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# GETTING TO KNOW YOUR IMAGINATION

## THE TORAH APPROACH TO IMAGINATION & HOW TO USE IT



Adapted from  
דע את דימיוןך  
by the author of  
"Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh"

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## *Editor's Preface*

In this *sefer*, the author explains that imagination is at the core of most of the problems in the world. When imagination is leading our lives, we are off-base and not in touch with reality. Imagination fools us all the time and leads us to make all kinds of mistakes.

While imagination certainly helps us be creative and fulfill our dreams, it is doing more harm than good, and so we have to work to uproot imagination. We will also learn in this *sefer* how we can steer the imagination in a positive direction, as well as how to use it for the purpose that Hashem created it for.

**Part One** of this *sefer* is based on an eleven-part series entitled *Da Es Dimyonecha* (“Getting To Know Your Imagination”). This series was more to the point and provided additional material not contained in *Da Es Machshavosecha*.

**Part Two** of this *sefer* is adapted from the final chapters of *sefer Da Es Machshavosecha*, where the author explains the power of Jewish thought (*machshavah*). These chapters focused solely on explaining how the power of imagination (*dimayon*) works, as well as how we can work to improve it.

**Part Three** contains additional teachings on imagination culled from other *shiurim* of the author.

We hope that that these teachings will help us remove the barriers that hold us back from reaching our true soul and continue in our service towards Hashem.

# ***1***

***Working  
with our  
Imagination***

## 1.1 | *The Structure of Imagination*<sup>1</sup>

### *An Introduction to the Concept of “Medameh”*

As is well known, our Sages have written that the soul has certain character traits/*middos*<sup>2</sup> that are present in both the lower, animalistic level of the soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*, as well as in the higher “G-dly” or divine level of our soul, the *nefesh haElokis*. However, there is also another level which exists between these lower and higher levels of the soul. It is called the *medameh* [usually known as the “imagination”] which is described by the Vilna *Gaon*.<sup>3</sup>

Our soul is comprised of the four elements – fire, wind, water, and earth<sup>4</sup>. Imagination is rooted in the element of earth, since earth *adamah* אֲדָמָה is related to the word *adameh* אֲדָמֶה, to resemble. The Maharal wrote that man is created from earth, and his spiritual task in this world is to uplift himself from that earthiness he was created from and instead come to ‘resemble’ G-d on some level. Man starts out from the earth [and therefore, he has earthly and base characteristics]. He must strive to become the Supreme One לעליון אֲדָמֶה לְעֵלְיוֹן as is stated, “I will resemble the One Above”).<sup>5</sup>

In other words, since man is fashioned from the earth, his aspect of “resembling”<sup>6</sup> is deeply rooted in his very makeup. Therefore, man has the ability to “resemble” things. [Either he can resemble the earth he came from, or he can resemble a spiritual being.] This is derived allusively since man is called *adam*, from the word *adameh*. Man has the power of *adameh*, to resemble.

The ideal, perfected state of mankind is to become the Supreme One where man transcends his initial state of earthiness. When man falls from his spiritual level, he resembles the earth he comes from. However, when man acts correctly and is lifted to higher spiritual levels, he climbs higher towards resembling the Creator towards the Supreme One.

Another function of the power of *medameh* in the soul is to use the power of imagination to utilize the natural animalistic characteristics stemming from his lower level of the soul to resemble the G-dly aspect of one’s divine soul.

1 <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-001-introduction-evils-imagination>

2 There are 7 middos or character traits which are the 7 primary emotions of both the animal and the divine soul: love, hatred, pride, victory, admitting, connection and lowliness as explained extensively in the author’s sefer, *Getting to Know Your Feelings*

3 in *Yeshayahu* 11:1 Amongst the 70 forces of the soul, the Vilna Gaon lists the two main abilities of thought/ *machshavah* and imagination/*medameh* in the brain/*mochin*.

4 Editor’s Note: Specifically, they are located in the animal soul/*nefesh habehaimis* area of the soul. The author has explained that the four elements also exist in the divine soul/*nefesh Elokis*, but that they are already perfected, so they do not have to be improved. It is only the four elements in the animal soul which we need to fix and improve.

5 See *Yeshayahu* 14:14; explained in *Shnei Luchos HaBris* 3a, 20b, 268b, 301b

6 *adamah/medameh* אֲדָמָה/אֲדָמֶה

It is man's animal soul which makes him resemble the earthiness he was created from, whereas the divine soul allows man to resemble the level of the Supreme One. Through using the power of imagination in the soul, man can succeed in getting his animal soul to resemble the divine soul.

On a deeper level, man's spiritual task is to elevate everything to the level of the Supreme One. As our Sages have explained, prophecy was accessed by Moshe *Rabbeinu* who was the father of all the prophets who [reached the exalted] level of the Supreme One. It is written, "*In the hands of the prophets, I resemble.*"<sup>7</sup> Prophecy was reached by those who perfected their ability of imagination. This was the ultimate level which only the prophets reached since they had succeeded in elevating even their divine soul to resemble the Creator. It is the highest function of imagination.

### ***How "Medameh" Relates to Middos***

Another very fundamental use of imagination is that imagination can produce entirely new character traits. The word *medameh* מדמה is related to the word *middah* מידה<sup>8</sup> since they both bear the same root [in Hebrew].

There are *middos* contained in firstly, our animal soul as well as in our divine soul; secondly, there are the 13 general *middos* of *Rebbi Yishmael* which the Torah expounds on;<sup>9</sup> and thirdly, there are the 13 *middos* of Hashem.<sup>10</sup>

However, as we mentioned previously, there is another source for character traits other than our animal soul and our divine soul which are found in the level of imagination. These character traits are situated between the levels of the animal soul and the divine soul.

Let us first reflect upon the following: When we think about what imagination is, what comes to mind? Generally, we think that this refers to the brain's ability to imagine things. As we know, our mind can compare one thing to another, which makes use of our imagination; or it can simply picture something in the mind, which is a visual kind of imagination.

However, imagination is only one of the uses of the soul's power of "imagination." There are many facets to imagination, as we will explain soon, G-d willing.

We have already mentioned that there are higher uses of our power of imagination: the prophets attained the highest use of imagination, which is called *adameh l'elyon*, "I will resemble the Supreme One". On our own level, we have an spiritual task to use our imagination to resemble the Creator by elevating our lower character traits to the level of our divine soul. And delving even deeper, we can elevate our entire being to the level of the Creator and thereby come to resemble Him.

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<sup>7</sup> *Hoshea* 12:11

<sup>8</sup> "*Middah*" is the singular form of the plural form "*middos*"- character traits

<sup>9</sup> which states the rules of how we learn halachos out of Torah verses, such as *kal vachomer*, *gzeira shava*, *binyan av*, etc.

<sup>10</sup> thirteen *middos* *harachamim* that delineate Hashem's mercy for us as explained in the classic *sefer Tomer Devorah*

### *The Problem With 'Imagination Techniques' In Modern Therapy*

Based upon these concepts, we can now understand that “guided-imagery” techniques of modern therapy use the power of the imagination to try to develop the soul. Imagination based therapy originates from non-Jewish sources, and it was previously unheard of that the Jewish people should ever make use of them. These “guided-imagery” techniques were introduced by people who are very far removed from the way of Torah and have [unfortunately] spread into the circles of Torah Jewry.

Let us examine what the problem with this therapy is, what the Torah approach is, and how we are really supposed to use our power of imagination.

The inner approach of the spiritual task of self-improvement, which has existed for many generations, was always to learn about the character traits of our animal soul, with the intention of elevating our lower, “animalistic” level to the higher divine level and to the level of the Torah’s *middos* for the purpose of resembling the *middos* of Hashem. This was always the way of our Sages.

But now Western thought uses an approach that basically throws away the spiritual task of working on our character traits, and instead attempts to solve all character issues using the power of the imagination! These techniques take the power of imagination, which is really scattered and attempts to create some kind of orderliness which is used in “guided-imagery”.

Instead of emphasizing character refinement and trying to change the animalistic character traits a person is born with, the emphasis is placed on how to use the power of imagination (using various methods of “guided-imagery”) to try and fix the entire psyche.

If these “guided-imagery” techniques would only be viewed as a part in the equation of self-improvement, there would be a point in considering this kind of therapy. But the way that this kind of therapy is being used simply ignores character improvement and instead attempts to solve all of the soul’s problems merely by using the power of the imagination. In doing so, these methods are an attempt to replace the path of our Sages throughout the generations in how we work with our soul.

Of course, we are not negating the fact that it is necessary to work on improving the negative uses of imagination. But when people think that all of the issues in the soul can be solved through just using imagination, we must acknowledge that this is not the way of our Sages.

If one studies the works of our Sages concerning the power of imagination<sup>11</sup>, one will see that fixing the power of imagination is only a part of the process of character improvement. It is clear that we cannot base our inner self-improvement solely on the soul’s power of imagination, in contrast to what the modern world of therapy is attempting to do.

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<sup>11</sup> enumerated in: Rambam, *Shemonah Perakim & Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah* | *Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam, Sefer haMaspik (Guide to Serving G-d) (Feldheim Edition, chapter 12)* | *The Vilna Gaon, list of Seventy Forces of the Soul in Yeshayahu 11:1* | *The Vilna Gaon in Sefer HaBris* | *Rav Yisrael Salanter, Iggeres HaMussar printed in sefer Ohr Yisrael* | *Rav Kalonimus Kalman Shapira, Rebbe of Piaseczna, the Aish Kodesh, sefer Chovas HaTalmidim* | *Rav Shlomo Wolbe, sefer Alei Shur* | *Rebbe Nachman of Breslev, sefer Likutey Moharan*



### ***Imagination of the Mind and the Heart***

In order to uproot ourselves from the above perspective of secular therapy, we must understand exactly why they are mistaken.

If imagination and character traits would be two distinct areas in the soul, there would be no assumption to use the imagination to fix character traits, because everyone would be aware that they are separate areas of the soul and that there is no connection between them. But, as we mentioned earlier, there are two sources of imagination: the mind and character traits. Since imagination is present both in the mind as well as in our character traits, it is possible for people to have the notion that the power of imagination can be used to solve all problems in the psyche.

Now we will explain this in clearer terms. The imagination is present both in the mind and in the heart. Our mind contains our knowledge, whereas our heart contains our character traits. It is written, “*And you shall know today, and you shall settle the matter upon your heart*”<sup>12</sup>. If imagination would be used as a way to internalize character traits “upon” our heart, that would be fine. But the secular methods of therapy are remaining at the level of “*And you shall know today*”, and they do not work at all on the level of internalization, which is “*And you shall settle the matter upon your heart.*”

It is almost impossible to internalize all of one’s mind’s knowledge “upon” the heart using the power of imagination, and thereby uproot from one’s self the negative character traits of his *animal soul* which are present in the heart. This is because the mind’s imagination cannot be used to affect the heart’s imagination, which contains the character traits; nor can it have an effect on these character traits and produce true good character traits.

Until now, we have briefly explained the root of the problem with using imagination technique in therapy. The mistaken notion described has fooled even *b’nei Torah* since people think it is some “new way” in self-improvement.

### ***The Two Abilities of the Heart: Character Traits and Imagination***

Delving even more deeply, we can expound that besides for the mind’s power of imagining, there is also the heart’s power to imagine which has several aspects.

In brief terms, there are two parts to the heart. There is the power of visualization/*tziyur*, which is described in the term “wise of heart”,<sup>13</sup> and in more subtle terms it is called “a heart that understands”.<sup>14</sup> The heart’s power to visualize information, which is fueled by the mind’s power of imagination, is one part of the heart. The other part of the heart is the character traits/*middos* that are expanded and exaggerated by the heart’s imagination.

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<sup>12</sup> Devarim 4:39

<sup>13</sup> Mishlei 8:10

<sup>14</sup> Berachos 61a

To illustrate, our Sages state, “One who wants a hundred wants two hundred.”<sup>15</sup> Besides for the natural desire to own more money, why would a person specifically want to double the amount of what he has? The answer is that his imagination has expanded the hundred into two hundred. Thus he is not satisfied with a hundred, and he wants two hundred. If a person would not be able to visualize using his imagination, he would not specifically want two hundred [he would simply want more].

The desire to own more money comes from the soul’s faculty of the will/*ratzon* combined with the fact that he imagines the two hundred dollars. The fact that he fantasizes about the two hundred dollars is one factor in his heart, and the second factor is the very initial desire for the money. The two factors together fuel his imagination. Thus, the will to have more money is due to an exaggerated desire, which his imagination caused. The desire for the two hundred came from the visual fantasies of his imagination.

This is a general outline of the concept which we will expand on later.

### *The Lower and Higher Uses of ‘Medameh’*

Now that we have explained what the structure of imagination in the soul looks like, we will map out this structure which determines our spiritual task, from the lowest to the highest level.

- 1) Man is called *adam*, derived from *adamah* אָדָמָה, the earth, which he was created from.
- 2) The word *adam* אָדָם is also allusively derived from the word *adameh* אָדָמָה, to resemble, which refers to how man’s animal soul resembles the earth.
- 3) Man is also called *adam* אָדָם from the *medameh* מְדַמָּה, the imagination, which can both expand information as well as picture information *tziyur* ציור.<sup>16</sup>
- 4) A higher use of *medameh* than imagination is for a person to refine his character traits, so that the character traits of his animal soul can come to resemble the higher character traits contained in his divine soul.
- 5) An even higher use of *medameh* is to use the *medameh* of the mind’s imagination *mochin*.
- 6) Higher than this use of *medameh* is when one is tries to “resemble” himself to the 13 *middos* of the Torah,<sup>17</sup> and in a more subtle use of this power, a person’s mind becomes aligned with the Torah as he learns the Torah, through comparing facts of Torah and seeing the differences between nuances in the Torah [which will be explained in the next chapter].

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<sup>15</sup> *Koheles Rabbah*

<sup>16</sup> In Chapter Five, this is referred to as “the heart’s imagination.”

<sup>17</sup> Rashi to Breishis 2:8 refers to the “32 middos” of Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yosi haGelili

- 7) Finally, the highest use of imagination is when a person comes to “resemble” the Creator – when his character traits have become aligned with the *middos* of Hashem.<sup>18</sup>

Now that we have briefly described the imagination’s structure, we need to stress that it is important to realize that whenever we are using the power of imagination, we must know what kind of imagination it is. We must know how to name it, what its limitations are and what the rules will be, and then we will understand how to make use of the particular kind of imagination that we are using.

Here is an example. When a person is learning *Gemara* and he is learning the words of Abaye and Rava or the *beraisa d’Rebbi Yishmael*, he is actually involved with learning about the 13 *middos* of the Torah (because there are 13 *middos* contained in the Oral Torah, which explain the written Torah). As a person is learning Torah, his mind is either intellectualizing the information, or he is picturing it. He is making use of imagination. But this kind of imagination will not necessarily have an effect on his mind’s imagination and purify it, and it surely will not always improve the heart’s imagination. He is using one kind of imagination, which will not necessarily affect the other kinds of imagination that are in the soul.

Thus, whenever we are using imagination, we must know what kind of imagination it is, what its rules are, and how it specifically works. Even when we use imagination properly and we keep to the rules, we still have to see it as only rectifying a part of the soul, and not as the entire rectification of the soul. We cannot base our entire spiritual task only upon imagination.

We must keep remembering this point, and we will keep mentioning it as we go along: The attempt to correct our entire spectrum of the soul through imagination alone has no basis in reality and it does not succeed.

### ***Why Imagination Cannot Be Used To Improve The Entire Soul***

What, indeed, is wrong with using imagination as a power to rectify the entire soul? What is essentially the mistake of those who are trying to use “guided-imagery” to solve all of the soul’s issues?

When people use it, it seems to them as if they are working out their issues; they are finding that certain parts of their life are easier after having used “guided-imagery” techniques. It seems to be a good thing which proves successful. But the error is that even if people have gained from it somewhat, it is still not purifying their being. It is only affecting their mind’s imagination, and maybe it even improves the heart’s imagination as well, but it is not directly improving the character traits at their root – the character traits of the person’s animal soul remain as before, largely unaffected.

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<sup>18</sup> This will be explained in Chapters Ten and Eleven, *b’ezer Hashem*.

So, even if a person may feel that “guided-imagery” techniques are improving the person’s power of imagination to a certain extent, it does not actually improve the character traits of the animal soul. The lower, animalistic level of the soul continues to remain as it was before, unfixed and unimproved [so he has not become a better person from all of these “guided-imagery” techniques].

### ***The Imagination’s Power To Expand***

Now let us explain, with the help of Heaven, the imagination’s power to expand information which we mentioned.

Rav Yisrael Salanter wrote that “Man is trapped by his intellect, but free in his fantasies. His imagination can lead him to wherever his heart desires.”<sup>19</sup> These words tell us everything we have to know about [a Jew’s] self-improvement with regards to fixing the character traits, and where we need to begin. We would have thought that fixing our character traits begins with attempting to fix the character traits themselves, but Reb Yisrael Salanter tells us that its root is in fixing the imagination, which fuels all of the negative character traits.

In these words, Reb Yisrael Salanter pinpointed the very root of character improvement: it is the imagination which lies at the core of all evil in man. The imagination essentially breaks the limitations of each of the character traits and exaggerates them beyond their normal uses.

Let’s analyze this further. We explained that there are three kinds of character traits present in our soul: the character traits of our lower “animalistic” level, the higher character traits of our higher “G-dly” or divine level, and the middle level between them which is called imagination.

To illustrate, let’s take the trait of desire, for example. Every person has desires/*taavah*, which causes him to want certain things. There are two factors here. There is the desire itself, and there is also the imagination which is continuing to fuel it. A person’s imagination comes and expands the desire, stretching it past its normal and healthy bounds.

This applies to each of the character traits as well, not just desire. Each of our character traits contains two aspects – both the character trait itself, as well as the imagination which comes and expands the character trait beyond its normal bounds. And even more subtle, besides for the *medameh* aspect that fuels imagination, there is also the visualization perception ציור, which visualizes the image in both the mind and the heart.

### ***Imagination As A Cause For Sadness***

Now we will explain how imagination relates to the four elements of the soul which are earth, water, wind and fire.

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<sup>19</sup> *Igeres HaMussar, printed in sefer Ohr Yisrael, 31.*

*Medameh* is generally rooted in the element of earth. Earth is “*adamah*”, from the word “*medameh*.” Since earth in the soul is the root of the trait of sadness, there are many cases of sadness which are rooted in imagination.

The very fact that a person wishes he had something when it is not realistic for him to attain it, is already a use of the imagination. If a person wants something that is realistic, this is not being fueled by the imagination. But when a person wants something which he cannot realistically acquire, this shows the imagination at work. Here we come to the major root of sadness in many people.

One kind of sadness stems from our element of earth. This kind of sadness belongs to the group of the other negative traits in the soul, such as anger, arrogance, idle speech, desires, laziness, etc. These different traits stem from the four elements of the soul. Besides this kind of sadness, however, there is an entirely new source in the soul for sadness, which is produced by the imagination.

We will return to discussing this, with the help of Hashem [in chapter 10 and 11].

### ***Imagination Exaggerates The Uses of Middos***

As we said before, our character traits are affected by our lower, “animalistic” level, as well as by our imagination.

In order to differentiate between these two levels we need to tread delicately and with depth. For example, when a person suddenly feels a desire for something, can he discern if this desire is coming from the normal trait of desire that is present in the lower, “animalistic” level, or if it is perhaps coming from his imagination?

If the desire is coming from the lower, “animalistic” level, the solution lies in working directly with the desire. However, if the desire is coming from the imagination, then the approach will lie in refining the imagination. There is a vast difference between these two motivations of desire.

Let us again repeat and emphasize that each of the character traits contain both the character trait itself as well as the imagination which expands the limits of the trait. (On a deeper note, not only does the imagination exaggerate each character trait, but it also perverts the proper use of each character trait in the process).

### ***The Difference Between Regular Middos & Middos Exaggerated By Imagination***

Now we want to know: What is the difference between the imagination which seeks to exaggerate the character traits, and our actual character traits [of our lower, “animalistic” level]?

The actual character traits themselves can be derived from one [or a combination of] the four elements: fire, wind, water and earth. A persons will is being used to activate any of these character traits: “I **want** to be haughty”, “I **want** to eat”, etc.

