

BILVAVI

GETTING TO
KNOW YOUR
SHARE

003

SEEING REALITY
THROUGH INNER
QUIET

BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH
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SUMMARY

In previous chapters, we explained that the root of a person's task is to recognize his personal portion and reach it and become connected to it, for that is his entire havayah (existence). The fundamental way to get there is through inner silence (hashkatah, or sheket), a deep power of the soul. In this lesson we will continue to explain more about it, BS"D.

UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES THROUGH INTELLECTUAL ANALYSIS

The way which most people clarify things is to use the ability of intellect. (Our intellect contains the mental faculties of *chochmah*, *binah*, and *daas*.) With our intellect, we can see general information and details and can think into them and come to conclusions, based on how far our mind can comprehend.

This ability is needed in order to learn the holy Torah, but it can also be put to use when people try to understand themselves and recognize their soul, and to know their personal share on this world. People are able to use their minds to analyze what their role on this world is and what they are personally meant to do. The “4 Elements” series which we have given is really explaining how to figure ourselves out and what we are meant to do on this world and what we need to personally avoid by using our ability of intellectual analysis.

UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES THROUGH EMOTION

A second way to understand ourselves and to know our share on this world is, through our ability of emotion. Just as a person can feel the cold and heat, so can a person feel what's within him and ‘feel himself out’. However, people often err with their feelings. Most people haven't yet clarified their emotional realm. Also, ever since we are born, people have a nature to be reactive, and whenever they emotionally react to something, they can often be mistaken. Their emotions lead them to form conclusions that aren't accurate.

If someone tries to understand himself and to figure out his personal share on this world by using his emotions alone, in most cases he will make mistakes – sometimes small mistakes, and sometimes very big mistakes. This is because he hasn't clarified his ability of emotion, and he also becomes reactive because of his emotions. This leads one to form conclusions that are not precise about reality and one doesn't really absorb the reality in front of them as it is.

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Emotional understanding of yourself is not totally inaccurate, but it is only a partial understanding of yourself. You can use your emotions to get more inward into yourself, especially when using your strongest positive emotion and your strongest negative emotion. For example, joy is a constructive emotion, and it opens up a person's heart, enabling a person to open up his inner world more. The Arizal said that his joy was the main key to reach all that he came to understand. Negative emotions, such as pain, are also a way to get very inward into the soul. When a person has experienced deep pain in his soul, this can also lead him to a very inner perspective and open up his inner world to him.

Yet, feelings of the soul are only the branches of the soul, not the soul itself. If we only feel our feelings – whether positive/happy or negative/painful – then we are only at the branches of the soul. If the deepest thing we know of is either our joy or our pain, then although we can get very deep into our soul through these emotions, we are just remaining with the branches of the soul, not the root.

Also, most people haven't had very deep experiences of either joy or pain, and most people cannot easily access any of these emotions on a deep level. This is because the heart of a person is very covered over (like "an uncircumcised heart") and that is why the emotions aren't that strong even when they are felt. The emotions are mixed, cloudy, and unsorted.

But even if a person has very strong emotions which he can use to delve deeply into his soul, usually he hasn't yet clarified or sorted out those feelings. He will just remain with a very emotional perspective, and his emotions aren't calm, so his emotions aren't clear and they won't be able to lead him to a truly accurate perspective.

The softer a person becomes and the more a person refines his emotions, his emotions become subtler and he gets closer to a deep place in his soul, where he is then able to recognize better what his personal share is. But it won't be completely clear, because he is only standing at the place of emotion, which can only offer him a partial perspective.

UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES THROUGH INTERNAL QUIET

A third way to understand oneself and what one's personal share is through the ability of "inner silence" (*hashkatah*, or *sheket*). This will be the main topic which we shall explain now, *BS"D*.

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THREE REASONS WHY PEOPLE DON'T SEE OR ABSORB REALITY AS IT SIMPLY IS

We can find altogether three reasons why a person doesn't see reality as it simply is – why they don't see the reality of the entire Creation in front of them and why they don't see their own personal reality.

The first reason is simple – people have a narrow or immature, undeveloped perspective (*katnus mochin*). Every person understands certain things, and when he thinks into things, he understands what he's able to, what his mind is capable of absorbing. But his understanding is limited and only offers him a partial perspective.

Another reason, which is very fundamental, is because the mind is “bribed” and biased to think in a certain direction, and it can sway him into a corrupted perspective (on varying levels) where even the best mind can see truth as falsity and see falsity as truth. The Torah says, “*A bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and corrupts the words of the righteous.*”¹ Not only does taking a physical bribe sway the mind, but even if a person wants something this also influences his mind to think in a certain way. The mind becomes bribed by what a person desires subconsciously, and then he cannot see reality as it is. This is actually the reason why most people don't absorb reality clearly as it is, besides the reason mentioned earlier, of having a narrowed or immature perspective.

