened* and cried, but his strong point was his power of thought and being immersed in learning, much more than his power of davening.

## Topic 6 – Recognizing The Neshamah

**Q: How do we attain “recognize” and become familiar with the abilities of our *neshamah*, just as we are able to recognize and become familiar with the capabilities and limitations of our *guf* (body) and *nefesh behaimis* (animal soul)?**

**A:** This is difficult to describe in the language of the body, but we will try to explain it in simple language. Before a person was born, he was a *neshamah*, and after he leaves the world, he will become a *neshamah* again, where he will be sitting in Gan Eden as a *neshamah* (or, *Rachmana Litzlan*, he will be found somewhere else.) So a person had a certain perspective – the *neshamah's* ability to recognize certain matters – and he had this before he entered into the materialistic perspective of the body.

**Q: Is that equally true for everyone on the same level, is it always the same recognition for each person? Or does each person have a different ability of recognizing the *neshamah*?**

**A:** There is a concept of the *ilan*, the “soul tree”, and each soul has its place in that tree, so there are different soul roots. There are different ways of thinking for each soul, based on his soul root, and *Raboseinu* discuss this a lot. So each soul has a different power of recognition that is unlike another's. The recognition of the “soul” really means the ability to recognize from our higher intellect. If there are different ways of intellectual recognition of a matter, certainly each person's soul has a different power to recognize, based on his soul root.

**Q: Can a person go straight to the soul's ability of recognition and skip the recognition of the body and animal soul?**



A: It is possible, but it won't help a person if he ignores recognizing his body's and animal soul's capabilities and limitations, because he hasn't yet purified himself and he won't be able to handle the revelations of the soul properly. He will only get "sparks" of the soul's radiance, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* discusses, that sparks of the soul are in the intellect. With his mind, he can get "sparks" of the soul's light and attain soul recognition on some level. But it's not yet the full recognition of the soul.

**Q: Is that because it's a very hard thing to reach?**

A: Most of *Raboseinu* don't discuss recognizing the *neshamah*. The matter is dispersed every here and there throughout their words. For example, the *Shaarei Teshuvah* says that the ability to regret one's sins comes from the purity of the soul. *Raboseinu* spoke every here and there of different points in which the soul is revealed in. Also, usually they are describing inspiration and not soul recognition. The only place, it seems, which discusses soul recognition in an organized manner, is in the sefarim of *Chabad*.

**Q: Is there anything a person can do practically to purify the *neshamah*? We heard in the name of the Rav that if someone wants to learn *pnimiyus haTorah*, he should recite a lot of Zohar. Is there anything practical a person can do to purify himself, in order to reach "recognition"? Or is it that "recognition" itself is what purifies a person?**

A: Recognition (*hakarah*) is another stage of purifying oneself, but this is a very general question, certainly anything holy will purify a person, but every person individual speaking needs to do different things to get purified, and it depends on the person and on the situation, so there is no one answer to this.

**Q: If someone has more *seichel* (intellect) does that mean he has a bigger *neshamah*?**

A: This is a fundamental question, and the answer is very clear. Not always is there a compatibility between one's inner layer and outer layer. There are people who have a lot of intellect, but it's all external, because they don't have a rich inner world inside them. The intellect itself is certainly a spark of the *neshamah*, and if a person has better thinking abilities, it's certainly the spark of the *neshamah* that is contributing to this. In the words of *Raboseinu*, there are those who have a "soul root" above that is small, but down on the world they appear to have greater souls, whereas there are those who have a greater soul root above but down on the world their souls appear as small. If someone has a great mind, this does not always mean that his *neshamah* will be greater. But sometimes we can see that a person's mind is able to hold much more than the norm, and this is beyond the intellect. There are people who have great thinking abilities. There are high-level souls who have a low amount of intellect, but it's still recognizable on them that their soul is on a higher level. There are even *goyim* who are very smart and wise, but this does not mean that they have a high-level soul. Not always does a great, wise mind mean that their soul is very high. When it comes to *middos* as well, there are high-level souls who have fallen to a low level of *middos*, while there are souls of lesser stature which were born with more purified *middos*. So having a high-level soul or low-level soul does not automatically mean that one's intellect or character will be on a higher level.