In contrast, imagination, which expands the limits of each of the character traits, is when I want something simply because I imagine it and visualize it.

*Chazal* state that the evil inclination does not control a person unless he sees something.<sup>20</sup> Why is it that sight precedes desire? If desire wouldn't be linked with laying eyes upon something, a person would continue to desire something even if he has never seen it, just as a person gets angry or becomes conceited without having seen something beforehand. But since desire can be fueled by imagination, and imagination causes a person to visualize, desire is therefore always preceded by some kind of sight or visualization which enables the evil inclination to take hold. (This is because Chavah laid her eyes upon the Tree of Good and Evil (the *Eitz HaDaas*), which symbolizes the imagination.<sup>21</sup> Ever since then, desire is always preceded by the imagination visualizing it).

Here *Chazal* are telling us that the character traits themselves, when left untouched by imagination, would be fine. The character traits of our lower, "animalistic" level would stay in their limits and would not be problematic. However, it is the imagination which comes and abuses the limitations of the character traits of the lower, "animalistic" level, causing the character traits of our "animalistic" level to be misused.

(However, we can ask: If there are two sources of evil in a person's character – the character traits of the animal soul, and imagination - why would the character traits of the animal soul remain fine if there wouldn't be such a thing as the imagination? Desire, for example, would cause a person to continue desiring and wishing for something. Why is desire only evil when it is affected by imagination? The answer is that if imagination would not be used for evil, it would be used for holiness. Imagination would cause the character traits of the lower, "animalistic" level to resemble the character traits of the divine soul, and then the character traits in our animal soul would be perfected.)

We all have the power of imagination in the soul, and the only question is how we are using and directing it.

Usually, a person is not drawn toward self-improvement, and he does not initially express a desire to get his lower, animalistic level to resemble his higher divine level. What happens as a result? When imagination isn't being used for holiness, it serves to exaggerate the proper limits of each of the character traits. We already mentioned the trait of desire as one example, but this is true as well for all of the other character traits – the imagination comes and exaggerates the uses of all character traits present in the animal soul.

Two problems are created from this. First of all, the lower character traits present in our animal soul will never come to resemble the higher character traits present in our divine soul (and then our character traits will certainly never become aligned with the *middos* of Torah and the *middos* of Hashem). In addition, the lower, unrefined character traits will become unrestrained, due to the

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<sup>20</sup> *Sotah 8a*

<sup>21</sup> according to the commentaries of the *Vilna Gaon* and the *Sforno* in parshas *Bereishis*

imagination which dominates them, and then our character traits will continue to be used and ruled by imagination.

There will then be two distinct kinds of evil present in the person: the unrestrained imagination, and the character traits which have been negatively affected by it. The imagination will use all of the various character traits of the lower, animalistic level by expanding and exaggerating them for evil uses.

### ***The Nature of Imagination: The Expansion Of A Previous Thought***

Imagination cannot initiate a thought; it can only expand and exaggerate the thought that is already there. Imagination is a use of the mind's power of contemplation/*binah*. The original information that enters the mind which one has received from his teachers is called wisdom/*chochma*, whereas contemplation is an understanding based upon comparing the information that enters the mind. The imagination cannot begin anything new. It is always a second step in the mental process.

The same is true for how imagination affects the character traits. It cannot produce new character traits; all it can do is expand the original character traits.

Thus, although the evil in our initially unrefined human character lies in the animal soul, the evil of the animal soul wouldn't spread outward from where it is if not for imagination. The imagination would then be holy, and the animal soul would come to resemble the divine soul and all of our character traits would be perfected.

But when imagination remains in its raw and unrefined state in the soul, the imagination only serves to exaggerate the character traits, and instead of elevating the character traits of the animal soul to the level of the divine soul, it damages the character traits and causes a person to descend downward from his current level.

Now we can understand in depth why the evil inclination is aroused specifically when a person sees something that he desires. If his eyes wouldn't see it, the imagination would not be awakened, and the trait of desire would remain in its limits. When he sees something he desires, the visual aspect of imagination ציור is activated leading to the desire being exaggerated.

In order to rectify our character traits, the first thing to bear in mind is that we have both our initial character traits as well as the exaggerated character traits produced from imagination. Thus, when we want to know what to work on in order to rectify our character traits, our spiritual task will be two-fold. We will need to fix the imagination, as well as the character traits themselves.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Fixing our medameh is the subject of this sefer, *Getting To Know Your Imagination*. Fixing the middos is the subject of a four-part series of the author's audio series, "Fixing Your Middos", which includes *Fixing Your Earth*, *Fixing Your Water*, *Fixing Your Wind*, and *Fixing Your Fire*.

If we manage to fix our power of imagination completely and it becomes holy, our character traits will be improved as a direct result. However, the proper way to approach character improvement is to not only fix the imagination, but to work on the imagination and character traits simultaneously. Through working on both of these aspects together, we can rectify the soul.

### ***The Mind's Imagination and the Heart's Imagination***

Now we will discuss an additional point about the imagination.

As we said, there are lower and higher forms of imagination. The lower form of imagination exists in the baser parts of man, which draws him towards earthiness and unrefined, animalistic behavior. Above this are two higher uses of imagination: 1) imagination present in one's mind, which either compares information or visualizes information/*tziyur* and; 2) imagination present in the heart, which either expands information/*harchavah* or fantasizes (which is another form of *tziyur*).

We can learn about the mind's imagination and the heart's imagination from our dreams. Our dreams show us what we truly desire. "*On my bed at nights, I sought that which my soul loves.*"<sup>23</sup> What does a person dream about? Sometimes we dream about what our mind has imagined during the day, and sometimes we dream about our heart's desires. Sometimes we dream about desires that we aren't even aware we really have, and we dismiss these dreams as nothing but fantasies that do not reflect our actual desires.

We dream about things that our soul feels connected to. If we wouldn't feel connected to a certain thing, we wouldn't dream about it since imagination is based on some thought that preceded it. Here we are speaking about the basic level of imagination. It is understood that we are not discussing high level dreams where the soul leaves the body and views things through a higher and refined kind of imagination.

When we analyze our dreams, we discover that there are two different things we dream about. We dream about things we already feel connected to in our soul. We find ourselves expanding upon those wishes that we already have and identify with. But we also dream about things that are far-fetched – things that we do not feel connected to at all.

Most dreams are like the second type. A person wakes up from a dream and he remembers bits and pieces of his dream, but he has no idea why he dreamed it. The truth is, though, that he really wants those things he dreamed about, and those desires are just deep in his subconscious.

What is the difference between these two kinds of dreams? There are fantasies that come from our mind, and there are fantasies that come from our heart. On a more subtle note, all fantasies stem from a combination of both the mind and heart, and the only issue is in the percentages of them – how much of the fantasy is coming from the mind, and how much is coming from the heart.

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<sup>23</sup> *Shir HaShirim 3:1*



### ***Imagination Is Linked With The Evil Inclination***

The inclination of man is called “*yetzer*”. We have a *yetzer tov* (good inclination) and a *yetzer hora* (evil inclination). The word “*yetzer*” צַר comes from the word “*tziyur*” צִיּוּר, to “fashion images.” Our *yetzer tov* is essentially a force in us that fashions holy thoughts, and our *yetzer hora* produces evil images in the mind.

The Sages<sup>24</sup> state that in the future, the righteous will see how the evil inclination is like a mountain, while the wicked will see how the evil inclination is like a hair. In other words, the entire power of the evil inclination is to use the imagination! The good inclination gives us a picture of reality, while the evil inclination gives us a picture of the fake reality, an imagined reality. Both of our inclinations are using the power of צִיּוּר – a mental picture. Thus, our mind and our heart are each capable of different ways of fantasizing. What is the difference between the mind’s fantasies and the heart’s fantasies?

We are more familiar with the mind’s imagination. Even in our thoughts, there are fleeting images that pass very quickly as the mind is in the midst of its thinking process. These images take place so quickly, though, and we are almost always unaware of them.

Our heart fantasizes about things that are related to our character traits and our desires. We are aware of some of our desires, and there are other desires we have which we are unaware of. When we imagine or dream about things that we think we have no relation to, it is really stemming from those desires that are buried deep in our subconscious.

### ***Fixing The Imagination***

In light of all that we have said here, we see that our spiritual task to rectify the imagination is two-fold. We will need to rectify both the mind’s imagination and the heart’s imagination. These are two separate tasks which we need to work on simultaneously.

The actual root of imagination is in the brain, and our task is to refine this kind of imagination. We also need to work on refining the heart’s imagination, which is the seat of the evil inclination/*yetzer hora*, who is also called the angel *Dumah*, from the word *dimayon* (imagination). The *yetzer hora* is synonymous with the Angel of Death and Satan. Through following the imagination/*yetzer hora*, a person is led towards hell/*Gehinnom*.<sup>25</sup>

When we will work on purifying the heart’s imagination<sup>26</sup>, we will not be working with fantasies directly. The fantasies are not the issue. They are rather offshoots of our deepest desires and deeply embedded negative character traits which we will ultimately face and deal with. In actuality, we will

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<sup>24</sup> *Sukkah 52a*

<sup>25</sup> *the angel appointed over Gehinnom is called Dumah, which is derived from the hebrew word dimayon, the imagination.*

<sup>26</sup> *Beginning from Chapter Five*

need to work both on improving the accuracy of our fantasies, as well as on the character traits that are fueling them; and on a more subtle note, we will have to get to the root of all our desires.

In the “guided-imagery” techniques of the modern world, they are dealing only with the mind’s imagination. To a certain extent, this technique can refine the mind’s imagination and improve it. But as we have already explained, in order to improve our character traits, it will not suffice to only improve the mind’s imagination. This is because, as we have learned here, there is a power of imagination present both in our mind and heart. When we only work with the mind’s imagination and we ignore (the work with) our heart’s imagination, we might be able to improve the mind’s imagination a bit, but our character traits will not be improved. Learning about various visualization techniques will not improve our character, and we will gain almost nothing from it.

### ***Sudden Sadness – The Result of Imagination***

As mentioned in the beginning, the main detriment resulting from imagination is that it brings can make a person sad. Let us reflect on this. Which kind of imagination causes sadness? Is it the mind’s imagination, or the heart’s imagination?

At first glance, it would seem that sadness stems from the heart’s imagination. A person wants something badly, for example, and then he desires it, and he becomes sad because he does not get it. As *Chazal* said, “He who wants one hundred, will want two hundred.”<sup>27</sup> When a person doesn’t get what he wants, he becomes sad.

However, upon subtle reflection, we can see that sadness also stems from the mind’s imagination. Sometimes, when a person is sad, he becomes stuck in his sadness and is unable to find the trigger that has caused his sadness. But the true reason of the sadness is because his mind has just fantasized about something he wanted – and it all took place very quickly, before he even got the chance to register the desire. The imagination awakened in him a yearning for something [which he does not have] and that is why he became sad.

A person is not always conscious of this kind of sadness. The mind of a person is never asleep for one moment. If a person merits to be immersed in Torah, his mind is constantly involved with Torah thoughts, thinking either about Torah or about Hashem. But when a person does not merit to be immersed in Torah or about Hashem, his mind is flying all over the place, and he fantasizes, and at a certain point these fantasies breed sadness.

### ***In Conclusion***

In this chapter we have introduced the power of imagination in the soul. Our purpose was to paint the general picture of the structure of *medameh*, where it is found in us, and how it works.

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<sup>27</sup> *Devarim 39:4*

## 1.2 | Refining Our Imagination Through Mental Contrast<sup>28</sup>

*Editor's Summary: In Chapter One, we outlined imagination/medameh, from the lowest to the highest level. 1) The lowest level is where man falls to the level of earthiness. This leads to a feeling of sadness. 2) A higher use of medameh is with our character traits, and the purpose of this kind of imagination is to cause the character traits of our unrefined, animalistic behaviors to resemble our divine soul. 3) Higher than this use of imagination is the power to visualize and fantasize which is located in the heart. 4) Higher than this is a use of imagination that is located in the brain/mind. 5) Higher than that is a use of imagination where one's character traits reflect the middos of the Torah (such as the 13 middos that the Torah is expounded with). 6) Finally, the highest use of imagination is where one's character traits 'resemble' Hashem's middos.*

### **The Mind's Imagination: Comparing Information**

Since we have briefly outlined the levels of imagination, we can now explore this topic in more detail. However, the actual order will be a bit different than the order explained earlier.

We will begin to analyze the power of imagination that is in the brain/*mochin*, which has both an external and an internal use.

The mind's external use of imagination is located in the "left brain."<sup>29</sup> This is the imagination which we are all familiar with. It is especially expressed when sleeping, since the imagination is more dominant. However, it is not only active when a person is asleep for even when a person is awake, there can be thousands of (imaginative) thoughts passing through the mind. [The external layer of imagination is the power of mental visualization/*tziyur*, which deals with pictures retained in the mind after the eyes have seen something.]

There is also an inner use of the mind's power of imagination. This is called contemplation/*binah*, by our Sages. Through contemplation, a person can understand one thing based upon understanding something else.<sup>30</sup>

How does one understand something based upon something else that one has [already] understood? The Sages explain that the power of contemplation takes an original thought/*chochmah*,<sup>31</sup> and compares it with another thought. This is called comparing one thing to another.<sup>32</sup> This makes use of *medameh*, by "comparing" information with each other.

Therefore, the outer use of the mind's *medameh* is the imagination, which makes a mental picture of the information, and the inner use of the mind's *medameh* which compares one thing to another.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-002-refining-our-imagination-contrasting>

<sup>29</sup> Shaar HaHakdamah (Rav Chaim Vital, student of the Arizal): shaar 1, hakdamah 4

<sup>30</sup> "meivin dovor m'toch dovor"

<sup>31</sup> *chochmah*- the knowledge that one has received from his teachers

<sup>32</sup> מילתא למילתא , "dimuy milsa l'milsa"

The clearer and sharper a person's power of comparing one thing to another is, the more it will refine the mind's imagination. The same is true vice versa: The weaker a person's comparing one thing to another is, the less it will improve the imagination, resulting in the imagination roaming freely. As Rav Yisrael Salanter said, "Man is bound by his intellect, whereas his imagination is not restricted and runs wild following his heart's desires."<sup>33</sup> The imagination dominates the mind when we don't make enough use of the power of mental comparison.

### ***Improving The Mind's Imagination – The Torah Approach Vs. The World's Modern Approach***

We can now understand a fundamental principal about imagination, which totally uproots the world's modern approach of guided-imagery technique in therapy. (We will continuously emphasize the difference between the Torah's approach and the modern world's approach that has originated in the [western] world, of how to use the power of imagination).

The root method of working with our power of imagination does not begin with mental visualization/*tziyur* but with refining the mind's ability to make mental contrasts between information. Only through using this power, which is contemplation by comparing one thing to another, can we refine the mind's imagination.

Let's think about the following: What is the difference between a dream that a *tzaddik* has, and the dream of a less righteous person? Here's where we can really see the difference between a refined imagination and an unrefined imagination. When a person has truly developed his mind, his imagination becomes more accurate as well, and it can be trusted more. The dreams of such a person will be much more aligned with reality.

Thus, when a person attempts to improve his imagination without developing the power of mental contrast, he is essentially attempting to work with the outer layer of imagination before he has improved the inner layer. The method of the modern world today works only with the outer layer and never works with the root. In the Torah approach, we work both on the outer layers as well as on the inner layers.

Therefore, the main part of our task in working on our imagination is to first develop the mind's power of mental contrast/*dimuy milsa l'limsa*, and upon that, we can then work with the visual aspects of imagination/*tziyur*.

### ***The Gain of Mental Comparison***

In order to understand how the power of mental contrast works, we must first explain a fundamental rule (which many are ignorant of causing them to blunder).

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<sup>33</sup> *Sefer Ohr Yisrael, Iggeres haMussar*

Our Sages state, “Their ways of thinking are not similar to each other, and their faces are not similar to each other.”<sup>34</sup> Not only is there no such thing as two people who are exactly alike, but there is nothing in Creation which is exactly like another. Thus, the entire power of *medameh*, which compares information, can only give us a partial understanding of a matter, but not the entire understanding. When you compare any two things in creation, you must realize that there are similarities and also distinctions between them.

### ***Moshol and Nimshal – Seeing The Lesson of the Parable***

Besides this rule, there is another fundamental point to mention about “comparing.” Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained that whenever our Sages speak in terms of a parable/*moshol* and lesson/*nimshal*, it is based on imagination, for it uses comparisons. The first step in hearing a “parable and lesson/*moshol v’nimshal*” is to compare the parable to the lesson, and from hearing the parable well, one can then understand the lesson that it imparts.

In other words, when one has already reached the lesson, he has succeeded in comparing the parable to the lesson. In contrast, if he didn’t understand the lesson, he will have attained understanding the lesson by first comparing the lesson to the parable, and see how it compares. Thus, the concept of “parable and lesson” is based on the idea of comparing information, which is a form of *medameh*.

In Rav Chaim Volozhiner’s words, we learn that in every “parable and lesson,” the parable is never a total comparison to the lesson. If the “parable and lesson” would be totally alike, then the parable itself would be the lesson. It must be, then, that the parable is always similar in some way to the lesson, but it is also not similar to the lesson in some way.

A common mistake when it comes to hearing a “parable and lesson” is that a person is mistaken about what the lesson is. This happens because a person compares a part of the parable to the lesson that has nothing to do with the lesson – he makes an erroneous comparison.

Usually, when most people read of a “parable and lesson,” especially in our generation where people like to read stories that have a parable and a lesson (and this is certainly a part of Torah), there is a common error that people make. They compare a part of the parable that does not really compare at all to the lesson. When a person does not know how to properly draw a comparison between the parable and the lesson that it imparts, he surely will not understand how the parable relates to the lesson. And even when a person compares a part of the parable that truly compares to the lesson, there can still be an additional problem of exaggerating the lesson way past its intended meaning.

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<sup>34</sup> *Berachos 58a*

In order to properly understand a parable, one must think first which parts of the parable are similar to the lesson, and which parts of the parable are not.

Almost all people make this mistake when it comes to learning a “parable and lesson.” There is some kind of erroneous comparison made between the parable and the lesson, and then details are either added or subtracted, which distorts the accuracy of the lesson being imparted.

In order to properly understand a “parable and lesson,” one needs to analyze: In what ways are the “parable and lesson” similar, and in what ways are they different? Only after that can he draw forth the lesson that the parable is imparting.

### ***Analyzing Different Nuances When It Comes To Learning Torah In-Depth***

This concept is not only applicable to “parable and lesson.” It is also true when a person scrutinizes the words of Abaye and Rava in the *Gemara* or whenever a person is learning wisdom of the Torah contained in our *sefarim*. (To a certain extent, the *sefarim* that a person learns are considered to be like his teacher.) Sometimes a person thinks that he has an accurate understanding of what he has learned in the Torah, and he compares one fact to another fact, while in reality the comparison is off-mark. There are levels of erroneous comparisons – sometimes they are slightly inaccurate, and sometimes they are completely off.

To get an idea of this, when we learn *Tosafos*, we can see that *Tosafos* will ask a contradiction between two different *Gemara's* (which compares the two *Gemara's* together). When *Tosafos* answers why it's not a contradiction, *Tosafos* will sometimes show how the two *Gemara's* are not similar, meaning that the question was never a valid question to begin with. Other times, *Tosafos* will answer the question by pointing out differences between the two *Gemara's*.

When a person studies Torah with by in-depth analysis/*iyun*, this is really a power to understand how to analyze, compare, and differentiate.

After we see *Tosafos* on the *Gemara* and we are now seeing the words of *Rishonim*, such as the *Rashba* and *Ritva*, we find additional answers to the same question on the *Gemara*. Sometimes the *Rishonim* will give the same answer as *Tosafos* but with some different nuances. We need to compare their words with *Tosafos*: Why didn't the *Rishonim* want to give the exact answer as *Tosafos*...? Why didn't *Tosafos* want to say the answer that the other *Rishonim* give...?

Those familiar with the yeshiva style of learning are already used to thinking in this way, but it's possible that a person is used to this way of thinking simply because he has gone through the yeshiva system and he has never really clarified to himself what the approach is. The more a person is used to proper exertion in Torah study, the better he will refine his ability to make mental comparisons, and he will get better at accurately analyzing a manner, seeing the aspects of how A compares to B and also the aspects of how A doesn't compare to B.