A third reason why people don't see reality – and this is the main topic which we will explain here BS”D – is because people lack a certain calmness, and without this calmness, they can't see properly.

THE NOISY WORLD TODAY IS LIKE A STORMY SEA

We will use water as an analogy to explain this concept. The water in the sea is usually clear and we can see under it, but when there are waves in the sea, or when the water is being tossed around in a storm, the waters are unclear and we can't see what's under it. Most people can't absorb or recognize reality as it is, because the world we are found in – a world of action – is like a stormy sea, with no calm respite for the waters to settle.

The reality of the world today is noisy, turbulent, and unstable. New things are constantly emerging. There are fast movements constantly that quickly run through

¹ Devarim 16

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our world, and our world today is like a stormy sea which don't let us see into the water. The movement doesn't let us absorb reality as it is – the reality that can be seen by a person who lives a life of truth. This is a fundamental reason why people don't have an accurate grasp on reality of the world in general, and why they don't understand their souls specifically. They can't see themselves clearly because they see all the storms inside of them - all of the bad character traits which make their soul murky and unclear to them.

The world in general is a noisy place, which makes it hard for people to get a general perspective on the reality in our world today. But there is also the noise that is inside a person himself. A person has all kinds of thoughts, emotions, and desires which are all one big noise in himself. If a person is in a noisy place, he can't absorb reality as it is. The more a person merits to reach a place of inner silence in himself, the better he can see reality as it is.

THE ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE REALITY

Today there is a word that is commonly used, called “experience” (in Hebrew, *chavayah*). People go to a certain place and they enjoy themselves there, and this is called an “experience.” This word has no clear root in *Lashon HaKodesh*, but it is rooted in an Aramaic word “*chavi*,” which means to “see.” The Gemara uses this term in many instances. Aramaic is close to *Lashon HaKodesh*. So to experience a reality is therefore to “see” a reality.

But when people equate experience with “emotion” or “feeling,” this is a disastrous way to define an experience. An experience is not based on what we feel. A real deep experience is to see reality as it is. When we see reality as it is, we see an entirely different reality than what most people see. When we reach a place of inner silence in the soul, we can leave behind the perspective of a person in the midst of a stormy sea, who has no quiet or calm. Then, we gain a new ability, to absorb reality as it is.

THE KEY – INNER SILENCE

It is written, “*For a person is seen to the eye, but Hashem sees into the heart.*”² A person sees reality based on what he sees with his eyes, but he is only seeing the superficial layer. To see the inner layer of reality, a person can't use his eyes. Either our intellect or our feelings can see more internally into the reality in front of us as mentioned

² *Shmuel I 16:7*

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earlier. We can understand something or feel something, but still we will not see it, if we are coming from the perspective of our mind or our emotions.

“Hashem sees into the heart,” meaning that with the ability of revealed G-dliness, we can see with our heart. The verse does not simply mean that Hashem can see into the heart and that He can see what people don’t see. Rather, it means that whoever lives with Hashem’s Presence in his heart can see an inner perspective as explained by *Raboseinu*.

Certainly there are levels to how much G-dliness can be revealed in one’s heart, and there are levels within levels to it, but the gateway to it is via the ability to have an inner silence. “*For Hashem is not found in a wind...and not in a noise, only in a soft subtle sound.*”³ Through silence, a person leaves the perspective of the creations and he enters, so to speak, into the world of G-dliness. There, a new gate is opened, a revelation of G-dliness, in which a person can absorb reality.

People absorb the reality in front of them by using their physical senses. A more internal reality is seen through our abilities of intellect and emotion. When a person is not found in "quiet" and goes out into the noisy world, which is like one big sounding alarm, he will only be able to see the external layer of reality. But when he enters more inward, into a place of internal quiet, to the soft subtle sound in his soul, he enters into a world where he can absorb and experience a more inner level of reality.

ACCESSING OUR NESHAMAH'S PERSPECTIVE ON OUR OWN LEVEL

On Shabbos we abstain from work. This is really an ability of quiet, to desist from being active. Our *neshamah*, by its very nature, lives in a world of Shabbos, where there is no work and no action. The *nefesh* part of our soul wants action, and the *ruach* part of our soul wants movement. The *neshamah* part of our soul, however, lives in a world of quiet and calmness, and views reality from that place of quiet.

Even if a person hasn’t yet revealed their *neshamah*, they can still gain a degree of it within his current soul-level. If he is living on the level of *nefesh*, he can still access the *neshamah* -level within the *nefesh*, and if he is living on the level of *ruach*, he can access the *neshamah*-level within *ruach*. When we speak about the *neshamah* here, we aren’t speaking of high levels, such as the light of the Next World. Rather, we are referring to a level of *neshamah* that is accessible within our current reach, at whatever level we

³ *Melachim I: 19,11*

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are on. If a person lives at the level of *nefesh*, he lives in a world of action. If he lives on the level of *ruach*, he lives within the movements of his feelings. If he lives on the level of *neshamah*, he lives with quiet and calm and serenity – he can see reality from a calm place in himself.