## [Topic 7 – Applying Lofty Concepts]

**Q: What is the concept of “choosing to have *yediah*” (choosing to believe that Hashem knows everything already)?**

A: There is a well-known issue discussed in the Rishonim: Did Hashem “pre-set” everything that will happen, since He does everything and will do everything without exception? Or is this limited by the choices that we make with our free will (*bechirah*), and Hashem doesn’t interfere with our free choice and He lets people do as they wish (being that He created a novelty, Creation, in which He allows man to also be in control, as it were)? There are 2 parts to free will – a lower part and a higher part. The lower aspect of free will is that Hashem left over an area for man to choose. There is also a higher aspect of free will, in which man choose the foreknowledge (*yediah*) that Hashem knows and does everything, and in this way, *bechirah* serves as a bridging point to *yediah*. Hashem gave man free will to “choose” who will be in control: “Do I choose for Hashem to be in control, or am I choosing that I will be in control?”

Now let’s explain this in deeper terms. In the future, Hashem will be One and His Name will be one, and there will be no more free will. The *yediah*, which is above *bechirah*, will be revealed. The simple understanding of this matter is that from then onward, man will no longer have free will. But the deeper way to understand it is that it will become revealed “retroactively” that Hashem was in control, and not man. Therefore, one can choose right now to have that revelation in which Hashem is completely in control from now and onward, and also retroactively.

These are really 2 stages of choosing. According to the first way that we explained, our free will is to choose either *bechirah* (free will) or to choose to have *yediah* (foreknowledge of Hashem). According to the second way mentioned, our choice is if we will choose to connect ourselves to the revelation of the future, in which it becomes from then onward and also retroactively that only Hashem is in control of everything, and therefore we are choosing right now to let Hashem take over “retroactively.”

**Q: Does that mean that one has to choose to live in such a way [in which he lets Hashem run his life and he is not the one choosing anything]?**

A: It means to choose to connect yourself to that level, and then be default you will be living like that. Meaning to say, this is not a way to act in the active sense. It just means that you connect yourself, truly, to that level, and that is exactly the *bechirah* that we have. The word “choose” is **בחר** (*bachar*), from the word **חבר** (*chibur*), connection. We can “connect” ourselves through our *bechirah*, to the level of the future in which there is no *bechirah*. It is not a decision of how you will “act”, it is rather a decision of becoming inwardly connected to the state of the future [where Hashem is running everything].

**Q: What about if a person has gained the light of *yediah* and being that he knows that Hashem is running everything, he doesn’t *daven* as much and he doesn’t get emotional anymore when he *davens*, he’s just calm and serene all the time because he knows that Hashem is running everything? Is such a person acting in the wrong way?**

**A:** There is always a concern that when a person gains a high level of light (in this case, the light of *yediah*), his “container”, his body and his animal soul which are meant to house the light, will misinterpret the light. In this case, the body and animal soul can misinterpret the concept of *yediah* as “Since Hashem is running everything anyway, I can be lazy”, and he allows his emotions and heart to become hardened like a stone. This is not because he has *emunah*, it comes from turning his heart into a heart of stone that doesn’t feel. The danger of using a high level of light when the container isn’t yet pure (whether his body or animal soul isn’t purified) is not a problem at the root (the high level of light) but a problem with the branches that are below on the world (the person’s body and animal soul), which will use the high level of light for its own self-serving purposes.