### *Analyzing Our Dreams*

Our Sages teach that a person only dreams at night about things which his heart has imagined during the daytime.<sup>35</sup> However, there are 8clearly dreams we have at night which seem to be totally unrelated to any of what we thought about during the day. What is the source of these dreams, and how do we reconcile this reality with the words of our Sages?

One of the ways to explain this is because dreams are not necessarily stemming from thoughts we consciously thought about during the day, but from mental comparisons that our brain made. Sometime we see a certain thing and then our brain compares it to something else, and that is why we sometimes have dreams at night about things we did not actually see during the day. Thus, the Sages explain, these dreams really stem from the heart's fantasies, but the brain has taken the fantasies and has played around with them, through comparing the information with other information.

This ability of the brain becomes awakened at night time. The Vilna *Gaon* wrote that when a person sleeps, his real thoughts leave him, and instead the imagination takes over. Based upon this concept, the amount of imagination one has experienced during the daytime when he is fully awake will be mirrored at nighttime when he is sleeping, and as he dreams, his imagination will expand upon the fantasies that have already been experienced.

In addition to this, sometimes a person dreams about several things in the same dream which seem completely unrelated to each other. One first dreams about something and then a moment later one dreams about something else. Upon one's initial analysis of the dream, the sequence of the events in the dream does not seem to have any connection. It seems that one has dreamed about two different things in the same dream (that have nothing to do with each other).

When this happens, it is a sign that the imagination of the person has never been organized. It remains as a jumbled repository of stored memories in the person's mind, where the imagination will put together fact A with fact B, fact B with fact C, and so forth. Thus, the person will be unable to discover what the causes for these erroneous mental comparisons are.

(We should mention an additional reason why people sometimes dream about things that are unrelated to anything they thought about during the day. The *sefarim hakedoshim* discuss the soul leaving the body at night and roaming throughout the universe. When a person experiences a frightening nightmare, it can be that the soul wandered to places where it shouldn't. On the other hand, when a person experiences a very positive dream, it can be because his soul entered into a high and lofty place in Heaven).

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<sup>35</sup> *Berachos 45b*

### *Seeing The Connection of The Thoughts*

There is a rule that a person can never think of any two consecutive thoughts unless there was some connection between the two thoughts. (This is excluding situations where a person is thinking of something and then he is suddenly interrupted by another person's question, or where he notices something interesting that distracts him, etc.) The first thought always drags with it a second thought. Sometimes a person is aware of how the first thought led to the second thought, but at other times a person is not sure how one thought led to another. Upon deeper reflection, a person can notice some subtle connection between two consecutive thoughts, and then he will see how the first thought led to the second thought.

Until a person has organized his imagination, the thoughts in the mind will remain jumbled, and the mind will [perhaps] make erroneous comparisons between one thought and another, linking together various thoughts that in reality have no connection to each other. Even when a thought has almost no relation to another thought, the mind will still link the two thoughts together and connect them, because the imagination can easily dart from one thought to another, as long as it sees some kind of comparison between the topics of each of the thoughts.

What we have described here is a result of the mind's ability of mental visualization, which is a product of the mind's *medameh*. The power of *tziyur* visualizes one fantasy, and then another fantasy, and then another, and it keeps adding on additional fantasies. As long as a person has not refined the mind's ability of making mental comparisons, the imagination will continue to put together all kinds of thoughts that in reality bear no connection to each other at all.

In contrast, when one has properly developed his ability of making mental comparisons, his thoughts and his imagination will be more orderly and they will be more based upon previous thoughts. If he visualized something holy at the beginning of the day, his second visualization will be closely related to the first, and the third will be closely related to the second, and so forth. This paves the way for a developed, holy kind of imagination.

If we take a look at the reality [in our generation] today, we will notice that most people experience an undeveloped kind of imagination, where their thoughts are flying quickly between one subject and another. This is in line with the words of Rav Yisrael Salanter (which we mentioned earlier) that "Man is bound by his intellect, whereas his imagination is not restricted and runs wild following his heart's desires."

Along the lines of what we have just discussed, it seems that the root of the dominant and unstable imagination in most people is not stemming from the mind's ability of mental visualization, but from an underdeveloped ability of making mental comparisons (which in turn means that the person has not yet learned to make use of making mental comparisons when he studies the words of the *Gemara*).



### ***Refining Our Imagination In Worldly Matters***

However, even if a person knows how to really study Torah well, and his brain is occupied with holy thoughts as it should, a person still needs to refine their imagination in worldly matters as well.

If a person is satisfied with the fact that his brain is occupied with holy Torah thoughts and he sees no need to refine his imagination when it comes to other matters, there is a good chance that he will not be successful when he deals with the world that is outside of his Torah study. *Chazal* say that “the eyes see and the heart desires”<sup>36</sup>, and if a person hasn’t yet developed self-control over his eyes, his imagination will dominate, because he has not yet trained his brain’s ability of mental comparison. His imagination will then roam unhindered, as Rav Yisrael Salanter writes, and it will take his mind to all sorts of unbecoming places.

To overcome this problem, one will need to practice inner methods of reflection, as follows. Each person, according to his own level, can try taking two different things and analyzing both the similarities and the differences between them. For example, as Sukkos is approaching and you are looking to buy a *lulav* and *esrog*, try taking two *esrogim* in your hands and compare them. See how they are similar, and then see the differences between them.

At first, this might seem childish or like a game. But the truth is that the imagination of most adults hasn’t changed that much since they were children. The adult’s imagination is simply into bigger and better things than when he was a child. Unfortunately, a person will probably remain that way until the end of his life unless he works on refining his imagination.

### ***Two Steps of Refining Imagination***

We will review two steps needed in order to work on refining the imagination [and finally a third, deeper step which will be explained later].

- 1) The main step of the process is, to begin opening the mind’s power of mental comparison by learning *Gemara* in-depth and by comparing nuances in the words of the *Gemara* and the *Rishonim*.

This is the root to begin with. If one skips this step, he will be attempting to work with ‘branches’ without a ‘root’. In this step, one refines his mind by clarifying each point he comes across as he is learning the *Gemara*. He analyzes the similarities as well as the differences between one point and another point. Understandably, this step is only applicable to men, who have a *mitzvah* of Torah study).

- 2) After working on this step, one should then try refining his imagination in worldly areas. One should try reflecting into the similarities and differences between two things. This can be accomplished either by examining mundane objects or through using objects of

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<sup>36</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:2

holiness, and it is preferable to use holy objects, such as the example of examining *esrogim*. Alternatively, one can also try this with the eight Chanukah lights on the *menorah*, and analyze the similarities and differences between the lights.

The first step clearly uses something holy. It involves the study of *Gemara*, which is pure holiness, in the form of exertion in Torah learning. But even in the second step, which involves analyzing worldly matters, it is still better to try this with holy objects rather than with mundane objects.

These are just examples. Each person can come up with his own examples as well of analyzing holy objects; such as by examining the differences between two *mezuzos*, etc.

### ***The Importance of Refining The Imagination In Worldly Matters***

Let's try to understand why there is a need for the second step of refining the imagination, where we analyze and compare different things in the world [in addition to the mental comparisons we make when learning *Gemara*].

Earlier, we mentioned that the faculty of *medameh* consists of an external layer and inner layer. The inner layer of imagination is the ability of mental comparisons, which works purely in the intellectual realm, and the external layer of imagination is mental visualization/*tziyur*, which deals with pictures retained in the mind after the eyes have seen something.

When one is used to properly analyzing the words of the *Gemara* and the *Rishonim*, he is making use of his ability of mental comparison. However, his power of visualization isn't necessarily developed from this. He will be able to think in the abstract and compare intellectual nuances with each other, but he still might not be able to compare two visualizations together and analyze the differences between them.

One possibility of solving this issue is to use a method of learning *Gemara* in which the *Gemara* is learned in the form of pictures, imagining the discussions in the *Gemara* in a more visually oriented manner, as opposed to mere intellectualization of the *Gemara*. However, this is not accepted by most people, since learning *Gemara* in this way turns every discussion into something that has to be pictured, which can hamper the intellect when overdone. Even though this method allows for the words of the *Gemara* to be experienced in a more palpable way, because the imagination has been brought closer to the senses, it is nevertheless detrimental since it can block one's actual intellectual progress when trying to figure out the words of the *Gemara*.

For example, a person is learning the beginning of tractate *Bava Metzia*, which discusses a case where two people are holding onto a piece of clothing and each of them is claiming to be the owner. If he is learning this *Gemara* with the mental ability of visualization, he will vividly imagine the scene: how Reuven's face looks, how Shimon's face looks, how they are each pulling it towards themselves, etc. When learning about what the *halachah* of this scenario is, he will want to determine this based on what kind of personalities they have, and what kind of material the *tallis* is made of.

If one does learn the *Gemara* using one's power of visualization, it must be done properly and sensibly. Using the mental ability of visualization should not be overdone or on a regular basis. Rather, using *tziyur* should be done only at certain times. In addition, if someone is the type to get drawn into fantasizing about worldly matters, he must not make use of this method when learning *Gemara*.

That being the case, we will need to look for different ways to develop the power of mental comparison in areas that involved visualization. As we mentioned, it is preferable to take two holy objects [such as two *esrogim*, two Chanukah lights, two *mezuzos*, etc.] and analyze the similarities and differences between them. These are exercises of how we can develop the mind's power of mental comparison/*dimuy milsa l'milsa* in the realm of visualization.

### ***Why Is All Of This Necessary?***

If we think about it, we will notice that each of us encounters thousands of thoughts in just one day alone. For example, when you walk into a *beis midrash*, your eyes are quickly surveying the scene: there are four walls, a certain amount of shelves containing hundreds of *sefarim*, a certain amount of pages in the *sefer* you are learning, many different people around you, etc. All of this information enters your mind very quickly and is processed subconsciously. By the time you have ended the day, thousands of these images have passed through your thoughts.

All of these images remain in the head as a giant, unsorted jumble. If a person's ability of imagination has not yet been refined, the *medameh* will come and connect all of these images together. The combined images in the head will not be an accurate presentation of all the information in one's head and will lead to erroneous comparisons.

This is all the more applicable when a person has seen certain improper sights during the day, and all the more so if they are images forbidden by the Torah to stare at. All of these inappropriate images will coagulate in the mind and form a kind of mental videotape, one scene showing something permissible and another scene showing something forbidden. It will be a mixture of good and evil in the brain that remains unedited and unsorted – entirely the fruits of an unrefined imagination.

Even worse, these mixed images in the brain will resurface at nighttime, where they can bring a person to spiritual contamination.<sup>37</sup> These are the more evil symptoms of an unrefined imagination which has never been refined.

To summarize and conclude, in order to refine the imagination, we need to traverse two steps: (1) Develop the ability of mental comparison, by learning *Gemara* with in-depth analysis, with focus on comparing the nuances between the points of what we learn. (2) Develop the ability of visualization by analyzing the differences between objects, preferably holy objects such as *esrogim*, Chanukah

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<sup>37</sup> See *Kesubos 44a*, "One should not entertain lewd thoughts during the day, so that he should not become spiritually contaminated at night."

lights, etc. These two methods together train the mind's imagination to become clearer and accurately compare two thoughts simultaneously, which refines the imagination and therefore makes it more reliable.

### ***Using Both Methods of Refining The Imagination***

As we explained earlier, there is both an external and inner use of the power of mental comparison. The external use of mental comparison is visualizing/*tziyur* while the inner use of mental comparison is in-depth, intellectual analysis/*iyun*. The truth is that whenever we take two tangible things and we analyze their similarities and differences, we are really combining both the abilities of *iyun* and *tziyur*. We will explain how this is true.

Some people are better in developing the power of *iyun*, but they have a harder time with developing a refined power of *tziyur*. When this is the case, a person might learn Torah throughout the day, yet he still struggles with improper thoughts at nighttime when he's in bed, to the point that it leads to acts of sin (G-d forbid). The person struggles to understand why, because it doesn't make any sense. How it could be that he studies Torah by day, [which is the *mitzvah* that clearly sanctifies the mind], yet he still struggles with improper thoughts at nighttime? Where are the positive effects of his Torah study?

The inner answer is based upon what we have been explaining until now. The thoughts of a person may be pure, and a person may even merit to develop his mind in the study of Torah, but this doesn't necessarily improve the mental vision/*tziyur* aspect of his mind. It is very possible that he has not worked upon this part of his mind at all!

One needs to develop **both** the abilities of in-depth analysis and proper visualization. In-depth analysis is refined by studying Torah, but no less important is developing the ability of proper visualization, which is developed through analyzing the similarities and differences in things we encounter that are outside of studying Torah. When we have developed both of these areas, we will have achieved a connection between the external layer of *medameh* (mental vision/*tziyur*) and the inner layer of *medameh* (in-depth/analysis *iyun*). And then we are beginning to uncover a holy and refined kind of imagination.

### ***Proof of A Refined Imagination: Experiencing Clearer Dreams***

If one has succeeded in working upon both of the above practices, he will be able to see satisfying results in his own dreams which are a product of our imagination. When your imagination has become more refined, your dreams will seem clearer to you.

In addition to this, the effects will be noticeable during the day also since your imagination is not dominating your thoughts as much as before. But you will sense the improvement even more clearly

at nighttime in your dreams where you will see that your imagination has become more orderly and it is not combining so many random thoughts into a senseless jumble.

From your dreams, you will be able to see that your imagination has become more refined and improved, arranging the information in your mind in a more orderly manner, where it makes sense how one imaginative thought led to the other.

### ***A Third, Deeper Method of Refining The Imagination***

Let's return to discussing how we can refine the imagination. Until now, we explained that there are two steps in refining the mind's imagination: firstly, by developing the power of mental contrasting or comparing, and secondly, by developing the power of visualization. We also clarified that each of these abilities needs to be worked on together, because using the power of mental comparison alone will not be enough to refine the imagination if one's visualization hasn't been properly developed.

Before explaining this additional, advanced step, we must emphasize that this method is not advisable for anyone with mental anxiety or who is suffering (G-d forbid). It should only be used by someone who has some sense of knowing how to guide their imagination properly and is not strongly controlled by their imagination. In addition, the method should only be used by someone whose imagination floats toward either holy or mundane thoughts [only], and not towards improper things.

One will have to be in a calm and quiet place in order to work on this – sit in a quiet place, and let your thoughts roam freely, and then analyze how one thought led to another. For example, if you are lying on your bed at night as you are going to sleep, you can let your thoughts roam freely, for a certain amount of time, and watch where they go.

(There is a separate *avodah* when we stay focused in our thoughts and not let them wander when we are studying Torah or concentrating on our connection with Hashem. Now, however, we are explaining how to rectify our imagination by letting the imagination wander on its own so we can fix it. This is the opposite of concentrating on Torah study and on Hashem. The *avodah* of fixing our imagination is of no less importance than our *avodah* of serving Hashem).

After letting the imagination take its course for a while, halt your thoughts. Examine the previous string of thoughts, and remind yourself of each of the thoughts that led to each other. Clarify which thought came first, which came second, which came third, etc.

If you let your imagination roam freely for too long of a period of time, you probably won't even remember which thought came first, second, and third. That is why it is not recommended to let it roam for a long amount of time.

An additional point to consider is the very first imaginative thought that entered the mind. What led it to enter your mind? Unless some external stimuli caused the first thought to enter the mind, it is worth considering what caused the very first imaginative thought to appear.<sup>38</sup>

The next step is to wonder how each thought led to the other. What caused thought A to lead to thought B? Firstly, see the similarities between the two thoughts which shows you how Thought A flowed into Thought B. Secondly, think how are they dissimilar.

The first benefit is that you are becoming aware of the imagination, which is an essential step in gaining control over your mind which is an example of how “the mind controls the heart”<sup>39</sup>. You will see the difference between real thought/*machshavah* and imagination/*dimayon* and develop an ability to connect the imagination back to the thoughts.

An even more subtle benefit is that you will be able to gain control over the imagination itself, in light of the words of Rav Yisrael Salanter that we mentioned earlier, man’s imagination initially roams free in the mind, overpowering the intellect/*seichel* which is supposed to be leading the mind. When you become aware of your imagination by checking your previous thoughts and by comparing the similarities and differences between them, you begin to organize your imagination. You empower your intellect to be in control of your imagination. The result will be a more accurate and reliable imagination.

### ***The Advantage of Using The Third Method***

The purpose of the first two methods of refining imagination is to develop a more constructive, sanctified kind of imagination. The third method, which we are currently explaining, deals with the imagination at your present current level.

We must repeat and emphasize that the third method is not to be used by a person who has a tendency to fantasize or who is easily led to imagining forbidden thoughts. Such a person has a different *avodah*: he must simply run away from these thoughts, and not get involved with them and try to figure them out. If he tries to get involved with the source of these thoughts, he will only get sucked further into the improper thoughts, contaminating his mind and eventually falling.<sup>40</sup>

However, if a person has an imagination that generally is either drawn towards holy thoughts or thoughts that are not forbidden, then he can use this *avodah* at times. He can get into his thoughts and compare the thoughts with each other, the similarities and the contrasts between them, in addition to analyzing how each thought led to the other. In this way, a person will begin to recognize and become aware of his imagination and, slowly but surely, he will see what he tends to imagine about.

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<sup>38</sup> This is a topic in itself, which is not being discussed here.

<sup>39</sup> Zohar III 224a

<sup>40</sup> This issue has been written about extensively by Rav Dessler in his sefarim “Michtav M’Eliyahu.

Concerning this topic, we will briefly mention that each of us has a certain unique way of thought processing, and so too, each of us has a unique process of mental comparison. But most people have not yet gotten in touch with this mental power, and that is why the imagination usually remains undeveloped and out of order. People have a hard time recognizing their own style of thinking, and surely they have it harder when it comes to recognizing how their mind's imagination compares and links together information.

For instance, if we see an artist as he is painting and we ask him what he is painting, he might answer, "I once saw something that caused me to imagine this other thing, and that is how I received the inspiration to make this painting." We can easily relate to this, because it is a tangible example that involves the realm of action. We all do this in our minds – our minds are constantly painting pictures, using all of the images that it has seen and combining it. We have the ability to sometimes follow the string of thoughts in our mind, backwards, and notice how one thought led to another thought, and then we can see how we arrived at our mental 'picture' of whatever the imagination has done.

We can get used to sorting out and clearing up our imagination, by, (1) Checking the file history of our thoughts, (2) Then seeing how one thought led to another, and (3) Then seeing the contrast between the previous thought and the next thought.

We are then able to fix our imagination so that we will see what was accurately compared, and what was not accurately compared. This is how we are eventually led to a more accurate, reliable and truthful kind of imagination.

### ***Sorting Out The Mixture of Good and Evil In The Imagination***

To better understand the concepts here, we can draw upon the words of the *Vilna Gaon* and the *Sforno* that everything in creation has become a mixture of good and evil, ever since Adam and Chavah ate from the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil."<sup>41</sup> Thus, there are both good and evil ways to use the power of imagination.

The positive use of imagination/*medameh* is when we use its' ability of mental comparisons either in the realm of pure intellect, or when we use it with pictures. The negative use of *medameh* is when we make an erroneous comparison between two things.

We find a statement in our Sages which depicts positive mental visualization: "One should look at *techeiles*, for *techeiles* resembles the sea, and the sea resembles the sky, and the sky resembles the Throne of Glory."<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, there is a hint elsewhere in the words of our Sages<sup>43</sup> of the detrimental effects of imagination. The Sages said that the angel appointed over Hell/*Gehinnom* is called "*Dumah*," and there are those that link this word with *medameh*, the imagination. In other

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<sup>41</sup> *Eitz HaDaas*, which was called "*Eitz HaDaas Tov V'ra*"

<sup>42</sup> *Sotah 17a*

<sup>43</sup> *Midrash Aseres haDibbros 22*

words, by using imagination incorrectly [by making erroneous comparisons] one trigger's one's own downfall propelling them towards *Gehinnom*.

When a person gets in touch with his imaginative faculty and he sees which thoughts were accurately compared with each other and which thoughts were not, he begins to refine his *medameh*, so that it can become clearer, accurate, and reliable. As a person trains himself in this manner, he will begin to see that his imagination has become more refined, and whenever an imaginative thought passes through his mind, he will see the connection between the thoughts.