SEEING FROM A CALM PLACE IN OURSELVES

When a person lives in fast movement mode, with everything moving quickly with non-stop emotions, and then he sees something - he barely sees it. It passes by him in a flash, so he can't analyze it properly. But when a person sits quietly and he sees something, he can really see it. He can analyze it and become familiar with it, simply. So too, when a person lives from a quiet place in his soul, he sees the Creation in front of him and really sees reality and can absorb it properly.

Think about the following. The concept we are explaining here is really the inner power in one's soul to recognize oneself. The soul has depth upon depth, as it is written, "*Deep, deep, who can find it?*" and "*Very deep are Your thoughts.*"⁴

When a person tries to understand himself from his intellect, he's approaching himself from the outside. He sees the results of what he has done and the outcomes of his feelings, and based on this information, he attempts to understand himself. A clearer perspective of himself would be gained if he would try to understand himself based on how he feels about himself. Now he is getting closer, he has gotten more within, and he's not coming totally from outside of himself. He is experiencing himself as an emotional, feeling being. But, as mentioned, he can still be in error, because often the imagination is mixed with our feelings. We may be feeling something when really we are fantasizing it, either totally or mostly or partially - we can't totally trust our feelings.

So the best way to understand ourselves is through deep inner quiet. Amidst an inner silence, we can figure out ourselves better, because the quiet in our soul is closer to the soul's root, as opposed to our emotions and rational understanding, which are only branches. From the root we can get to the branches. Instead of trying to understand our soul from its branches, we can try to clarify it from the very place where the soul is – from the place of the inner silence within us.

⁴ Tehillim 92:6

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To give an idea of what we mean, whenever we want to understand something and we use something that's external to it in order to become familiar with it, we will only recognize it vaguely. But if we use the very thing itself so that we can become familiar with it, then we will come to recognize it much better.

The true method to recognize our soul – from within the soul itself, and not from its branching abilities – is to approach the soul from a place of quiet and calm. Then we can just see, without thinking, proving, dissecting, differentiating, imagining, or even experiencing. It is beyond emotion – it is just an ability to see reality as it is. Usually, people have used other methods than this ability of inner quiet so they will have difficulty grasping this concept and trying to apply it. But we have to be aware that there is an internal ability to grasp reality and really see ourselves as we are.

If someone has any moments of total quiet, he is able to feel how a certain deeper understanding has become more opened within him. But this usually happens only seldom and not consistently. If a person lives a life of quiet and calm, he can regularly see reality as it is. When a person lives in a more serene place in himself, he can regularly see reality as it is. This is not like a flash of understanding which comes and goes. It is a certain perspective that a person sees, from a quiet place in himself by which he can absorb reality as it is. He is not just feeling something there. Any feelings are only touching the external layer of reality. He is rather absorbing reality as it is.

Just as the physical eye sees physical reality, so can an internal view in ourselves see the inner world as it is. A person like this sees a totally different world than what most people see. And from that ability he is also able to see into himself, into what's going on inside himself. He can view his soul from outside and see into it. This ability gives a person an entirely new viewpoint. It is similar to the ability of being above the garden-maze of life, which is described in the beginning of *sefer Mesilas Yesharim*, the ability to view oneself from outside of oneself and then direct himself. When a person reaches the place of inner silence in himself, he can see things from above it and outside it, similar to the person who stands above the garden-maze who can direct people through the maze.

THE KEY ABILITY FOR THE COMING LESSONS

This concept is the key to everything that we will explain in the coming lessons. Understand it very well. In the coming lessons, we won't only be using this ability of inner quiet, but will be making use of different abilities, such as intellectual clarification and our feelings, and sometimes we need to use all these abilities at once.

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Even with the ability to see reality using the power of inner silence, we still have to make use of other abilities. But the main ability we have to use is the "inner silence". If not, then our feelings can't be accurate and we will be mistaken about what we feel, and our intellect won't be able to figure things out (because our mind is so limited) and we will not be able to put things into the proper perspective. But when we have the ability of inner quiet, we can then see reality from afar, seeing many things at once by seeing the general picture of something.

Once we see reality, we can absorb it even though we didn't yet have the time to clarify it in our minds. What will take a lot of time for a person to clarify something intellectually will take a second for someone who can see reality as it is from a place of inner quiet. The mind has to take a lot of time in order to clarify something, but the ability of inner quiet can absorb a reality in one moment. Once we gain the ability, we will figure out things very quickly, but it can take a while for most people to develop this ability, because most people have difficulty when trying to reach this ability of inner quiet.