Here is a simple, clear example. On Shabbos, there is *menuchah* (serenity), a person doesn’t work on Shabbos, so he rests. From the inner perspective, a person rests on Shabbos because he is connected to the fact that Hashem rested on Shabbos. But it’s clear and simple that most people aren’t on this level, and they sleep on Shabbos simply because it’s pleasant for them to sleep. The animal soul of a person enjoys sleeping on Shabbos, and this is no different than if a person would be sleeping during the weekday, except that now he’s sleeping on Shabbos. Now, if a person is in touch with the G-dly spark in him, he is serene on Shabbos because Hashem rested on Shabbos. But a person isn’t found at this level entirely. A big part of his motivation is coming from his body and animal soul which use the serenity of Shabbos for self-serving purposes. This is an example of a high level of light – in this case, the serenity of Shabbos – which is misused by the “containers” that are below on the world – the body and animal soul – and using the light for the exact opposite of its intended purpose, to gratify the body instead of the soul.

**Q: So what is the solution to this problem?**

**A:** To give a general definition, a person has to be engaged at such a time with “opposite movements” at once, to make sure that he gives up some small percentage of his self-serving motivations. If he doesn’t do this, he will completely misuse the intended purpose of the light. He has to go a little bit “against” the reality of the body and animal soul. So for example, when sleeping on Shabbos which he enjoys to do, he should try to minimize a bit of his sleep on Shabbos with the conscious intention that he wants to uproot the pleasure of the animal soul in this act.

**Q: And how can a person get himself to daven with more feeling when he feels very relaxed that everything’s okay because Hashem is running everything – how can he push himself to daven more, and with feeling?**

**A:** The same idea. He should *daven* about something he needs, even though he knows that from the perspective of *emunah* he doesn’t need to daven for it. He should daven, so that his “animal soul” will be able to get what it needs. So the rule is that whenever a person is making use of a high level of light (i.e. the serenity of Shabbos, or a very high level of *emunah*) and his body or animal soul isn’t purified enough, the higher the light is, the more of a danger there is, and his body or animal soul will misuse the light for its own purposes.

**Q: And that will make him become a lazy person?**

**A:** Yes, because he is being aided by a high level of light and his lower aspects are misinterpreting the light and using it for its own convenient purposes.

Now, there are also people who do not have any light at all, but they imagine that they do have a lot of light. This is a deeper issue – they are delusional about what level they are on. But even if a person does have light and he’s making use of it, in most cases, the person hasn’t purified himself enough so he’s not able to use the light properly. And this is a common error which is found by *ovdei Hashem* (those who serve Hashem with great devotion), where they do have a connection to inner perceptions and high levels of light, which is good – but they are making heavy use of the light and they don’t restrict it, and it becomes to their detriment. It ruins their lower aspects. We can sometimes see people who are on a very high level, but then they fall into bad *middos* or they stumble in areas where it’s difficult to grasp how such a thing could happen to a person on such a high level – after all, this is a person who has higher perceptions. The answer to this is because they are using the high level light but they didn’t yet purify their baser aspects, and they had thought that they were aligned with the high level of light while in reality it was only “surrounding light” (*ohr makif*) to them which didn’t yet enter them. Their lower aspects use the high level of light for self-serving purposes. A high level of light is only permissible to “see them alone” [just as it is said of the Menorah lights] and not to use them for personal benefit.

**Q: What is the way for people who have gained high levels of light but it hasn’t yet penetrated into them – how can they absorb the light properly? A person can be learning all kinds of topics of a very high level, and suddenly he falls into bad middos like when he’s home with his family, or he falls into all kinds of unbecoming behavior for him. So what can a person do to allow the light to get fully and properly absorbed into him, to affect him at his deepest levels?**

**A:** *Raboseinu* have a term, “There will always be a part that remains which is not pure.” Whenever we discuss growth, we are always discussing how we can minimize this impure part that remains. We can’t explain how to reach a state where there are no traces of impurity in us at all. But part of the difficulty is – here’s an example – people will make use of certain concepts that are of a very, very high level of *avodah*, and this awakens even their baser aspects to reach these high levels. This is either because they reach higher levels of “recognition”, or because their emotions were deeply touched by the concept they learn about and make use of, and then it seems to the person that even his lower, baser aspects are also aligned with these high level concepts. But he is fooling himself.