### ***Summary***

In summary, there are three steps in developing a clearer and more authentic imagination.

The first step, which applies only to men, is to develop the power of mental contrast, via exertion in learning Torah and analyzing the words of the *Gemara* and the *Rishonim*.

The second step, which applies to both men and women who want to work on refining their imagination, is to become accustomed to comparing two similar things, and see the contrasts. [This should preferably be done with holy objects, such as two *esrogim*, Chanukah lights, *mezuzos*, etc.]

The third step applies only to those who do not have a tendency to fantasize or who are easily led to imagining forbidden thoughts. If you are on this level, then let the imagination roam free for a short time in order to see the chain of your thoughts. Go backwards in your imaginative thoughts: How did your current imaginative thought come from the imaginative thought that came before it? Then, analyze the similarities and the differences between the two imaginative thoughts.

In this way, you give yourself the opportunity to separate the good from the evil contained in the imaginative thoughts, which were previously unsorted. Slowly as you get used to this, there will be less evil and forbidden imaginative thoughts and the amount of good and holy thoughts will become more dominant. And in turn, the imagination will become even more refined than before.



### 1.3 | *The Effects of Imagination On Past and Future*<sup>44</sup>

*Summary: In the previous chapters, we listed the functions of the faculty of “medameh,” from the lowest to the highest level: 1) The imaginative faculty of earthly man; 2) The imaginative faculty of the animal soul’s character traits; 3) The imaginative faculty of the divine soul’s character traits; 4) The imaginative faculty revealed in the heart’s character traits; 5) The imaginative faculty of the brain/mind; 6) The imaginative faculty where one’s character traits reflect the middos of the Torah; 7) Finally, the highest use of imagination is where one’s character traits ‘resemble’ Hashem’s middos.*

*Even though we have listed all the uses of medameh, we should realize that each of these levels subdivides into further divisions.*

*In the previous chapter, we discussed the mind’s faculty of medameh. We explained that the inner use of the mind’s medameh is not the imagination, but the faculty of mental comparison, which is called binah. Only after we have refined our faculty of mental comparison can we develop our faculty of imagination. We explained that we first need to think in the abstract and make mental comparisons in what we study. Only then can we properly visualize any information with our minds.*

*We explained that in order to develop this mental power, we should take two items that look similar. It is best to use holy items, such as two esrogim or two Chanukah lights. Look at the differences between the two items, seeing how they are similar and how they differ. This refines the imagination.*

*We mentioned an additional practice meant only for those who can guard their thoughts from fantasizing about forbidden things. Let the imagination roam freely, and then check and see how each of these thoughts led to another. Work your way backwards, and then see how the first imaginative thought led to the second imaginative thought. See how the chain of thoughts were similar to each other, which led your mind in its direction. Also make sure to see the differences between the chain of thoughts. This technique cleanses and refines the imagination.*

#### ***Why Modern Imagination Techniques Cannot Be Used To Solve Stress***

Now we will discuss the modern method that uses the imagination to heal unwanted stress or bitterness in one’s life [which is clearly not the way of our Torah tradition].

For example, if Reuven has embarrassed Shimon and Shimon wishes to rid himself of the feeling of shame, there is a way for Shimon to use his imagination to cleanse himself from the negative feelings he has experienced.

The Sages said, “Those who are shamed but do not shame back, those who hear their disgrace but do not respond, who perform *mitzvos* with love and rejoice in chastisement; of them the verse says, “*And his loved ones are like the sun going out in its zenith.*”<sup>45</sup> There are also additional teachings of our Sages that can help a person with this matter.

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-003-using-imagination-heal-stress>

<sup>45</sup> Gittin 36b; Shoftim 5:31

But in modern therapy, a new alternative is being suggested to heal oneself of any unwanted negative feelings – the power of imagination. Shimon, who was shamed by Reuven, imagines (to himself) that Reuven is a horrible person. He imagines him as a lowly or disgusting creature, until he feels disgusted with him, to the point that he totally disregards Reuven as a normal human being. Thus he sees no reason to feel shamed by Reuven, because he has taught himself to disgust Reuven and so he can easily disregard Reuven's acts or remarks.

Sometimes, this form of imagination therapy is used with children who are trying to overcome negative feelings they may have towards their parents. They are shown how to imagine their father or mother in a very negative light, picturing the parent as a ugly, negative image in their minds. This can result in completely disregarding the parent, Heaven forbid, and thereby eradicating the pain that was caused by them.

This practice is not the way of the Torah. It completely ignores the *mitzvah* to love another Jew, and it also includes several other Torah prohibitions related to it, like honoring your mother and father.

It is clear that there is no place in our Torah to permit such imagination based therapy in order to rid oneself of any unwanted stress. The imagination is not allowed to be used to distort reality, whether it is being used to get rid of something permissible or something holy, and especially if it is being used to destroy the image of another Jew's soul in one's mind.

### ***Using Imagination To Avoid Evil***

However, there are certain instances where our Sages did encourage the use of the imagination. For example, if a person is being tempted by something evil “staring him in the face,” then he may empower his imagination to steer his mind away from the image in front of him, thereby avoiding the temptation.

The Sages state that “One should not say, it is not possible for me [to desire] to eat pork. Rather, I desire it, but what can I do since the Torah has forbidden me to eat it.”<sup>46</sup> In other instances, the Sages encourage developing a disgust towards the forbidden desire, and in that way, the person saves himself from the temptation of sinning. For example, the Sages encourage one to belittle practices of idol worship.<sup>47</sup> In such situations where we must acquire a disgust for the sin, there is an *avodah* to evoke a negative feeling and disgust towards the sinful act, so that a person will be prevented from sinning.

Thus, only in situations of avoiding sin or behavior forbidden by the Torah is there any mention of using imagination to develop disgust for something. But if we are dealing with a neutral or a holy activity, and even the more so a performance of a *mitzvah*, we do not find any basis amongst the words of our Sages to permit a “negative imagination” technique. Even if a person thinks that he will

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<sup>46</sup> *Toras Kohanim: Vayikra 20,26*

<sup>47</sup> *Avodah Zarah 46a*

be helped by using the negative imagination technique to heal himself of the pain that others did to him, this really is not being constructive. Instead of rectifying the situation, he has only harmed himself in the process.

We have briefly mentioned the problem with the modern negative imagination technique. Unfortunately, it has become more common in our generation to make use of this destructive method. Even *bnei Torah* have fallen into it, out of complete earnestness and ignorance of the issues. Therefore we must emphasize clearly that this method of therapy does not belong to the path of the Torah tradition.

### ***The Power of Visualization: Developing A Stable Imagination***

The power of imagination is able to have an effect on other parts of the soul. This can improve a person's mental and emotional well-being. However, we must first be aware of two fundamental powers of the soul which need to be developed properly before we make use of the imagination: intellect/*seichel*, and visualization/*tziyur*. [After properly developing our intellect and power of visualization we can then work with our imagination and see positive results.]

The intellect/*seichel* itself divides into three mental abilities: *chochmah*, *binah*, and *daas*.<sup>48</sup> These abilities are referred to under the general term “mind/brain”/*mochin*. These intellectual abilities help a person learn and comprehend the Torah. In addition to these abilities, the mind is also capable of mentally picturing information. This ability is called visualization/*tziyur*. In addition to picturing the information, the faculty of *tziyur* is also able to make mental comparisons of images. This is called the faculty of mental comparison [of visualization].

(This is not to be confused with the faculty of mental comparison/*dimuy milsa l'milsa* that we explained in the previous chapter, which is present in the mind itself. Here we are dealing with a more specific kind of mental comparison, which takes place **within** visualization).

If someone attempts to use the faculty of imagination without a strong and stable faculty to visualize something, then his thoughts quickly jump from one topic to another. We can all recognize this. The imagination can jump into all kinds of places in our mind. This is because the imagination is not staying focused on any one particular picture in the mind. It is instead passing from one mental picture to another mental picture and from one imaginative thought to another imaginative thought.

That is why if a person has not developed his ability of visualization/*tziyur* to strongly picture something, he will not be able to use his imagination for holy and constructive purposes. Even if he tries to, he would be weakening the stability of whatever current level of visualization he is experiencing.

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<sup>48</sup> *Chochmah* is knowing the information. *Binah* is when one contemplates it. *Da'as* means that one is connected to the matter; his mind is fixed on it.

It is a clear principle that when anything remains unbalanced, it cannot function properly. For example, if something does not stop moving, it is unstable, and it will not work correctly. To illustrate, if the earth that we walk on would not be still and would always be moving, there would be constant earthquakes, and the world would be unstable. In the same way, if a person's imagination is unstable, even if we try to move it towards holiness by visualizing something holy, the fact that it lacks stability will prevent it from functioning properly.

The imagination resembles the wind's movements quickly passing from one topic to another in the mind. The only way to succeed with the imagination is to stabilize it using the methods of our Sages. In other words, our ability of visualization/*tziyur* needs to be stable, so that it won't move all over the place. If a person uses the imagination when it is not yet stable, his imagination will dominate and control his mind. Only someone who has a stable imagination can use his imagination for holy and constructive purposes.

In terms of the four elements of the soul, stability is a strongly developed element of earth, whereas movement is a use of the element of wind. When there is too much earth in the soul, a person becomes sad, due to the dominance of the non-movement in his soul, which causes lethargy. When there is too much wind in the soul and there is a lack of earth to give balance to the wind, a person will move so much to the point that he can feel unstable. (We can see this clearly in many people who have great yearnings for holiness. Because their element of wind is not balanced properly with enough earth, they lack stability).

The imagination involves the uses of imagination/*medameh* and visualization/*tziyur*. The ability of *tziyur*, which is focused mental visualization, requires stability in the mind, resembling the element of earth. In contrast, the ability of *medameh* - the imagination which quickly passes from one thought to another thought - resembles wind. Therefore, in order for there to be proper balance in the soul, one who uses the power of imagination [of wind] needs to have a strong ability of focused mental visualization [of earth], which quickly stabilizes the *medameh*.

### ***Focusing The Imagination On Something Holy***

As explained above, if someone recognizes that he can stay focused in his imagination on something, he will be able to work with his imagination without harming his own soul's balance in the process. But if he has not yet developed his ability of focused mental visualization, he should not utilize his imagination yet. He should first develop the ability of focusing his mental visualization.

How indeed do we develop a strong, stable ability of focused mental visualization? This matter is explained in the well-known practice mentioned in the beginning of the *Mishnah Berurah*,<sup>49</sup> that one must place Hashem before himself at all times שׁוֹיֵתִי ה' לְנֶגְדִי תָמִיד.

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<sup>49</sup> *Mishnah Berurah* 1:1 quoting the Arizal

This is not the place to explain the depth of this concept.<sup>50</sup> Let it suffice to say that the four-letter name of *Hashem* is the root and essence behind all of Hashem's names. Therefore, it is the most fundamental picture that one should focus on.

Not everyone is on the high spiritual level of focusing on the name of Hashem at all times. There exists, however, other holy visions (that are on a lower level than the name of Hashem) which are easier to picture and stay focused on. Every person needs to pick a holy vision in his mind that he can focus on. Examples include picturing the Western Wall/*Kosel*, the Tomb of our Forefathers/*Me'aras HaMachpela* in Chevron, the Tomb of Rachel /*Kever Rachel*, a picture of a certain *tzaddik*, a picture of a *sukkah* or *esrog*, etc. Each person can choose any of these holy images that he feels drawn towards. Whatever image you choose, the point is to be able to stay focused on any of these pictures in our minds, for a stretch of time.

Understandably, you won't be able to stay focused all the time, because there are always various actions and thoughts throughout the day that will interrupt and thereby weaken your concentration. The point is to focus on a picture of something holy (to concentrate on). You can switch every once in a while to a different picture as long as it is something holy. But make sure not to keep switching that often, or else you will lose your mental stability which in turn will hamper the development of focused mental visualization/*tziyur*.

This exercise is especially relevant to those who are at the beginning of their path of working with imagination. It is recommended to set aside times during the day where you can sit and concentrate on any of these pictures of holiness.

Anyone who actually tries this will be able to sense that when he concentrates deeply on something holy, he is connecting himself to the holiness of the image and acquiring more holiness since he is staying focused. Even more so, the holiness of the holy image will become more deeply engraved into his mind, and anytime he remembers the image he will be easily awakened to its holiness.

As we said, the prerequisite condition needed in order to work with imagination is developing a balance between visualization and imagination. We need to make sure that we can stay focused on a particular image in the mind, in order for the imagination to work in a stable fashion.

To our chagrin, we are living in a generation in which almost everyone lives totally in their imagination. The modern therapies which employ "guided-imagery" techniques are unaware of the pre-requisites for working with the imagination, and therefore, the entire approach of these techniques undermines the stability of the soul.

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<sup>50</sup> *The Arizal explains why it is specifically the four-letter name of Hashem which is chosen and why it must be imagined with a specific way of pronunciation (using the vowels/nekudos of the word awe/yirah).*

### ***Healing Painful Experiences of the Past***

We have explained the prerequisite condition necessary before using the imagination. Now we can explain how the imagination can be used for things that have already occurred, as well as for future events that didn't happen yet.

Every person has gone through many difficult experiences in his life ranging from past experiences, as well as present challenges. Even more so, besides the experiences of one's current lifetime, which continue to affect one in the present, we are also affected by experiences of previous lifetimes/*gilgulim*. The experiences we have gone through can be divided into events we remember, and events we do not remember. These differing memories require different methods in order for one to heal.

Let's first begin with events from our past that we remember. One of the reasons we remember something is because it was so painful. In order to get rid of any memories that are negative and distressing, we should return to that very same situation in our minds and re-experience it, but with a different attitude.

The Vilna *Gaon* wrote that one of the seventy forces of the soul is *shoimer*, a mental ability that "guards" stored memories. Through using the ability of *shoimer*, one can return to the past event in one's mind. The point is not to simply remember the past exactly as it happened – one must imagine it exactly as it happened, but with a different attitude.

### ***Reliving The Past Experience With A New Attitude***

The proper way to do this is to return to the situation in your mind exactly as it happened, but with a different perspective. You can view it with a mature, wiser perspective, or alternatively, you can look at what happened with a new perspective of faith/*emunah*. You can think "This, too, is for the good" (*gam zu l'tovah*). In addition, you can view what happened with even deeper levels of *emunah*.

To emphasize, we should not use the imagination to change what happened. The point is to use the imagination to relive the past experience exactly as it happened, without changing even one detail, but looking at the event with a new mature perspective. The only thing that is changing is your inner attitude towards what happened.

This method is used by many therapists who are helping people heal themselves of past negative experiences, except with some minor "changes". The therapist might tell the person to imagine the past in a very real way, but will recommend that they leave out certain details of the past or to perhaps distort a part of what happened.

For example, if a person was screamed at and as a result felt emotionally scarred, he might be told to imagine the event in a way that he is being spoken to in a soft tone. The problem was that he was

in fact hurt by someone else's verbal abuse, so if he imagines that he is being spoken to kindly and softly, he essentially erases the entire pain of the event completely.

Upon reflection, one can see that there is a fundamental difference between the method we are presenting versus the aforementioned method which is widely practiced in the world of therapy today. In the method we are presenting, the past is not changed at all. We are reshaping our attitude towards it, even as we fully relive the past event. In the method that is practiced in therapy today, the approach is to distort some of the past.

Now let's further explain how these two methods differ vastly. In the method we are presenting, we leave the past untouched. We are not trying to 'edit' what happened so that we can become more comfortable with the event and thereby be healed. Rather, we are going straight into the painful event, with all the details that were experienced, but we are changing the way we view it. Either we can view it with a more mature and intellectual perspective, or we can view it with *emunah*.

In the therapeutic method that is widely practiced today, a person relives the past, with some 'minor changes.' This helps him spare the pain and discomfort he associates with this event, so as to make peace with what happened. Although he might feel better afterwards, he has just deceived himself. This might be the beginning of him denying reality.

Even worse, though, is the creation of a deep, inner contradiction within the soul. The **reality** of his soul knows that the past happened in a certain way, but the **imagination** in one's soul is telling him something else. What will happen from this inner clash? He is apt to let the imagination's perspective dominate over reality. Furthermore, when one lets imagination dominate over reality, he forfeits complete control to the evil inclination/*yetzer hora*, which is the power of the imagination running wild.

Every person faces a struggle with imagination versus reality to some degree. If one's reality is dominant over one's imagination, it means that the intellect is in charge of the emotions. He resembles the "righteous, whose good inclination/*yetzer tov* rules them." However, one who lets imagination dominate the perspective of reality is placing himself amongst the category of "the wicked, whose *yetzer hora* rules them."

Many people are unaware of the damage that the aforementioned therapy causes to their souls. Even if they are aware that it originates in non-Torah sources, they may justify it by saying that it is not prohibited in the Jewish Code of Law/*Shulchan Aruch*. If one reflects deeply on these issues, he will understand how much damage and internal confusion is created by using this modern therapy method.

When a person makes consistent use of this therapy, he has let the imagination totally control and dominate his reality. If it is only practiced rarely, a person will still be able to stay grounded in reality, but if he is truthful, he will find himself having a hard time with this therapy, because he is not comfortable with letting his imagination take over his reality.

(An exception to this rule would be someone who is on an exceptionally high spiritual level, who knows how to differentiate between imagination and reality and he can temporarily let himself

detach from his reality and observe his imagination, aware the whole time that it's just his imagination. But this is a very subtle ability, and only a few people know how to do this.)

Thus, we conclude that the therapeutic method of altering past painful experiences via the imagination is a practice that, while it can certainly make a person feel better and help him 'get over' the past, also causes destruction in the process. It allows the imagination to dominate reality making this kind of therapy extremely harmful.

The alternative method of 'getting over the past' explained here is based upon the advice of the holy Torah. We need to fully relive the past experience, without distorting any of the details, and to change our attitude towards it either through a more mature and objective attitude or through *emunah*. Our soul can re-experience the event with a new perspective, without lying to ourselves about what happened and at the same time taking the sting out of it.

### ***Attaining Things That You Want - Via Imagination***

We have so far discussed how we can use imagination to deal with events of the past. Now we will discuss how we can use imagination for future events.

(Currently we are discussing the mind's imagination. When it comes to imagining the future, it stems from either the mind's or the heart's imagination, such as when the heart has a desire for something. Therefore, we should really place this chapter later, when we discuss the heart's imagination. We are discussing it here, however, because we have just discussed imagining the past, so it follows that we need to explain imagining the future.)

Every person has many things that he desires. Except for a few individuals in the world who have deeply worked on themselves by nullifying all of their desires completely and who only desire the will of the Creator, the soul of a person is full of all kinds of desires that he wishes to acquire. Some of these are holy desires, and some are lowly desires. How can a person actualize these many desires and ambitions?

Understandably, there are some desires we can acquire as long as we put in effort to attain them. Even though it is easy for us to actualize some desires, we do not always get everything we want. It is distressing when one doesn't fulfill what he wants, and it can cause a person to feel sick, as it is written, "*A continuous wanting is sickness to the heart.*"

One of the ways to deal with unfulfilled desires is by using the imagination. For example, if a person wants to purchase a certain house, he can calm himself by imagining that he is living in it already. If a woman wants to buy a certain kind of outfit, she can calm herself by imagining wearing it.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* discuss the concept of "a pull" *hamshachah* where a person wants something so much that the object of his desire is actually pulled towards him. He imagines vividly what he desires very badly, which ends up becoming a motivating factor that leads him to pull it



towards him. This works because anything in Creation which we are interested in acquiring can be drawn and pulled towards us through faith/*emunah* and through prayer/*tefillah*.

Firstly, you can only draw something towards you when you truly believe and hope that it will come to you. In other words, the power of *emunah* enables something to come to you. More specifically, it is called hope/*tikvah*. Through continuously hoping that you will get something it can come towards you. The Hebrew word *tikvah* is derived from the word “*kav*”, a “straight line”, which enables the object of your desire to be connected and pulled towards you.

An additional way of how a person can “pull” something towards him is through prayer/*tefillah* – to pray that it comes to you. (Many times when a person *davens* for something he wants, he is strongly imagining that which he wants. However, since this is a habit, it does not necessarily mean that the person’s *tefillah* will become more powerful).