THE FAST-PACED LIFESTYLE OF THE WORLD TODAY IS NOT NORMAL

It is difficult to reach a place of inner silence in ourselves, because we have grown up in a world where the life in front of us all seems to us as "normal." Anyone who wants to do a bit different is considered "weird" and then he has to bring proof to be deemed as normal. Whoever tries to be a bit different, will always have the lower hand. And that is how people live their lives, busy with all their pursuits. The whole world is filled with all kinds of things that people are busy with.

In order to reach a place of inner calm in ourselves, we need to realize that the world today has become like what the Gemara says, that when certain sins are rampant, "Destruction (*andral-musya*) comes to the world." The world has never been so noisy and loud as it is today. The world lacks an absolute calmness. There were always turbulent times of war, but until today's times there was never a regular routine of "noise" every single day. Everything today is screaming out loud, and people can't find calmness. There was never such a reality as in today's times. This is really one of the ways that the last generation has descended.

We have to understand and internalize that the noise which is found within us is really one big block in our path preventing us from accessing our inner world. It is hard to describe this completely in words. It is a certain way of absorbing reality in front of us, and once a person is *zocheh* to understand it, he suddenly absorbs how

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daily life today is really a profound *galus* (exile), not just because we don't we have a *Beis HaMikdash* and no *korbonos*, but because the simple, daily lifestyle of today is really an exile of our souls. And this is all because of the great big noise which we are found in.

That is besides for all the *tumah* [impurity of technology and other evil influences of the world today], which is a separate discussion, and which is from the depths of the "50th gate of impurity." The very noise itself which we are found in today is an absolute contradiction to our inner world. (The noisy situation of today is really getting all of its energy from the "50th gate of impurity," and that is why there is so much noise, but the noise is not the impurity itself, only an outcome of it.)

CREATING A LIFE OF QUIET FOR OURSELVES, IN THE PROPER BALANCE

The way to reach calmness is to choose a life of quiet, where a person can absorb these words and reach an inner recognition and inner decision, that he has to live a "double-life" on this world. One must have times for quiet every day – and of course, he also has to make sure that he is dealing with the world, with his family, with his obligations, his livelihood, his health, etc. A person has to divide his schedule: There are times where he shouldn't have anything to do with the world, and there are times when he should do what he needs to do. But he has to choose for himself a lifestyle which is based on calm and quiet.

The highest level of this was reached by the prophets and those who would go to the desert or live far from civilization so that they could meditate on what was important. They lived all the time with this. But we don't even mean this here. We can't be on such a level. If only each of us could just reach what we personally are capable of and meant to do, as part of our personal task on this world. Here we are just saying that we need to choose a life in which we have calmness and quiet as part of our daily routine. Part of our day has to be spent on responsibilities, and that too requires a balance. But a recognizable chunk of our life has to be a quieter, calmer lifestyle.

(If we choose to learn Torah during our times of quiet, it should be in a calm way. Though Torah learning requires effort and exertion, heated arguments and yelling should be left out during our quiet time, and instead we should just learn calmly and quietly. Think about what the Mishnah, Gemara or *sefer* is saying, amidst a quiet calmness.)

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This is not just advice, but a choice to make, to choose to live a life of calmness. A person who chooses such a life must be prepared to give up many things. He will notice that many necessities of life really bother him and place him under stress. The world in general is a bothersome, stressful environment. We need to be sensible with what we should cut out and what we shouldn't cut out, on what we really need and what we don't really need. But as long as we are prepared to give up things that only create more noise in our life, we can slowly acquire a life of quiet and calm. This is the structure for a good life.

To give an analogy, older people get bothered by the smallest noise, like if there are children living in the tenant above them who are jumping up and down and this greatly disturbs the quiet of the older couple living underneath them. We can be young in our age, but we can have the mentality of an older person, which is: I need quiet and calm. If we have that attitude, we can continue to discuss the further stages in coming lessons. But we first need to make a 'splitting of the sea' – to cross over from the turbulent, crashing waters today - and to choose a life that is quieter and more serene.

It is clear to any sensible person today that there is no calmness in this world. But there is a kind of life we can live which is closer to calmness, as opposed to a life that is far from calmness. When we choose to live more calmly, slowly we become calmer inside, not only avoiding the physical noise of life, but to become internally calmer. The less a person is attached to the lifestyle of the world today, the calmer he becomes inside. He will slowly prefer to be in a quieter, calmer place. When he needs to, he goes back into the noise, and afterwards he returns to the quiet, in a cycle. In this way, a person can be in a place of "*A clear world, I see*" – he sees the world from a quiet place in himself, and from that serene view, he can view reality as it is.⁵

⁵ There was a fascinating Q&A discussion after the class, which has not yet been transcribed.



The Rav's classes appear

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