What the person really needs to do is to **take on small resolutions in order to go against his nature.** He should not be only making use of high level concepts that are from higher worlds. “The older ones must warn the younger ones” – the word “warn” is from the word *zohar*, which also means to “shine”, meaning that the radiance of a high level of light, which is like the ‘adult’, can be shined onto a lower level, but as for the lower level itself, which is like a ‘child’, the lower level (the person himself, who is below on this world and receiving the light from above) has to take on very simple resolutions, as if he is a simple person who doesn’t know of any of these higher perceptions. Of course, the higher perceptions can help a person effectively take on these small resolutions. But practically speaking, he must continue

to keep to these small resolutions that he will take on, so that he can purify his lower aspects (his animal soul).

As an example of this, the sefarim of *Raboseinu* teach that even if a person has the higher level of fear of Hashem, which is called *yiras haromemus* (awe of His exaltedness), one should still not let go of his fear of punishment. Although the higher and more desired level is to be in awe of Hashem's exaltedness, this doesn't have as much as an influence on the "animal soul" as the simple fear of punishment does. This is a very clear example of the concept here. We can use this fundamental concept when it comes to any area of avodah. A person always has to **take on very small points of practical improvement**, anything that's within his reach right now to start working on, so that he can reach the more immature parts of his soul and improve them.

**There are those who feel, "I'm involved with such high matters, I don't need to work on these small little things."** But this is like a person is involved with doing great *chessed* for people, so he feels that giving someone a little cup of water is not called doing *chessed*. **There has to always be the little things that we do that we're able to start with, and we must always be doing these little acts of improvement which anyone on any level can do. This point is very, very, very fundamental.** People who skip this point and try to get around it, they'll fall into behavior that's beneath their stature, even if they're on a very high level and they understand very deep things.

There was a well-known story where the Netziv was showing his yeshivah in Volozhin to the Alter of Kelm, and suddenly the Netziv started to cry out of deep emotion for his yeshiva that was so dear to him. The Alter of Kelm quipped at him, "If this was someone else's yeshiva, would you also be crying?" I am not *chas v'shalom* saying the Netziv did anything wrong, I am just saying this story to bring out the point that the Alter of Kelm was saying to him. It is relevant to any person who benefits many people. He has to always suspect himself that maybe all the pleasure he's getting from the Torah being learned in the yeshivah that he runs, maybe it's all coming from some *negios* [a personal self-serving interest that's subtle and hard to be conscious of].

In order to counter this problem, one needs to take on small resolutions so that he can go against any subtle *negios* that he may have. An example which *Raboseinu* bring is that if a person writes a sefer and then he publishes it and he receives his first copy, he should wait a few days so that he doesn't quickly give in to his enjoyment of seeing his new sefer. Why? Because maybe when he's enjoying the sefer, he's not enjoying the truthfulness of the words of the sefer, rather he's enjoying the pleasant feeling that it was him who published and printed this sefer. Although he knows that the sefer is good, he should suspect himself that maybe his lower and baser aspects, his "animal soul", is somehow misusing his enjoyment for self-serving purposes. So he has to do one small thing to go against that possible fallacy of human nature. There are so many more examples that we can give of this, but the idea of it is very clear.

**Q: Is it really enough for this to just to do one small little action of improvement...?**

**A:** One small little action, by itself, is of course not enough. But **if we keep repeating that one small little action, again and again, from a deep awareness that we want to uproot the baser aspects in our animal soul (*nefesh habehaimis*), this will gradually purify our animal soul.** Even if a person is the greatest person in the world, he must never stop doing these small little acts of improvement, and he must do it **on a regular basis**. To emphasize – this is not something to do every here and there, it has to be done consistently.