Through both faith/*emunah* and prayer/*tefillah* we are shown how powerful the imagination is. Just by imagining what a person wants, he can succeed in drawing it towards himself (and he can clearly see the results).

### ***The Danger Of Attaining Things Through Imagination***

However, this will not prove successful to a person whose imagination isn’t purified yet. He is not among those whose “mind controls the heart.” If imagination dominates a person’s intellect, then anything being drawn towards him will just be in his imagination, and not in reality. Even if he does succeed in drawing something within his reach, it will be due to the power of his imagination. It will disappear after he has attained it, just as a fantasy disappears.

A similar concept is explained by our Sages regarding something attained through prayer. For example, if a person prayed to have children, but something was lacking in his *tefillah*, then it is possible that he will merit children, but they will not live long, Heaven forbid. His *tefillah* drew what he wanted closer to him, but since something was lacking, it did not draw it towards him completely. This reflects the statement of the Sages, “Prayer does half.”<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, if someone has an imagination that dominates his intellect, he will usually not succeed in getting what he wants through strongly imagining it. And even if it does come to him, he will probably not see the results last that long. It came entirely through the imagination and it will be just as lasting as the imagination is.

In contrast, if a person’s intellect is stronger than his imagination, since his mind dominates his emotions, he is able to view the imagination as a tool that can draw something towards him. Then he can attain something through the imagination and it will be a lasting attainment. His mind is controlling his imagination, and not vice versa. When he uses imagination, he is using an

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<sup>51</sup> *Vayikra Rabbah* 10:5

imagination that is solidly grounded in the reality of the intellect. Anything he subsequently attains through it will last.

A person's imagination can only "reach" something and take hold of it based on their own level. Therefore, if one has perfected their level of imagination, their imagination will bear results in reality. In contrast, one whose imagination is not yet perfected can only reach as far as his imagination allows him. Since his imagination is not stable, he will be very limited in using his imagination.

There is a very clear example that explains this. If a person's power of imagination leads him to commit a sin, Heaven forbid, then it is clear that his imagination is nothing but fantasy. This person's imagination can do nothing except fantasize. It cannot accomplish anything in reality.

In contrast, someone who lives a life of holiness can utilize their holy imagination to bear positive results in reality. For example, he knows how to use his *medameh* to make logical mental comparisons as he is learning the *Gemara*, until he arrives at the legal/ *halachic* conclusions of the *Gemara*. Such a person is capable of using his imagination in a way that bears positive results in reality, reflecting his purified imagination.

In the vast majority of people the imagination dominates the intellect. Their intellect does not dominate their emotions. That being the case, most people in the world are not able to actually draw things closer to them using the power of the imagination. And if people do attain things, due to their imagination, the results do not last long.

Therefore, it is not recommended for most people to try to draw what they want towards them through strongly imagining what they want. Only a few rare individuals, whose minds are in complete control over their emotions, can make use of the imagination to draw things closer to themselves. And even when this is the case, they must also use faith/*emunah* and prayer/*tefillah* to attain what they want. Only with faith and prayer can the imagination then have any effect.

### ***Combining Bitachon With Imagination***

In addition, a strong amount of trust in Hashem/*bitachon* is a viable method that can empower the imagination to attain what it wants.

There is a well-known disagreement about trust in Hashem. The view of the *Chovos HaLevovos* is that a person must believe that everything that Hashem has decreed will come to the person somehow. He will not lose that which is supposed to come to him, nor will he receive anything more that is supposed to come to him unless his sins prevent him. The view of the *Alshich* is that if a person has *bitachon*, he will attain anything he wants as long as he trusts that Hashem is in charge of everything. Therefore, he can attain even things that were not originally decreed by Hashem for him to attain.

Based on the view of the Alshich, we can see another possibility. A person draws things towards himself that he wants through having trust/*bitachon*, together with strongly imagining what he wants to attain.

This method, *bitachon*, is a deeper approach than the methods of faith and prayer. Combined with the power of imagination, a person can use his trust in Hashem to strongly believe that Hashem can give him what he wants. The imagination is strengthening the person's *bitachon*, and this is the deep reason of how he can attain what he wants. (On a deeper level, he is giving form to something that only previously existed in the realm of intellect, and now he is actualizing the intellect).

### ***In Conclusion***

The imagination can be utilized only after it has been preceded by developing two abilities: faith in Hashem/*emunah*, and one's mental abilities/*chochmah*. When imagination is firmly grounded with developed *emunah* and *chochmah* in the soul, it can work properly. But if a person has not developed any of these abilities, he will not know how to use his imagination properly. He will just be using it as a way to try to get what he wants.

This is actually what the non-Torah world is trying to do with the power of imagination. When a person uses imagination in this way, he is basically erasing the uses of *emunah*, *tefillah*, and *bitachon*, using the imagination alone so that he can get what he wants.

Now we can understand what is wrong with using the modern methods of imagination therapy and why it is forbidden according to the Torah's values. In light of all that has been said here, it is obvious that using modern methods of imagination therapy is in total contradiction with the holiness of a Jew's soul.

## 1.4 | *The Rules of Using Imagination*<sup>52</sup>

*In the previous chapter, we explained how to properly use the power of imagination to heal ourselves from troubling past events by mentally visualizing the past experience and re-entering the event with a more mature perspective either by using the faculty of intellect, or from a perspective of faith/emunah.*

*It was also explained how using the imagination can affect future events, especially based upon the view of the Alshich using the concept of trust/bitachon, where firm belief in Hashem can draw what we want closer to ourselves.*

### ***Fantasies – A Disconnection From The Present***

Besides using imagination as a tool to attain what we **want** to reach in the future, the imagination can also be used to simply fantasize about future events.

Most fantasies are usually about the past or about the future. There is a famous statement of Rav Dessler *zt”l* that thinking about the future is entirely an immersion in fantasy. Upon reflection, we can realize that even our fantasies of the past are tied to the future. We are fantasizing about something in the past because somehow, it affects our future.

It is human nature not to remember anything painful that happened to us which we would rather just forget. However, if we do remember something painful, it’s because the pain was so strong that it continues to be tangibly felt.

When we think about the past, we usually dwell on joyful and pleasant memories. Even though we already experienced the pleasure of the event in the past, we keep recalling the event which was so pleasurable in order to experience the same pleasure in the future.

Earlier, we explained that imagination stems from the mind as well as from the heart. In this chapter, we will discuss imagining the future in the category of the heart. First let us analyze the root of fantasizing and a person’s motivation to think about the future.

When we are immersed in thoughts about the past or future, we disconnect momentarily from the present. The truth is that all imagination is a form of detachment from reality to some degree. But this is especially the case when it comes to imagining the past or the future, where a person is [consciously] disconnecting from the present, and is instead connecting himself to a past or future experience.

Even more so (as discussed in the previous chapter), if a person is imagining something about the future that he would like to attain, he really detaches from the present since he is thinking heavily about that which he wants. If he is imagining something which is not realistically attainable, then he is totally disconnected from reality.

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-004-limits-imagination>

Imagining the past does not disconnect one from reality as much as fantasizing about the future. When imagining the past, we are imagining something that actually happened, so it still has a level of connection to reality. Thinking about the future not only disconnects one from the present but also connects one to a dimension that may never become tangibly real.

There is always a root and a branch to everything in Creation. Evil imagination is just the branch of the problem. The root of the problem of evil imagination is immersion in future events that may never happen at all.

Every concept exists both on the side of evil as well as on the side of holiness. The evil manifestation of this concept is immersion in future events that may never happen. The holy manifestation of immersion in the non-existent is the faculty of *binah* which is the faculty of the mind that can invent new Torah thoughts. *Binah*-thoughts are novel thoughts, introducing a new reality that previously did not exist [and is preceded by *chochmah*, which is the raw information that one has received from his teachers].

Earlier we mentioned the faculty of mental comparison/*dimuy milsa l'milsa* regarding the ability to produce novel Torah thoughts/*chiddushei Torah*. The root of this power lies in an ability to invent new realities, reflecting the verse, “*I am creating a new heavens and a new earth.*”<sup>53</sup> This concept is expressed in the faculty of the imagination/*medameh*, and it can be used for either good or evil, as we will explain later.

Whenever a person imagines anything that did not happen yet which probably will not happen, or especially when one imagines things that definitely will not happen, one has detached from reality. Understandably, there exist several levels of detachment, ranging from minor levels of detachment to total detachment.

A minor level of disconnection would be when a person imagines something that exists, but he connects to the existing thing through his imagination. For example, if a person imagines that he is on a cruise and is setting sail towards a distant island. He knows that in reality he will never actually do this. But, since, he and the ship definitely exist, so we consider this to be a minor form of disconnection.

But sometimes a person finds himself fantasizing about things that do not exist because the mind is combining images that one has already seen. This is commonly the case with dreams, where a person sees things in his dreams that do not exist at all in reality. (Even so, there are various levels of imagination that will disconnect him from reality).

Thus, the evil side of imagination is most apparent where a person imagines something in the future, which did not happen yet in reality, and which may never happen at all. The imagination connects the person to a dimension that does not actually exist, and these fantasies detach one from reality.

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<sup>53</sup> *Yeshayahu 65:17*

### ***Escaping Painful Reality***

Yet, as senseless as these fantasies are, there are situations which would cause a person to enter such a delusional state. There are two different scenarios where the problem can occur.

One scenario is where a person does not consciously evoke such fantasies which are just coming to him randomly throughout the day, such as when he's lying in bed at night and trying to fall asleep, or as he's sitting on the bus and he's daydreaming, etc.. In this kind of scenario, he did not consciously try to leave reality and enter into a fantasy state.

But there is another kind of scenario where a person will deliberately enter into a fantasy. This is common when a person is going through a stressful period. Examples of this include marital difficulties, financial difficulties, health issues, and any other forms of suffering or tragedy that are very painful to face. One feels overwhelmed by their problems, and since there is no way to get rid of the issues in reality, a person deals with these issues by escaping into a delusional world where he avoids the harsh reality.

How do these fantasies and delusions help a person deal with his difficulties? If he is merely trying to take his mind off his problems so that he can avoid the harsh reality, there are alternative solutions, such as talking to a friend. *"A worry in the heart of man, speak of it to others"*.<sup>54</sup> But when a person deliberately fantasizes in order to run away from reality, he can feel a much deeper level of relief. As he begins fantasizing he detaches from his harsh reality using the imagination.

It's a simple equation: the issues are only in the reality, so if he manages to somehow "escape" from reality, there are no issues. His soul becomes calm, and then he is able to invigorate himself to deal with the difficulties.

### ***The Danger of Using Imagination To Escape Harsh Reality***

If a person uses this type of therapeutic method in a sensible way, making sure not to go overboard and treading very carefully, it can sometimes be helpful. However, it is usually very dangerous. Why? Once a person is brought to a state where he feels like he has escaped reality, it is only natural for him to become addicted to this form of "relief." He is apt to develop a nature of escaping reality, until he becomes completely irresponsible, along with a host of other problems.

A more subtle negative outcome of becoming addicted to this form of relief is that it can open the door to some unsavory places in the soul. If a person had a fear of punishment for sins and he was aware that sins bring punishment in Hell/*Gehinnom*, now that he has learned how to run away from reality, he is apt to lose his sense of reward and punishment he once had. (This is not to be confused with a person who sins because the knowledge about punishment for sins is only in his mind and it hasn't yet been internalized in his heart. That is a separate issue that we are not dealing with here.)

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<sup>54</sup> see *Sotah 42a*

Let's understand this deeply. On the one hand, using the imagination to run away from reality is something that can certainly have a calming effect on the soul in many situations. On the other hand, however, we are speaking of a very dangerous power that can disconnect a person from reality. In addition to the problem of disconnecting from reality, and the fact that it distances a person from being truthful there is also a deeper issue. It will damage other areas of the soul that had previously been connected to reality. By running away from reality, the other areas of the soul become weakened and aren't able to function as well since they are no longer connected to reality.

### *The Detrimental Effects of Modern Technology/Visuals*

Unfortunately, many people in our generation are not consciously aware of living in a kind of fantasy world that disconnects them from reality.

One of the destructive aspects of the recent technological devices, is the fact that a person is totally immersed in so many different ["exciting"] things flashing before their eyes. They basically leave reality and enter instead into a different world when they are immersed in this visual experience. To our great sadness, this behavior is also prevalent amongst those who have the highest standards in keeping Torah and *mitzvos*.

Besides for the fact that it is rare to find someone who succeeds in protecting himself from inappropriate images, continuous use of these gadgets makes it difficult for a person to suddenly leave what they are doing and return to reality. Even if they are able to sometimes extract themselves from the visual world they have entered, it is very possible that their entire perspective towards reality afterwards is being viewed from a lens of fantasy instead of from the lens of reality.

Except for those who have revealed a deep, G-dly light in their souls, most people view reality through the lens of imagination to some degree. This is based on the verse, "*Then, we were like dreamers.*"<sup>55</sup> In the future, where we will be in the World To Come it will be revealed that there is nothing in reality besides for Hashem ("*Ain Od Milvado*"). We will truly recognize how our entire perception in the exile was entirely a dreamlike fantasy, in comparison to the reality that will be revealed with the coming of *Moshiach*.

There are some who argue that technology is only a problem for men, who have a *mitzvah* to learn Torah. Besides all the other negative aspects of viewing technology, the enticing visuals lure a man away from studying Torah which is considered *bittul Torah*.

According to their argument, the problems with these visual technology devices are not applicable to women. But in light of what we have explained, the problem affects women just as much as it affects men. The problem of staring at visuals causes a person to become disconnected from reality which is a problem for everyone. Even if a person is only viewing holy material, it is the same problem of entering a fantasy world which is detaching from reality.

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<sup>55</sup> *Tehillim* 126:1

In summary, visual technology gadgets represent the root of how imagination can be detrimental since it disconnects a person from reality. It causes a person to enter into a fantasy world, and it is very hard for the person to disconnect from it and return to reality.

### ***Imagining The Present***

Now that we have explained how the imagination is used regarding the past and the future, we will now discuss how imagination is used in relation to the present.

Everything in creation can be used for either good or evil, and imagining the present also has both a good and evil use. There are many instances in *Chazal* where we see a positive use of imagining something in the present. The *Gemara* says that when one goes out on the street, he should “consider” himself to be like one who is being escorted by a police officer to face trial<sup>56</sup>. In other words, through using his imagination, he should imagine that the street is a place of danger. Similarly, the *Gemara* says that a judge should “see” that there is a sword against his thigh.<sup>57</sup> Simply, this is to be understood as a use of the imagination.

There are other instances in *Chazal* as well where *Chazal* encourage a use of imagining something in the present. The common denominator between all of these scenarios is that when you are doing a certain act, your mind should be thinking about something else. In these cases, you are temporarily disconnecting from the present reality, and you are connecting yourself to a different reality – within the present. The purpose is to avoid spiritual downfall, by raising yourself to a higher spiritual level, as you imagine yourself in a plane of a higher reality.

However, just as with anything else, there must be rules how to use this advice, even if we are dealing with a holy method that comes from our Sages. It must be used properly and sensibly, staying within proper rules and limitations. If a person goes over the limitations set for this concept, even using a holy method taught by the Sages can be detrimental, causing a disconnection from reality.

The Sages are advising one to use his imagination in the present, but only according to the respective level of how much the person can remain connected to reality. Therefore, if a person has a tendency to strongly imagine the past or the future as he starts imagining something in the present, he should not use his imagination in the present that much, because he is easily drawn towards the negative uses of imagination.

To illustrate what we mean, the Sages state that it is permitted to “change the truth for the sake of peace.” However, the Baal Shem Tov explained that this leniency only applies to one who is always careful not to lie. If he has lied even once in his life, the Baal Shem Tov says that it is forbidden for him to diverge from the truth even for the sake of peace. Although it is a *mitzvah* to lie

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<sup>56</sup> *Shabbos 32a*

<sup>57</sup> *Sanhedrin 7a*



for the sake of fostering peace, someone who is used to lying will awaken his trait of dishonesty as soon as he diverges from the truth, and it will become “a sin drags [another] sin.”

In the same vein, when a person is easily dominated by imagination as soon as he begins to imagine, he should not take the advice of the Sages of imagining something in the present, even if it aids him in avoiding sin. While he may be saving himself from one kind of detriment, he is opening the door to a different problem instead. He should only use this imagination technique of the Sages very sparingly.

Thus, only if a person can avoid imagining the past or future should he make use of imagining something in the present. The more a person has purified his imagination, the more he can make use of imagining the present, and vice versa. The less a person has purified his imagination, the less he should imagine anything in the present, even if it is for holy purposes.

There are many holy imaginative thoughts that one can imagine in the present in order to occupy the mind with holy thoughts and thereby avoid sin. Examples include imagining the Wall/*Kosel*, Tomb of Rachel/*Kever Rachel*, and other holy places. However, the condition necessary for this is to remember that he is not actually there. If he is unaware that it's only his imagination, he falls into the negative uses of imagination, even though it was for holy purposes.

Thus, only when a person can remain aware that it's his imagination can he make use of the imagination for holy purposes. He must be able to know exactly where he is in the present and not delude himself that he has transported himself there. Only after he is sure about this can he make use of the imagination.

If a person is in an imaginative state about something holy and he breaks something as he's imagining, surely he will have to pay for the damage. Just because he imagined that he was in a different place doesn't mean that he has actually disconnected from the physical place he was in. Even when a person is using the imagination, he must not lose awareness of the time and place he is in. He has to be able to handle the two simultaneous states of consciousness at once – his imagination, and the reality in front of him that he is responsible for.

If a person ignores this rule, he will become deluded even when using holy imagination. His sense of reality will become damaged as he makes use of his imagination. Thus, imagining something in the present for a holy purpose can only be used by someone who is able to maintain his awareness towards reality as he is imagining. Only if a person is sure that he does not lose his awareness of reality as he imagines can he make use of the imagination.

### ***Evil Imagination: Losing Awareness of Reality***

As explained earlier, a holy imagination is built upon the power of *binah*, which makes use of mentally comparing information in the mind and to understand things based on pre-existing information that he has already received from reliable sources (the raw information is called *chochmah*).

When a person gains an understanding of something based on previous information, he does not entertain the notion that he understands on his own. He is aware that anything he comes to understand is based on previous knowledge that he received. In the same vein, imagination must be built upon reality. One must be aware that the basis is the reality, and that the imagination is clothed by reality.

Now we can understand better why a person needs to be able to remain firmly grounded in reality in order to make use of imagination. One may use the imagination as long as he can remain aware that it is imagination and that it is not becoming the reality. But if a person loses touch of reality as he is in his imaginative state, thinking that his imagination *is* reality, this is the very downfall caused by imagination and it is where imagination becomes truly evil.

On a deeper note, this is where all evil takes hold, resembling the *yetzer hora* itself, which is called “*dumah*”, from the word “*medameh*”. The angel “*Dumah*” is appointed as the overseer of *Gehinnom*...

### ***The Holy Imagination of Transcending Time and Place***

Aside from the concept *Chazal* discuss of imagining something for the purposes of something that relates to the present, the *sefarim hakedoshim* discuss the concept of using the imagination for holiness in the present moment, where a person transcends the physical time and space he is in. We will explain this.

In the *sefarim* of *Chovos HaTalmidim*, *Hachsharas Avreichim*<sup>58</sup>, and others, it is explained how one can use his imagination to elevate his level in serving Hashem. One of the examples of this is that one can imagine himself in Heaven, singing with the *shirah* (song) of the angels; other examples there as well are mentioned. We can bring many examples mentioned by our rabbis about this concept, but the common denominator between all of these examples is that a person is imagining in the present that he is going past the normal boundaries of where he is currently found.

This goes way beyond what we discussed earlier, of imagining something in the present which exists in our physical world, such as imagining being at the Kosel or other holy sites. That kind of imagination is still remaining within the bounds of our experiences, because the person has already seen the Kosel and he recognizes it, and it is just that he is not there at this moment; through the imagination, a person can connect himself to a place that he already recognizes.

But when it comes to the matter discussed in our *sefarim hakodeshim* to imagine an experience that goes beyond physical bounds (whether it is to imagine something Heavenly, which transcends the place we are in, or whether it is to imagine the coming of Mashiach and the era of the redemption and the *Beis HaMikdash*, which transcends the time we are on), this is a far deeper level of imagination, because we have never seen any of these things. (Regarding the *Beis HaMikdash*,

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<sup>58</sup> *The sefarim of Chovos HaTalmidim and Hachsharas Avreichim are authored by Rabbi Klonimis Kalman Shapiro, Hy”d, known as the “Aish Kodesh.”*

even if a person has learned the areas of the Talmud<sup>59</sup> that discuss the structure of the *Beis HaMikdash*, he has still not tangibly seen it, even though he can well imagine it).

This kind of imagination is different than what we discussed until now. It involves imagining something that we have never seen. No one has even seen the angels singing; to imagine it is to leave the current place we are in. No one has even seen the era of Mashiach's times, and to imagine it would be a break from the current time we are in.

### ***The Dangers Of Imagining The Higher Dimensions***

It is important to know that this matter is very, very subtle and complicated, and for many reasons.

First of all, this kind of imagination is a complete disconnection from the reality that we are tangibly found in, and it places a person into a completely different 'world'. If a person is imagining that he is singing with the angels in Heaven, his imagination is completely disconnecting him from the world, and he is entering into a world which he has no comprehension of.

In addition, if he is imagining himself singing with the angels, he is apt to imagine what they look like. If he is on the high spiritual level and he has merited to see angels, then this will not be a problem – but as for the rest of the world, who has never seen an angel, it is problematic to begin to imagine the angels.

There is a very thin line one would have to tread if he uses this kind of imagination, where he is imagining a realm that is beyond tangible physical reality. If he is not careful, he can have a complete spiritual downfall from it.

If he attempts to imagine what the angels look like, he is attempting to give some kind of physical picture to a spiritual being. The more a person is connected to physicality, the more physical his depictions of spiritual beings will be. He will attempt to paint the spiritual realm with as much as his physical creativity allows him to, and in this way he disgraces spirituality, by giving a physical look to all of it in his mind.

Therefore, even when is using this kind of imagination, he must make sure not try to picture what anything looks like in these spiritual dimensions. He should try to imagine only in the most subtle way possible that helps him ascend to the higher dimensions, but if he goes even a bit over this subtle bit of picturing that he is allowed to do, he will be falling spiritually.

Besides for this difficulty, there is an even stronger issue he will have to deal with when using this kind of imagination. He will be imagining something that is beyond his actual comprehension, so he is trying to imagine something that he has no recognition of, because the human intellect cannot relate to it.

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<sup>59</sup> *Tractate Middos*

In addition, he would have to maintain awareness throughout the entire time that it is entirely being imagined, and that it is not taking place in reality. He would have to be aware the entire time that he is involving himself with an imagined dimension that he has absolutely no comprehension of.

That being the case, although this kind of imagination is mentioned in our *sefarim hakedoshim*, and its entire purpose is meant to increase holiness, we must be aware of the dangers that are involved in this method. It is very possible that most of our Sages did not mention it in their *sefarim* precisely because of the dangers involved that are mentioned here.

If a person regularly involves himself with this kind of imagination and he is drawn very much after his imagination to the point that it weakens his intellect as he is in an imaginative state, he will cause an imbalance in his soul between his intellect and his imagination.

How do we know if one can make use of this method of imagination or not? If he has a soul that is rooted in and drawn after holy imagination, then it is his *avodah* to make use of his imagination in this way. But if he is like most people, whose souls are not rooted in holy imagination, it is probably not his *avodah* to involve himself with this kind of subtle imagination. That is why most people who try it are endangering themselves, and they do not become more spiritual or strengthened from it.

Thus, entering this kind of imagination is entering a world that does not exist in reality. Although there are some individuals who can grow spiritually from this practice, we must know that we are dealing with a road that is fraught with spiritual danger, and it is especially detrimental to someone who engages in it on a regular basis, because he will be constantly leaving the bounds of time and place, disconnecting himself on a constant basis from the reality in front of him.

### ***Imagination Must Never Become The Basic Power of The Soul***

Let us think more deeply into why it is dangerous to use the imagination in a way where one imagines that he is leaving the bounds of this current time and place.

There are many ways of how people use the power of imagination, and each person is using it according to how he understands it should be used. The common denominator between all people who use imagination, though – whether he is imagining the past, or something that will happen in the future, or something that he wants to happen in the future, or something that is original and currently not in existence – in either case, the imagination can only be constructive to the degree that it is aligned with reality.

*Medameh* can only thrive upon *chochmah*, which must precede it in development. To the degree that there is *chochmah* (or reality), can there be any room for *medameh* to build upon it.

But when a person uses his imagination to connect himself to worlds that do not exist, as was explained earlier, his imagination will slowly disconnect him from reality.

Any of the abilities of the soul need to be used in their proper limitations. It is a simple and clear rule that *medameh*/imagination is not a power unto itself. Rather, it is always clothed by a different ability of the soul. This is because the imagination can only work when it has something else to thrive on and climb upon.

The root of *medameh* lies in the makeup of man. Man is *adam*, from the word *medameh*, because man has the task to be ‘*medameh*’ himself to Hashem (*adameh l’Elyon*). In other words, man/*medameh* is the second point, which must come to resemble the ‘first’ point – Hashem. This is the very fundamental root of *medameh*.

Thus, whenever a person is using *medameh*/imagination, he must be aware clearly that it is not his first, basic power of the soul. One must know what the first point of the soul is and what the second point is. It is not possible for the imagination to ever become the ‘first’ point of the soul of which the other soul abilities are based upon.

In some people, the ‘first’ point of the soul is *emunah*, faith in Hashem, which is the “root of all roots.” In others, the first point of their soul is *chochmah* (or *seichel*), the intellect. In others, the first point in their soul is *chesed*, to bestow good upon others. Others have a first point that is *middas hadin* [or *gevurah*], the attribute of justice. There are many different kinds of souls who have different ‘first point’ in their souls which serves as the basic power in their soul.

(There is a very deep point in the soul in which all 600,000 souls of the Jewish people are equal and the “same” in. Here we are not dealing with this deeper ‘first point’ of the soul; here we are dealing with the first point of the soul that is revealed and actualized in each person’s soul).

But in any case, *medameh*/imagination is never the ‘first point’ of anyone’s soul. This is because the very nature of *medameh* is that it is preceded by some other force in the soul, and that is how it functions.

### ***Ruination: When Imagination Becomes The ‘First Point’ In The Soul***

The ruination taking place in the outside, modern world today is that they are trying to turn imagination into the ‘first point’ of the soul. This phenomenon is referred to as the infamous “*alma d’dimyon*”, a “world of imagination” which we are currently entrenched in.

Now let us explore the depth of this. There are essentially two kinds of imagination. One kind of imagination is where the imagination takes its course after some other power in the soul precedes it. But there is another kind of imagination which seems to begin its own reality from scratch, and it is entirely based upon a fabricated reality.

This second kind of imagination is what is referred to as the *alma d’dimyon*. In essence, it actually contradicts itself. This is because imagination can only thrive if it is preceded by another power. If the point of imagination is not beginning from a previous force in the soul and it is rather beginning from “itself”, it cannot thrive on anything.

But the trick of imagination is that it allows a person to think that he can invent new realities. When imagination is used in this way, a person is apt to think of himself as a “creator” who can invent a reality, reminiscent of what the Serpent told Chavah, “*You will become like G-d.*” The Sages explain that the Serpent was telling Chavah, “Just as He creates worlds, so can you create worlds.”<sup>60</sup>

Why would a person think he can create worlds? It is for the same reason that a person knows he can imagine a rooster with seven feet. Once a person can imagine a fake reality, there is no end to how much new realities he will think he can invent and imagine. This is the twisted form of the desire in man to “become like G-d” – to invent new realities that do not exist.

### ***Imagination Thrives On Combined Images In The Mind (Harkavah)***

When the desire to invent new realities becomes dominant in the person, it becomes the “first point” of the soul, and as we explained earlier, the soul cannot function normally when *medameh* becomes its basic force. Now we can see the falsity that is created from using *medameh*.

If we examine it deeply, we can see how this power really contradicts itself. The person thinks he is inventing new realities, but he is unaware that his imagination is merely combining pre-existing information together into one jumble. All the imagination can do is to compare different pieces of information together in the mind and jumble them together, but it cannot come up with something from scratch. So in reality, there is no such thing as the imagination actually inventing anything that is completely new and original.

*Medameh* thrives on a mental process of *harkavah*, combining together images that are stored in the psyche. *Medameh* is always a second point in the soul, for it thrives on the process of *harkavah*, which precedes it. Therefore, when a person thinks that his imagination is capable of inventing new realities and he thinks he is some sort of creator, he is fooling himself, because there is no such thing.

It should therefore be clear to a person that whenever he makes use of imagination, even when he is making sure to keep to its rules and limitations, he should be aware clearly that imagination is always a second point in the soul, which thrives on a combination of various preceding forces in the soul. The imagination itself is a product of the *harkavah* of thoughts that preceded it. The imagination is always a continuation of a previous force of the soul; it cannot begin from itself.

But when this awareness towards imagination is missing, a person will think that his imagination is the ‘first point’ in the soul, and imagination will become his basis. Such a person is touching upon the very first sin in Creation, which was like a subtle form of idol worship. The *Gemara* says that Adam *HaRishon* was heretical in committing the sin<sup>61</sup>, and this is because the warped perception of imagination which led him to sin (the desire to “become like G-d”) resembled idol worship.

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<sup>60</sup> *Tanchuma: Tazria 9*

<sup>61</sup> *Sanhedrin 38b*

### ***The Deep Difference Between Holy Imagination and Evil Imagination***

Upon reflection, we can now see the depth of the difference between holy, constructive imagination and evil, detrimental imagination.

A holy imagination is always a combination of factors that have preceded it. A holy imagination is bound to this *harkavah* that has been formed, and in this way, it resembles the raw *chochmah* that one has received from his teacher, in contrast to information that one did not receive from his own teacher. (Even when one uses the power of *binah*, where he understands something based upon something else that he has learned, he is still bound to the original *chochmah*).

In contrast, evil imagination is where new information is being produced with no basis that precedes it. It “breaks fences”, like the Serpent, and it ignores the limitations of Creation. It happens when a person comes to view imagination as the “first point” in his soul. It is the root of heresy, the roots of idol worship, which enables a person to entertain the thought that he has some kind of ability to create things on his own, *chas v’shalom*.

This is stark contrast with the lofty concept of *adameh l’Elyon*, the highest and holiest function of *medameh*, where a person comes to “resemble” Hashem – the person is aware that there is a “First” source which precedes him, and he comes to resemble this “First”, Whom there is none other besides.

## 1.5 | *The Heart's Imagination – The Exaggeration of Limits*<sup>62</sup>

### *The Heart's Imagination: An Imagination Connected To The Character Traits*

In the previous chapters, we explained about the **brain's** power of *medameh*/imagination. Now we will speak about a different kind of *medameh*/imagination: the **heart's** imagination.

First we will begin with a brief description of what the “heart” is, as explained in the works of our Sages. The *lev* (spiritual heart) is the combined reality of the brain's thinking abilities (which include *chochmah*, *binah*, and *daas*) with the emotions of the heart. We must also mention, as part of the introduction to this chapter, that the *middos* (character traits) are mainly expressed in the heart; and besides for the factor of the heart's *middos*, there is also the factor of the heart's *medameh* (imagination).

The Sages state that there are two spaces in the heart; the “right side” and the “left side”, of the heart.<sup>63</sup> The *yetzer tov* (good inclination) is present in the “right side” of the heart, whereas the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) is associated with the “left side” of the heart. Earlier, we mentioned the words of *Sforno* and the *Vilna Gaon* that the *yetzer hora's* main power lies in the use of *medameh*, in the imagination, which is rooted in the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V'Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil).

If we combine the above statements of our Sages together, we will notice that that the Sages are almost openly telling it to us: the heart contains the power of *medameh*/imagination, and upon that imagination, our *middos* are developed.

Thus, besides for the mind's power of *medameh*, which we have explained about at length in the previous chapters, this *medameh* can also spread into the heart, where a new source of *medameh* is created: a *medameh* that is connected with our *middos*.

### *The Heart's Imagination Is Affected By “Medameh” and “Middos”*

However, the mind's imagination and the heart's imagination are not entirely isolated from each other. Since the “heart” is essentially the combined reality of mind and emotion together, the heart's power to imagine is getting its original strength from the mind.

Thus, the heart's imagination consists of two factors. It is comprised of *medameh* in the heart, which refers to the *middos*, and it is also affected by a part of the mind's imagination, which descends

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<sup>62</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-005-connecting-unlimited>

<sup>63</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah*: 22



from the brain and spreads into the heart. The heart's imagination resembles the verse, "*And you shall know today, and you shall settle it upon your heart.*"<sup>64</sup>

### ***The Difference Between The Mind's Imagination and The Heart's Imagination***

Now we will reflect into the following. We have said that the heart's imagination is rooted in the brain's imagination, which is expressed in the form of *dimuy milsa l'milsa* (mental comparison), also known as the mental faculty of *binah* (contemplation), where one compares the information he has learned. The mind's imagination takes two facts together and produces a third piece of information, based upon the original information. Simply speaking, it is not actually producing any novel information.

However, upon a deeper understanding, the imagination is producing 'new' information, now that it has combined two facts together. It is similar to the union of man and woman, who produce a child. Although the comparison of two facts together is not actually producing anything completely from scratch, there is still something new being produced from the original information. Therefore, to some degree, we can view the mind's imagination as an ability that produces something new.

To illustrate, when learning a *sugya* of *Gemara*, part of the learning is to compare together two *sugyos* which are similar, or to compare together two different facts in *halachah*. Through comparing the information in the Torah that we are learning about (*dimuy milsa l'milsa*, which is a use of *medameh*), a new idea or *halacha* is produced from the comparison.

When we use our ability of *dimuy milsa l'milsa* in Torah learning, we are taking together two facts in *halachah* which at first glance seem to be incomparable, and we see the root behind both of them which they stem from. When we discovering the binding root that connects the two together, we can then discover a third, new point, based upon the original two points. The original two points remain unchanged; we have not distorted their boundaries.

Compare this again to the union of man and woman, who become united in marriage through the *Shechinah*; their union allows for a child, which is a 'third' point that results from the original two points, which both remain unchanged and undistorted.

Earlier, we explained that the brain's imagination works to compare the information (*dimuy milsa l'milsa*, or *binah*) based upon the pre-existing information. The brain's imagination doesn't come up with any new information; it merely serves to compare information. It can definitely come up with information as a result of comparing the information, (similar to how a man and woman get married, and then produce a child from their union; the man represents *chochmah*, while the woman represents *binah*), but in essence, the mind does not produce any "new" information from scratch.

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<sup>64</sup> Devarim 4:39

Anyone who has seen the sefarim of the *Rogotchover Gaon*<sup>65</sup> can see how he would combine together two *sugyos* of *Gemara* that seem very distant from each other, and drawn comparisons between them. This is a prime example of a refined and holy power of *medameh*.

### ***Character Improvement Begins With Recognizing Their Limits***

All of that pertains to the mind's imagination. But in this chapter, we will discuss the heart's imagination, which works very differently than the mind's imagination. In order to understand how the heart's imagination works, we will need the following fundamental introduction based upon the words of our Sages.

This is the outline of the concept: it is explained that the word *middah* (character trait) is from the word "*madod*", measured. In other words, our character traits must be kept in measurement, in their proper limitations, in order from them to be what we call "good" *middos*.

Therefore, working to improve our negative *middos*, whether it is anger, conceit, etc. does not begin with actually correcting these *middos* – although fixing the *middos* is certainly an integral part of the process. The beginning of character improvement lies in understanding well their nature. This is a well-known idea written about by both Rav Yisrael Salanter and Reb Yeruchem Levovitz.

Now, how does a person come to recognize the forces behind each of the *middos*? *Upon recognizing the character trait and its limitations*, a person then 'recognizes' that *middah*.

Obviously, a person will also have to work on the *middah* at hand. But the very stage of fixing the *middos* does not begin with fixing them per se. It begins with recognizing the limitations, the proper bounds, of the *middah* at hand; without being aware of the proper boundaries of the *middah*, a person will not be able to fully fix the *middah*.

### ***The Heart's Imagination – Exaggerating The Limits Of A Character Trait***

So each of our *middos* need to be kept within their respective boundaries. Comes along the heart's imagination, and what does it do? It compares information together and it subsequently *widens and expands the boundaries past their normal limit*.

Thus, there is a big difference between the mind's imagination and the heart's imagination. The mind's imagination compares together two things, though its ability of mental comparison. It is not attempting to produce anything new from the comparing. The only 'new' aspect involved is that it is combining together two different pieces of information, and sometimes a third 'new' point is borne from this information, but in essence, the original information remains untouched. But the heart's imagination will exaggerate the limitations of a *middah*, which will give an impression that the limitations of the *middah* have been expanded past its bounds.

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<sup>65</sup> *HaGaon HaRav Yosef Rosin zt"l* (late 1800's-early 1900's), whose sefarim are known as *Tzafnas Paneach*

To illustrate what is meant here, let's say we have two people, Reuven and Shimon, and Reuven can carry 20 kilo, while Shimon can normally carry 10 kilo. Shimon sees Reuven carrying the 20 kilo, compares himself to him, and then strains himself to carry the 20 kilo. It appears as if Shimon has expanded his normal limitations, by lifting more than his strength allows him to; it seems as if he has reshaped his limitations, creating new bounds for himself. He has not created new bounds for himself, however; he has simply uprooted his previous limitations.

The heart's imagination seems to break the bounds of each *middah*, but in actuality, it is not actually recreating the boundaries. The bounds of each *middah* remain as they are, and it is only *in the person's imagination* that the bounds have been expanded.

When a person expands the limitations of a *middah* past its normal bounds [which is the idea of the heart's imagination], this is like "the Serpent, who breaks the fence of the world."<sup>66</sup> Everything in Creation has its properly defined limits, and when a person imagines that the rules can be broken, he is attempting to shatter the existing limits in Creation – he is attempting to 'break the fence of the world', which cannot be done in reality, only in his *imagination*.

### ***The Creator's Reality Vs. The Imagination's Reality***

Let us think into the depth of this. Generally speaking, there are two "realities" we know of – the reality of the Creator, and the reality of His created beings. As we know, the Creator's reality is unlimited, for He is infinite, whereas the reality of created beings are limited. Man is called *adam*, from the word *medameh*, from the word *middah*, "measured" – man is "measured" and limited.

It is explained by our Sages<sup>67</sup> that there is a higher form of creation, where there is only one "man", which means that all that we see in front of our eyes are bits and pieces of this one "man". Even animals, plants, and non-living objects are all part of this one man. Although we cannot recognize how all of Creation is really a part of man, the truthful and deep perspective towards Creation is that all of Creation is part of man.

There is no other reality. Either something is a part of the Creator or it is a part of a created being. Since there is only one Creator and that there is nothing else besides Him, all created beings are of a created nature and they are not the Creator; there is no other way to view reality.

### ***The Root of Evil Imagination: The Desire To Eat From the Eitz HaDaas***

Now we can understand the evil of the imagination. When a person imagines that he has left the bounds of a human being, he thinks he is entering into the dimension of the unlimited. He thinks he is entering into the domain of the Creator.

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<sup>66</sup> *Vayikra Rabbah: 26*

<sup>67</sup> *In the mystical teachings of the Kaballah*

What is the root of attempting to do this, of trying to break the rules of creation? It began with the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*, where the Serpent told Adam and Chavah that if they eat from the tree, “*You will become like G-d.*”<sup>68</sup>

Everything in Creation must have its limitations. The attempt to break these limitations is basically an attempt to try to enter into a dimension where there is no such thing as limits. Even though a person cannot actually do it, the attempt to do so is really an imitation of the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*.

Let’s go back to the example we brought earlier, where Shimon sees Reuven carrying 20 kilo, and he copies Reuven and carries the 20 kilo, when his normal strength is to carry only 10 kilo. It seems that he has done so only because he has witnessed another person breaking limitations, and that he is merely imitating the other person. But Shimon’s desire to break his limits stems from a desire to be unlimited.