As an example, the Alter of Kelm, on the day of his death, wanted to get out of bed to drink a cup of water. He was very weak, but he forced himself to get out of bed. He said, “I suspect that that the reason I’m not getting up to get the cup of water is because I’m being lazy.” He said that this on his day of death, where he was certainly very weak, and not only that, but it’s known that he had always been physically weak, even before that. Even on his day of death, he suspected that his lack of strength is coming from laziness, so he went against it. Any other person in such a situation would say to himself “I’m not that thirsty”, or “I’m so immersed in my *avodah* that I don’t need to drink right now” – who would suspect himself on his day of death that he’s being lazy? After a person has reached all his high levels, he still has to keep doing small things to go against any unrefined aspects that he may still have.

However, there’s also another error that people make. People may think that they should just remain with small little points to work on, and they don’t aim to go higher. They remain with a low level of improvement and they’re satisfied with that. This is the opposite kind of problem than what we’ve been describing until now. On one hand, a person has to aim for the Heavens, to be like the ladder footed on earth that reached into the Heavens, but after one’s head is in the Heavens, he must make sure that he is keeping his small acts of improvement, and he must continue doing this until his last day on earth. No matter how high a person reaches, he must always remain with his small resolutions of improvement that he takes upon himself – they should be very small, practical acts of improvement, and he must do them consistently, and it must be an inseparable part of his life.

**Q: Is this because the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul) is always unrefined?**

**A:** The *nefesh habehaimis* is never completely refined, and if we sometimes let it remain completely unrefined and we don’t try to improve it all, its unrefined aspects will fester and gets worse.

**Q: Is it only resolutions of improvement that help us overcome our unrefined aspects? Or can a person just learn mussar for this or use other ways?**

**A:** Learning *mussar* is helpful either if a person learns it calmly and he is arriving at certain recognitions of matters from it, or, if he is learning it aloud and with passion, as Reb Yisrael Salanter introduced, and this is a method that can awaken one’s feelings. However, if we just remain with inspiration alone, the animal soul loses its inspiration eventually. Reb Yisrael Salanter said that every time a person learns *mussar* with excitement, it is penetrating more and more into his soul, like water dripping on a rock which can eventually shatter the rock. But, this is not enough. A person also needs to do actions of improvement. Just like we can’t suffice with our intellectual insights alone, and just like we can’t remain with inspiration alone. We need to be enlightened, we need to be inspired, and we also need to act in

the practical sense. Only actions of improvement will uproot negative behaviors. An enlightening thought or ideal isn't able to uproot a negative behavior, and even a powerful emotion cannot totally uproot a negative behavior. In order to uproot a negative behavior, we need to do an actual action, even if it's something very small. And in fact, this is the depth of all wisdom, when it's able to penetrate into even the tiniest action. A person is the entire spectrum, from the highest level down to the lowest level. Certainly one has to place his head in the Heavens [to enlighten his mind with Torah insights and learning about all the high levels described in the sefarim], but one also has to have his ladder footed on the earth, where it will reach all the way down to the tiniest details. Of course, the main thing is not these tiny little details, the main thing is the greatness [that we learn about and which we try to reach], but within all of this striving for greatness, we must never leave behind the small little acts of improvement that we have to keep doing regularly.

**Q: Why can't learning mussar with emotion and passion be enough for this? Why does a person need to also do actual acts of improvement?**

**A:** Action is a power of the body, and emotions and thoughts aren't able to counter actions. **Actions have to be countered with actions.** Even learning *mussar* passionately will not be enough to do it, though it will certainly affect a person for the better and inspire him to act better. But the 'final-hammer blow' of really being improved can only happen when one is engaging in acts/behaviors of improvement in order to counter his acts/behaviors that are negative. Passionate emotions and inspiration is not enough to improve one's actions/behavior.

**Q: So [in order for a person to improve his negative behaviors] a person has to act in a way that goes against his personal natures and dominant elements?**

**A:** Exactly. That's as true as can be.

[translated from the original Hebrew shiur עבודה-הכרה תשפ"ב 136 דרשות]