Thus, the evil of the heart’s imagination is that it is an attempt of man to somehow ‘imitate’ the Creator. This is a form of *kefirah* (heresy), a denial of the basic difference between humans and the Creator.

The Sages say that when Adam *HaRishon* sinned with the *Eitz HaDaas*, he became a ‘denier’ of Hashem<sup>69</sup>. What is the meaning of this? Clearly, this is a matter which needs to be explained very well, and it is not to be taken so simply and literally. But the deep message of this is because Adam’s desire to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* was motivated by the Serpent’s argument of, “*You shall become like G-d*”. The Sages explain that it said to Adam and Chavah, “Just as He can create universes, so can you be creators of universes.” The Serpent convinced man that he can break his boundaries.

The all-time low of this level was reached by Pharoah, who declared himself to be a god, claiming “*This river belongs to me, and I made it.*” But even if a person does not actually sink to this level of heresy, the very fact that he thinks he can leave his normal human limitations and expand past his bounds is an attempt to reach the unlimited dimension, which is impossible.

This is the nature of the heart’s imagination. The heart fantasizes in a way of attempting to break the normal boundaries of human nature that exist. It contains a spark of heresy to it – it is deeply rooted in an eccentric desire to become like a Creator that has no limits.

### ***Before and After The Sin With the Eitz HaDaas***

Now we will sharpen the words here. Before the sin, man was to remain in his original state, and there was no need to break his boundaries. “Man is created individual” – man’s entire *avodah*, initially, was to maintain his original level.

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<sup>68</sup> *Beraishis* 3:5

<sup>69</sup> *Sanhedrin* 38b

After the sin, the concept of “*medameh*” entered into scene. Ever since then, man is either using *medameh* for holiness or for evil. When *medameh* is used for holiness, man compares himself to the forefathers (Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov) in the hope of trying to resemble them. As the Sages say, “One must say, ‘When will my actions reach the actions of my forefathers?’”<sup>70</sup>

This is the holy use of *medameh*: In order to elevate ourselves, we need to compare ourselves with those great people and try to be like them. (On a deeper note, the forefathers are not actually ‘other people’ outside of ourselves whom we try to resemble. However, we certainly have our own individual task in trying to resemble them, without getting into all the subtle details of this concept).

But all of this came as a result of Adam’s sin. Only after the sin could there be a concept of *medameh*, and now that this is the case, we must rectify *medameh* using *medameh* itself, by being ‘*medameh*’ ourselves to our forefathers. In this way, it is how “from the wind itself, comes the recovery.”

If not for the sin of Adam, the growth of man would be independent of others to look to for inspiration; it would have been according to the root of his own soul. There would be no need to compare oneself to another in order to imitate him and become as great as him. Only after the sin do we need to make use of this power, in order to counter evil *medameh* with holy *medameh*.

### ***Access To Endlessness***

The *Ein Sof* (the Infinite) of Hashem implies two things.

The first aspect of it is that it serves to reveal Hashem. The root of our principles of faith is: “I believe, with complete faith, that the Creator, may His name be blessed, is infinite.”<sup>71</sup> (We must emphasize that whenever the concept of the *Ein Sof* is described by our Sages, it is not referring to Hashem’s essence, for we have absolutely no grasp of understanding this. The Vilna *Gaon* said that even the *Ein Sof* is not describing Hashem. Rather, the *Ein Sof* is a terminology that helps us understand of how Hashem is revealed upon His creations).

The second aspect of the *Ein Sof* is the ever-constant renewal of Creation, represented by the Torah, which is “*longer than the earth in measurement, and wider than the many seas.*”<sup>72</sup> The Sages explain that Hashem was in the midst of creating the world and everything was spreading outward, until Hashem roared at it to stop<sup>73</sup>. The world kept spreading outward due to the Torah, which Hashem looked into to create the world<sup>74</sup>. The Torah is “*longer than the earth in measurement and wider than the many seas*”, therefore the world that was created from it kept spreading out endlessly, until Hashem told it to stop.

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<sup>70</sup> *Tanna Dvei Eliyahu: 25*

<sup>71</sup> *Rambam: Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*

<sup>72</sup> *Iyov 11:9*

<sup>73</sup> *Chagigah 12a*

<sup>74</sup> *Zohar parshas Terumah 161b*

What is this “endless” aspect of the Torah? The Written Torah certainly has an end. There are 600,000 letters in the Written Torah. The endlessness of Torah is manifest in the Oral Torah, in the *chiddushei Torah* (novel Torah thoughts) which have been handed down to the Sages.<sup>75</sup>

The *Ein Sof* which manifests in Creation is through the Torah, which is “*longer than the earth in measurement and wider than the many seas*”, is not merely endless due to the Torah itself, but due to the *chiddushei Torah*. This *Ein Sof* is a form of renewal to Creation. In contrast, the *Ein Sof* of the Creator is not a renewal to creation; it is purely a belief in the fact that Creator is infinite.

The possibility for created beings to actually connect themselves to the *Ein Sof* will depend on how much one has subjugated his power of *medameh* (imagination) to the Torah. (We are referring specifically to the **mind**’s *medameh* described in previous chapters, which is the ability of *dimuy milsa l’milsa*, mental comparison). Through using our mind’s ability of mental comparison, we are able to produce *chiddushei Torah*, endlessly. This is also the meaning of how “Torah scholars have no rest, not on this world and not in the Next World.”<sup>76</sup>

Thus, the Torah scholars, who use the power of *chiddushei Torah* on a regular basis, are partnering with Hashem in renewing the world. As the book *Nefesh HaChaim*<sup>77</sup> describes, the renewal of the act of creation each day takes place precisely because of *chiddushei Torah*.

The *Ein Sof* which manifests in our creation is thus accessed through *Chiddushei Torah*. This concept is the holy use of *medameh*, and it is the power of the *Ein Sof* that manifests in man. To the degree that a person produces *chiddushei Torah* – which is accomplished via the use of the mind’s power of *medameh*, or *dimuy milsa l’milsa* (mental comparison) – to that degree, he purifies the mind and he is connected to the Infinite; to the renewal of Creation.

When one takes that very power of imagination though and he entertains thought of wanting to be godlike (“*And you will become like G-d*”) he will make the terrible error of thinking that just as Hashem is unlimited, so can human beings become unlimited. This is the evil use of *medameh* in its full strength.

### ***The Two Extremes of “Medameh”***

Now we can see the two opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to using the power of *medameh*. When a person is ‘*medameh*’ himself to Hashem – when he compares himself with Hashem and thinks that he can become unlimited and endless, and he wants to break his limitations – this is the evil use of *medameh*.

In contrast, when one is involved with *chiddushei Torah*, he is using his power of *medameh* for holiness, and he is partners with Hashem in the act of Creation<sup>78</sup>. A person becomes ‘partners’ with

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<sup>75</sup> Editor’s Note: As explained in sefer *Nefesh HaChaim*, all *chiddushei Torah* that will ever be said were told to Moshe at Har Sinai.

<sup>76</sup> *Berachos 64a*

<sup>77</sup> *Nefesh HaChaim, shaar IV*

Hashem through looking deeply into the Torah that Hashem looked into in order to create the world [which is the idea behind *chiddushei Torah*], for “Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one”. Therefore, when a person connects himself to the Torah [via *chiddushei Torah*], he is connected to the endless renewal of Creation, and through this he merits a deep connection to the Infinite.

One who uses *medameh* (imagination) without using the power of *chiddushei Torah* is missing the connection to the constant renewal of Creation, for the renewal of creation is allowed only through *chiddushei Torah*, which he is void of. He will want to be unlimited, and when he tries to connect himself to the endless, he will think that this is who he is – and this is total heresy.

Only when a person is using his *medameh* via the power of *dimuy milsa l'milse* will he be able to arrive at a holy kind of *medameh*. But if a person is using *medameh* in order to be free of the limitations of that his *middos* naturally require, this is deeply rooted in a desire to break the rules and to attempt to be godlike. He is not acknowledging the limitations of his *middos*, he is attempting to break the rules, but even worse than this is that his imagination is leading him in the direction towards heresy.

### ***How To Emulate Hashem's Middos***

Perhaps this can be all questioned, however, from a statement of *Chazal* that says, “Just as He is merciful, so must you be merciful.”<sup>79</sup> In this statement of *Chazal*, we are encouraged to get ourselves to ‘resemble’ Hashem, via character improvement. It seems to imply that the beginning of character improvement lies in resembling the *middos* of Hashem. According to everything we have said until now, why isn't this problematic?

However, the answer to this question lies in a deeper analysis of those very words of *Chazal*. Our *Chazal* did not simply say, “Be merciful”, but “*Just as He is merciful, so must you be merciful.*” In other words, character improvement is not simply accomplished through trying to imitate the good *middos* of Hashem. Rather, our *avodah* is to get our own *middos* to become a resemblance of Hashem's *middos*. As an example, if one wants to become more merciful and compassionate, he should aspire for Hashem's mercy and compassion. A person's own mercy and compassion should be stemming from Hashem's mercy and compassion.

Hashem has “thirteen attributes” which are said in the Torah, and as explained earlier (in Chapter One), one of the higher levels in our task of *medameh* is to get our *middos* to resemble the *middos* of Hashem that are said in the Torah. Through this, we attain holy *middos*.

One who wishes to attain this will need to subjugate his own *middos* to the *middos* of Hashem, with the understanding and attitude that Hashem's *middos* are the holy *middos* which we strive for. But if a person simply tries to work with his own *middos* and he tries to elevate them from there, he is missing the above attitude towards *middos*, and this is the root of evil *medameh*.

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<sup>78</sup> See *Shabbos 119a*, “Whoever says “*Vayechulu*” becomes a partner with Hashem in the act of creation.”  
<sup>79</sup> *Shabbos 133a*

### ***The Heart's Imagination Needs To Be Based On The Mind's Imagination***

Therefore, the heart's imagination can only be holy if it is preceded first by a purified imagination of the mind [which is attained via using the ability of mental comparison in Torah learning]. If one skips over the step of purifying his mind's imagination and he tries to work with his heart's imagination, what will result from this? He will produce seemingly logical definitions that are off-base, for his thoughts are not aligned with the rules and limitations. He will make erroneous comparisons between two things when he is unaware of the bounds of their concepts. His mind's imagination will then be based upon an undeveloped imagination of the heart and he will not be able to think accurately.

The proper order to advance in is to first attain a solid imagination of the mind, and only after that should one proceed to work with the imagination of the heart. If one starts with the heart's imagination and then he attempts to develop his mind's imagination, he has not yet attained a basic level of mind over emotion, and to a subtle degree, it is heresy.

Only after attaining a developed mind [via Torah study] can a person recognize the limitations and rules of concepts; only after connecting to Hashem through the Torah can one then attempt to tread the arena of imagination and to use it for holiness.

Thus, one who wants to get his *middos* to resemble the *middos* of Hashem can only do so on condition that he has first subjugated himself to the *middos* of the Torah. Only after one has connected himself to Torah learning does he have the possibility to reach the higher levels of connection to Hashem and His *middos*.

### ***Connection To Hashem Is Only Possible Through Torah Learning***

At a superficial glance, we might ask: Since there is a concept of "Hashem and the Torah and Yisrael are one"<sup>80</sup>, why must we connect to Hashem precisely through learning Torah? Why can't we use our inherent connection of "Yisrael" that we have with Hashem?

This question, however, is fundamentally incorrect. There must be a bridge that connects people to the Creator, and that bridge is the Torah. Therefore, in order to attach ourselves to Hashem, one must first pass through the Torah.

Based upon this, we can now understand that even when it comes to our character improvement of our *middos*, the only way for this to happen is when we subjugate our *middos* to a mind that is developed through Torah learning. In this way, our creativity is channeled towards our Torah learning. Through Torah learning we can become connected to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, our connection to Hashem is genuine, and we are able to rise to the level of holy imagination which the prophets traversed. (Later we will explain more about this level, with the help of Hashem).

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<sup>80</sup> Zohar III, Achrei Mos, 73a



But if one attempts to have a connection to Hashem without first developing a holy mind and sanctified imagination that results from learning Torah, the unrefined imagination of his heart is apt to lead him towards heresy, reminiscent of the error that Adam *HaRishon* made.

Any spiritual attainment needs to be gotten there in steps; there is no way that leads directly towards a higher spiritual which doesn't involve any steps to get there. That is why if a person thinks that he can have a "direct" connection with Hashem simply because he believes in the fact that "Hashem, Torah and Yisrael are one", he is being delusional, even if he believes very strongly in the oneness. On a more subtle note, he is apt to become heretical, *chas v'shalom*.

Only after a person has traversed the necessary steps can he have a real and genuine attachment to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. One must observe the *mitzvos* that are found on this lower realm, and though that he can ascend upwards to the higher dimension of oneness with Hashem. But if he attempts to reach the higher levels through using imagination before he has built the lower levels, he is like a person who seeks prophecy when he hasn't yet reached the more basic spiritual levels.

### ***In Summary***

Let us summarize the proper order of the steps in developing the imagination. The first step must be to use the mind's imagination, and only after developing the mind's imagination can a person develop the heart's imagination.

We have said that the mind's imagination takes two things that seem different and it compares them together, and then it produces new information from the original data. The heart's imagination works differently: it compares oneself to another, and it attempts to break the rules of human limitations. In this way, the heart's imagination, when it is left unrefined, is reminiscent of "the Serpent, who breaks the fence of the world", the evil desire to break our rules, and it is the root of heresy.

Only after we have refined the mind's imagination through *chiddushei Torah* do we become connected to the ongoing renewal of Creation, and that gives us a firm basis for working with the heart's imagination. We are then able to truly leave our current limitations, in a way that will lead us towards a genuine connection with Hashem, of "Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one."

We stressed that if a person has not yet purified his mind's imagination, instead choosing to skip over this stage (and for this reason, most people do not find their "true portion" in the Torah, due to their unrefined imagination which hampers them, and there are only a few individuals in the generation who merit it), if he now uses his heart's imagination, his imagination will not be rooted in holiness, and he is in a situation where he is apt to break rules, each on his own level.

This is the core of the issue that lies behind most of the imagination taking place in the world today – it is usually not based with a mind developed through Torah.

### ***Evil Imagination of the Heart Leads To A State of Non-Existence***

Now let us understand the following very deep point.

We have said that when the heart's imagination is left undeveloped and unrefined, due to the absence of Torah-thinking mind, the imagination will seek to break rules and all human limitations. It will attempt to be god-like. Understandably, it will not make a person more God-like, but at the same time, it will also cause a person to lose his "human" status. A created being is defined as a creature that has certain bounds and limitations [and this is the implication of "*middos*", which mean "measurements"].

But when a person forfeits this status, to a certain degree, he has stopped existing!

The angel appointed over *Gehinnom* is called "*Dumah*", from the word "*medameh*" [which implies that there is a connection between imagination and hell]. The Maharal explains that *Gehinnom* is called "*Tzeil-maves*", "in the shadow of death", because it is like a shadow of death that has come upon the person – meaning, he has ceased existing.

Using the heart's imagination when it is not developed by the mind will cause a person to leave his definition of limits, which means that he is placing himself on a path that is totally the opposite of Hashem's will. Instead of getting "somewhere" with his imagination, he will get "nowhere" – and he turns his existence into a "nowhere" place. This is the depth of the ruination that is caused by an undeveloped imagination of the heart.

It doesn't make a difference if a person is engaged in this evil kind of imagination for two minutes a day or seven hours a day. The very fact that he connects himself to a non-existent dimension, is the greatest ruination that there is. What will result from it? The person will eventually commit sins, because he is convinced himself that he is above limitations and that he is god-like, for he does not recognize any Authority who rules over him. He will not listen to commandments of the Creator, and he will throw away the yoke of Heaven from upon himself, deep in his heart.

If we reflect into this, it is subtle and it is frightening. It seems simply to us that there is nothing wrong with fantasizing all kinds of fantasies, and that this has nothing to do with accepting the yoke of Heaven upon us or not. But if we think about the inner workings of imagination and where it can lead to when it is left unfixd, we can see that not only won't it lead a person towards the Creator, but it leads him far away from the Creator. The heart's imagination will imagine that there are no rules, so there is no telling of how far and low it will go.

We should repeat and emphasize that there is almost no one who has totally purified his mind's imagination to be able to work with the heart's imagination. There were only individuals who reached it fully, and these were the prophets, but now that there is no more prophecy, there is almost no one who has a totally purified mind. Therefore, anyone today who uses the heart's imagination is trying to leave his limitations and he is entering a very dangerous place.

***In Conclusion***

If we have absorbed these words, we can now understand that herein lays the depth of proper *tikkun hamiddos* (character improvement).

Working on our *middos* is comprised of two parts. The first part of it, understandably, is to rectify the evil that is found in each of the *middos*. But there is a second part to it, which is the deeper aspect of *tikkun hamiddos*. The evil that is found in each of the unfixed *middos* is really stemming from the broken boundaries of the *middah* in question. When we recognize the boundaries of each *middah*, the “measurement” that each *middah* must stay in order for it to be constructive – and this is the depth of what is meant by *tikkun hamiddos*.

## 1.6 | *Rectifying The Heart's Imagination - 1<sup>81</sup>*

*(Summary: In previous chapters, we have laid out the general outline of the power of “medameh” (imagination). It was explained that the **mind**’s power to imagine is essentially the ability of mental contrast (“dimuy milsa l’ milsa”). The evil use of this power is when the mind compares things that are not actually similar and mixes the information together, whereas the holy use of this power is to see how one thing differs and compares with something else, which sorts out the imagination.*

*We have then begun to explain the **heart**’s power of imagination, which is connected with our middos. This kind of imagination exaggerates and abuses the proper limitations of each of our middos. It is rooted in the desire to break our human limits and to become like G-d, which was the Serpent’s argument. Just as Hashem is unlimited, so does the imagination seek to be unlimited, but for evil purposes: a desire to become like G-d (in the side of evil), a perspective rooted in the sin with the Eitz HaDaas, which was essentially a desire to break the rules that Hashem has given us.)*

### ***The Root of The Desire To Produce Something New***

Besides for the heresy contained in the Serpent’s words to Chavah, that breaking the rules and eating from the *Eitz HaDaas* would enable her to “*become like G-d*”, there was an additional aspect of evil contained in its argument. The Serpent argued with Chavah, “Just as He creates worlds, so can you create worlds.” It introduced a desire to break rules and limitations, expressed through a wish to create new things.

What is the root of this human desire to wish to create and invent new things?

Hashem created the world “*yeish m’ayin*”, “something from nothing” - He made the novelty of Creation, which is the most original thing ever invented. The desire in a human being to wish to create and invent things stems from the aspect of *medameh* (imagination/resembling) in man, which wishes to “*become like G-d*”; [and as the Serpent said to Chavah] – “Just as the He creates universes, so can you create universes.”

This is the general root of the desire to create new things, but if we look deeper, there is actually a force in the soul that precedes it: there is a desire in a person to break boundaries (in Hebrew, “*pritzas gevulim*”). The desire to break boundaries is the deep root of why people wish to create and invent.

It would seem that the desire to break boundaries, and the wish to be creative, are two unrelated aspects in man. But upon deep reflection, we can see their relationship, and how they are both rooted in one aspect, as we are about to explain.

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<sup>81</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-006-returning-beginning>

Our Sages explained that one of the reasons of why the Creator wished to create a world was due to a part of His Endlessness which yearned for companionship, for before Creation, there was nothing else in Creation besides for Him. This is the deep root of the concept of breaking boundaries, and with creation, Hashem entered it into existence. Thus, part of the purpose of Creation is due to the Creator's own wish to "break boundaries", so to speak, an aspect which stems from part of his Endlessness. Hashem overcame His own boundaries, so to speak, allowing "another" into existence other than Himself: this very Creation which we are in.

This deep aspect in Creation is reflected in man's own nature as well: man is a creature of *medameh* (imagination/resembling) who wishes to break boundaries, and in turn, this is the root of why man wants to create and invent new things – "Just as He creates universes, so can you create universes." This aspect of human nature stems from the Creator's own wish to break His boundaries (so to speak), when He created the world.

It really starts from a preceding evil force: the evil power to deny Hashem (*kefirah*). *Chazal* state, "Hashem creates world, and people also create worlds" – the meaning of this is that people "create" worlds through their imagination! When a person breaks the rules given to him, it's really a subtle sign of denying Hashem. He first has a spark of denial towards Hashem, and then he breaks his rules. Then, his evil imagination is fueled to produce all kinds of *middos* that have gone over the limit.

### ***The Abilities of Maaseh Beraishis (Original Form) and Maaseh Merkavah (Combined Thought)***

It is clear that the Creator's desire to break boundaries and the human desire to break desires is not of the same nature. Hashem created the world from absolute nothingness ("efes muchletes"<sup>82</sup>), otherwise known as "*yeish m'ayin*" (something from nothing), whereas man cannot create from nothing. The desire in man to 'create worlds' is being allowed through an ability called "*harkavah*" – combining together various thoughts.

Our Sages describe of two abilities called "*maaseh beraishis*" (lit. "the act of creation")<sup>83</sup>, and "*maaseh merkavah*" (lit. "the story of the Holy Chariot")<sup>84</sup>.<sup>85</sup> The concept of *maaseh beraishis* refers to a beginning point, and *maaseh merkavah* refers to combining together aspects that already existent.

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82 *Ramban in parshas Beraishis*

83 *The "Maaseh Beraishis" is the account of the creation of the first six days of the week and Shabbos, which the beginning of the Torah describes, in parshas Beraishis.*

84 *The story of the Holy Chariot (the "Maaseh Merkavah") appears in Ezekiel 1:1, and the Sages in Chagigah 12b explain that it is forbidden for one to study this part of Torah in-depth without a teacher who has the tradition of teaching it; the same goes for Maaseh Beraishis.*

85 *See Nefesh HaChaim 1:4 where it is explained that "every man contains in himself the entire "maaseh beraishis" (the entire act of creation) and all of the secrets of "maaseh merkavah" (all of the mystical secrets of the Holy Chariot)*

Thus, the root of the yearning of the *medameh* (imagination) to be creative is really rooted in a beginning point - *maaseh beraishis* - but in its active state, it is a kind of *maaseh merkavah*. The prophets, who attained the highest level of the imagination, were thus able to see the *maaseh merkavah*.<sup>86</sup> When *maaseh merkavah* manifests in a human being, in order for it to be holy, it will depend on if the imagination has been sanctified or not.

Thus, the root of imagination – both the mind’s imagination, which makes mental contrasts between information, as well as the heart’s imagination, which seeks resemblance of Hashem (which, as we have explained earlier, is the highest level of the imagination, when attained) - is defined as: the breaking of boundaries.

The imagination expands into the desire of creating new worlds, trying to create a new “*maaseh beraishis*”. There exists a desire in a person’s imagination to create new worlds, although it is actually impossible. (In the *Gemara* it is brought that there were some Sages who were able to create things.<sup>87</sup> However, this was because of the aspect of “*maaseh beraishis*” in the soul, for they did not actually create anything from scratch; it was due to combining together various forces, which is “*harkavah*”).

Imagination is the root of a wish in a person to resemble the Creator. Just as Hashem created the world from total scratch, from absolute nothingness (*efes muchletes*), from “*yeish m’ayin*” (something from nothing), so does a person think that he can do so. But all man can do is combine together various data and have an idea emerge from there; man cannot actually create anything totally new and original. This is referred to as man’s power of “*harkavah*” (combination).

The concept of wishing to break human limitations, which lies at the core of imagination, is the hidden agenda of the imagination; it lies hidden and concealed from our consciousness in the same way that we aren’t conscious of the roots under a tree when we only see the tree. The parts of the imagination which we can notice clearly are the aspects of “*harkavah*”, the combined images in our mind, which the imagination constructs together. There are various ways of how the mind puts together these images.

For example, a person imagines a person with three ears. Is he inventing a new reality in his head of a person with three ears? The imagination here is not producing anything original. He has seen a man with two ears, which exists, and he simply replaces the two ears with three ears. This is the “*harkavah*” process at work: it has combined together various pieces of images. There are many more examples we can give of this concept, but the idea is always the same.

It appears to us that the imagination is nothing but a combination of various images in the mind, which is *harkavah*. But the root of the imagination is stemming from the wish to break human limitations. Therefore, the imagination can fantasize about things that are beyond bounds.

Through the heart’s ability of *harkavah*, a person takes things which are properly defined with their limitations (the *middos*, which in our heart, mean “measurements”, because the *middos* are in

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<sup>86</sup> Editor’s Note: The prophets who merited to see the “*Maaseh Merkavah*” were *Yechezkel HaNavi* (Ezekiel) and *Yeshayahu HaNavi* (Isaiah).

<sup>87</sup> *Sanhedrin* 65b

essence measured; in each person the *middos* differ, because each person has his own proper limitations), and as a result of the underlying factor of the imagination, which is its desire to break limitations, the limitations are then shattered, and new “measurements” are then “created” for whatever the person has imagined.

### ***The Heart’s Ability To Estimate Information***

To explain this further, there are two abilities in man to give “measurement” to concepts. One ability of “measurement” is in the mind: the mind gives proper definition to each thing. We also find another kind of ability to “measuring” which is referred to in the term, “Each person can determine it, according to what his heart has estimated.”

The mind’s ability to measure is called “*shiur*”, which gives the exact and precise definition and limitations of a concept. The heart’s ability to measure is called *hashaarah* (estimation), where a person defines something based on assumption and estimation, which is not focused on precision.

It is explained by our Sages an important concept about the heart: the entire reality of the heart is an extension of the mind’s knowledge.<sup>88</sup> It is written, “*And you shall know today, and you shall return the matter to your heart.*”<sup>89</sup> The “heart” only appears after the mind’s knowledge has been internalized. Since the heart is an extension of the mind, the mind’s ability of “*shiur*” (to determine the limitations and definitions of a concept) extend into the heart, where “*shiur*” becomes “*hashaarah*” – the limitations can now be played around with by the heart. Imagination is where a person leaves the precise limitations of a concept, so when “*shiur*” becomes “*hashaarah*”, it is defined by the heart’s ideas of definition, and not by the thinking mind’s idea of definition.

In the ideal situation, the “mind controls the heart.” But sometimes the heart controls the mind, and the heart’s imagination travels upward into the mind, distorting the mind’s perception. When the mind is in control of the heart, the mind’s ability of *shiur* will be in control over the heart’s *hashaarah*. But when the heart’s *hashaarah* is in control over the mind’s *shiur*, it is a sign that the person is aiming to break the limitations of a concept.

### ***In Summary of How The Imagination Works***

As explained earlier, the evil use of the imagination is not rooted in man’s aspect of *maaseh beraishis* contained in him, but in a deep desire to soar to become God-like and create: “Just as He creates universes, so can you create universes.”

There are actually two steps in this desire. The first step is, “Just as He”, and the second step is, “creates worlds”. If the imagination only desired to create, then it would only be trying to resemble

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<sup>88</sup> Arizal: Eitz Chaim shaar 32 (*shaar hamochin*)

<sup>89</sup> Devarim 4:39

*maaseh beraishis*. But the root of the evil imagination is aiming for something more: “Just as He.” It wants to be god-like – it wants to shatter all defined limitations. It is a desire in a human to become a Creator. This is the evil of the imagination, and this is why the imagination is linked with heresy.

In order for a person to reach any clear understanding about anything, there must be an integration of the mind and the heart. Thus, if a person is trying to reach something beyond comprehension, there are no properly definitions (no “*shiur*”) of where he is trying to get to, and it will be entirely left to his heart’s estimations, his *hashaarah*.

We have so far seen that the imagination consists of three factors: (1) The mind’s ability to contrast and compare facts with each other, (2) The heart’s wish to break limitations, (3) The heart’s ability to combine together information.

As we explained, the heart’s ability to combine together information (*harkavah*) is not stemming from the aspect of *maaseh beraishis* in man, but from *maaseh merkavah* – meaning, the “combining” together of various existing forces [which cannot create anything from scratch].

### ***Rectifying The Heart’s Imagination – Through “Maaseh Beraishis” and “Maaseh Merkavah”***

Now that we have explained the roots of the imagination, we will now try to break down these matters further and arrive at the practical outcomes of how to use these concepts.

When a person begins to imagine something, either he is imagining from his mind or from his heart. If he is imagining through his mind, he will be comparing together two existing things; if he is imagining through his heart, he is trying to come up with something new.

We have explained how these are two totally different kinds of imagination. Now that we have explained at length of how they differ, we now how that have the tools to figure out where our imagination is coming from, whenever we find ourselves imagining something.

When you find yourself imagining something, firstly, try to determine where the imagination is coming from: is it coming from your mind, or from your heart? Try to figure out the nature of the particular imagination that has surfaced.

If someone is drawn towards fantasizing, he can identify this clearly, when he finds himself spacing out even as he’s fully awake. But even if a person is not drawn towards fantasies, there is a way for him to get into his imagination and see where it is usually coming from: by examining his dreams. One can try to remember the dream as clearly as he can, in the order of events that the dream unfolded in. After a person has recalled the imaginative thoughts, he should now think of what factors contributed to this imagination (he is thinking of what the “*harkavah*” is).

The next step will be: to purify the imagination. It can be done in two different ways. (1) Either one can return the imagination to its *maaseh beraishis*, to its beginning form, (2) Or, he can fix the imagination through the very *merkavah* (combination) of the thoughts that contributed to it: by leaving behind the fantasy produced by the *merkavah* of these thoughts, and by returning to a holy



kind of “*maaseh merkavah*” (we are not referring to the actual *maaseh merkavah* which the prophets saw, of course; we are referring to a holy power of *merkavah* found in all parts of Torah.<sup>90</sup>)

We will first explain how we can fix the imagination, by returning the imagination to the soul’s power of *maaseh beraishis*.

### ***Using The Power of “Maaseh Beraishis” To Fix The Imagination***

Let’s use example we brought earlier, of a person who imagined a person with three ears. In reality, there is no such thing, so when we contrast this imaginative thought against reality, we will instantly see that the fantasy will cease, because we are reminded that it is ludicrous in the reality.

As explained earlier, when a person imagines a creature with three ears, this is rooted in man’s ability of *harkavah*, to combine together existing information. That is why if a person thinks into this imaginative thought, he can get rid of whatever *harkavah* he has formed, essentially getting rid of this imaginary creature in his mind that he has thought about. In this way, he naturally ‘returns’ the ear to is *maaseh beraishis*, to its original, beginning point, to the way it looked like at the beginning of Creation. Practically speaking, he should simply imagine the person now with two ears!

Understandably, there are deeper aspects to *maaseh beraishis* than this use, for within each aspect of *maaseh beraishis*, there are also deeper and more hidden beginnings to each beginning point. But a clear and simple method of using the power of *maaseh beraishis* is to take a fantasy and return it to its root form. If you imagined a person with three ears, by imagining a person with two ears, you have returned the ear to its original form, the way it looked like at the beginning of Creation – its *maaseh beraishis*.

By returning something to its *maaseh beraishis* (relatively and to some extent), you have left its *maaseh merkavah* that distorted it, and then the *harkavah* of the combined images will now cease on its own.

Let us emphasize that this particular method of fixing the imagination is not simply about erasing the image in your mind that you imagined; the idea is not simply that instead of imagining a person with three ears, you now imagine the person with two ears. We are conveying a different point here: When the process of *harkavah* (combined images) in the mind ceases, the image in your mind that was formed now returns to its original form, to the way it looked like at *maaseh beraishis*.

(On a deeper note, *maaseh beraishis* includes only the first day of creation, whereas the rest of the six days of the creation were *maaseh merkavah*. But generally speaking, all of the six days of creation are in the category of *maaseh beraishis*, and returning the image to its original form will mean that it has been returned to its *maaseh beraishis*).

Here is another example. If a person imagined a tree with certain properties that does not exist in reality, and then he imagines a normal tree, he has returned this image in his mind of the tree to its

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<sup>90</sup> This will be explained in the next chapter.

original root form. He has not actually taken apart the image in his mind; by focusing in his mind of what a normal tree looks like, he has returned the fantasy in his mind to the way it really exists in reality. He has returned it from a *maaseh merkavah* into its *maaseh beraishis*.

A person will also have to consider all of the imagined aspects in the image and return each aspect to its original form. For example, if a person imagined a man with the nose of an elephant, he will have to imagine the elephant nose on an elephant, and the rest of the person's body needs to be replaced with an image of what the body is supposed to look like. In order to return a fantasy to its root form, a person should examine how many parts of the image is a fantasy, and to keep returning each aspect of the fantasy to its *maaseh beraishis*, to the way it looked like at its source.

### ***Returning To A Beginning Point***

Now that we have explained the method of “returning to the beginning” in a more practical sense, let's explain the deeper inner workings behind how this power of the soul works.

Let's use the following simple example. If you are currently in the year 5776 and it is *Parshas Beraishis* this week, and you are in shul hearing *Parshas Beraishis* being read from the Torah, how do you view this? Do you feel that you are currently in 5776 and that you are just hearing about the events of *maaseh Beraishis* a something that happened in the beginning of history, a very long time ago? Or *does your soul return to the very beginning of creation*, when you hear *Parshas Beraishis* being read from the Torah?

If a person just views it as an event of history, it is a sign that he lacks the power of returning to beginnings. Using the mentioned here that we mentioned of returning a *harkavah*-thought to a *maaseh beraishis* image will feel very superficial to him.

### ***The Depth of Returning To The Beginning Point***

Let us explore this deeper. The root of imagination began with the sin of Adam, when he ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, which was called *Eitz HaDaas “Tov V’Ra”*,<sup>91</sup> a mixture of good and evil. The *Eitz HaDaas* was essentially a *harkavah*, a combined mixture, of good and evil. Had Adam never eaten from the tree and sinned, he would have lived for only six days, and then he would have gone straight into an eternal Shabbos. In other words, he would have only lived within the six days of *maaseh beraishis*, and afterwards, the World To Come. But when he sinned, the six days of Creation spawned into six thousand years. In other words, he left the state of *maaseh beraishis* of six days, and entered into a system where each “day” would take 1000 years – he entered into the state of “*maaseh merkavah*”, of current time.

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91 *The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*

Earlier we explained that the heart's imagination does not begin with *harkavah*, nor does it even begin with a desire to resemble *maaseh beraishis*. It goes deeper than that – it is a desire to break limitations, which stems from an even deeper desire: a desire to resemble the Creator. Now let us ponder the depth of this concept.

Whenever a person imagines, he is comparing together two things. When the mind imagines, it is contrasting together two pieces of data. When the heart imagines, the person deep down is trying to somewhat 'resemble' the Creator: he wishes to break boundaries and give new definition, such as the example we brought earlier of imagining a person with three ears. The person takes together two separate images and combines them together.

Now that we have seen that imagination is always a second point in the mental process – it is always preceded by some factor that came before it – we can understand how to rectify it. When we train ourselves to uncover the beginning point of each thing, the entire foundation that was supporting the imagination will now give way and the fantasy collapses. This will essentially mean that the person has left behind the imagination.

Each thing we come across contains details. When we take apart something and we see what details it is made up of, what the source of each part is, how it got to this, etc., we come to access its *maaseh beraishis*.

### ***Consciously Returning To A Beginning***

To sharpen this concept more: We are currently at a 'middle' point, and we do not see ourselves at a 'beginning' point. This is true both from the viewpoints of time and soul. When we view ourselves from the angle of time, we are currently in the year 5776, so we are clearly not at the beginning of time. In terms of our soul, we have usually gone through several lifetimes before this current one, so it is not the first time that we are here. But every person has a permanent point in his soul where he can return, though it, to his beginning point.

This is not only a power to make use of with regards to fixing the imagination. It is more encompassing. In many other areas we are involved with, it is also necessary to return to our beginning point.

For example, when learning the *Gemara* in-depth, as opposed to just learning the 'page of *Gemara*' in front of us and staying there, some people are drawn towards seeing all of the information there at its source. They first open up the *Chumash* and learn all of the verses in the Torah that will be discussed in the particular *sugya* of the *Gemara* they will be learning, and slowly they enter into the depth of the *sugya* like this, beginning from the root.

Of course, there are many other reasons as well why one would be learning in this particular style. Some people do this simply for the sake of clarity and to have a sense of order in their learning. But the deeper reason to use this method is so that you can see the beginning point of all that you come across. Instead of working our way backwards, beginning from the *Gemara* and then the *Mishnah*

and then opening up the *Chumash* – where we are beginning from the middle – we can instead begin from the source, from its beginning point.

### ***Strengthening Our Emunah Through Studying Maaseh Beraishis***

It is well-known that the Chofetz Chaim would say that when he needed to strengthen his *emunah*<sup>92</sup>, he would review *Parshas Beraishis*. Simply speaking, studying the account of Creation can strength one’s *emunah* because it reminds a person that Hashem created the world and everything in it. But there is more to it. It is because by returning to *maaseh beraishis*, a person returns to the very beginning point of *emunah*.

However, this will only work for a person if he is consciously connecting himself to his soul’s power of returning to beginnings (*raishis*). There are only a few people who are consciously in touch with this power of *raishis*. For this reason, most of the world experiences their viewpoint from “*maaseh merkavah*”, and that is the deep reason of why most of the world has weak *emunah*.

What is the difference between the soul’s power of *raishis* and the soul’s power of *emunah*? The deep reason is because most of the world is regularly in a state of *harkavah*, combining together one thought with another thought, to the point that even their *emunah* has been built upon a *harkavah* based upon *harkavah*. We are in the year 5776, and our souls have gone through much *harkavah* upon *harkavah*, which has distanced us greatly from the simple point of *emunah* in the Creator’s existence.

But if a person draws himself closer to the beginning point, he is somewhat accessing the point of *maaseh beraishis*, which gives him a greater connection to *emunah* in the Creator.

Thus, in order to rectify the fantasies of our imagination – via returning from a state of distorted *maaseh merkavah* to pristine *maaseh beraishis* – we will need to reveal our soul’s power of *raishis*, of returning to beginnings. The practical way to use this deep power is that in anything you encounter, think into its original source.<sup>93</sup>

### ***Returning To Beginnings – Through Analyzing Each Thing In Creation***

We can give a few simple examples of how a person can return to “*maaseh beraishis*” throughout our daily routine.

If a person is walking in the street and he sees a tree, he should think: “How did this tree get here?” So he will think, “Someone must have planted it here.” Now he can think: “But who did the roots get here?” The answer will be, “Because there were roots here already from before.” But then he

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<sup>92</sup> *belief and faith in the Creator*

<sup>93</sup> For more on how to understand the soul’s power of “*raishis*”, refer to the *derasha* of the Rav in *The Weekly Shmuess\_03\_Raishis – The Power of Beginnings*, and *Shavuos #011 – Seeing Hashem In Creation*.

can think: “And how did the old roots get here?” He can keep thinking like this, until he concludes that the roots of this tree began with the third day of creation, where Hashem created all trees.

A person can do this in his home as well. As he is sitting by his table, he can think: “How was this table made?” Then he thinks, “Wood, which is chopped from the trees.” Then he can think, “And where do the trees come from?” He can keep thinking in this way until he eventually works his way backwards to the original six days of Creation.

This is exactly how a person returns to the beginning point in all that he comes across, even in mundane daily life.

The point of this is to realize that there is nothing “new” in Creation – it is all contained in the original data of the six days of Creation. People breed together two different species of animal and a new species is formed, but there is really nothing original and new here, because it is entirely a product of combined genes. The only difference is in the combination of the data that went into it, but nothing new has been created.

By getting used to thinking in this way, a person can come into contact with the beginning of each thing he comes across. This is not just a mental exercise. It is a use of a deep power of the soul, *raishis*, and it further opens this power.

Using this power of *raishis* will weaken fantasy. The imagination will thereby be improved, and the mind’s perception becomes clearer and more pristine. Even more so, getting used to seeing beginnings will improve two major areas: it will result in an ability to think clearly in his Torah learning, and it will increase the clarity of one’s *emunah*.

In summary, we have explained a method of rectifying [the heart’s] imagination: by returning to *maaseh beraishis*, to return to the beginning point of each thing [using the soul’s deep power of *raishis*, which allows us to consciously return to the beginning point of something]. Regularly using this power of returning to *maaseh beraishis* uproots fantasy.

The *raishis*, the beginning point, of each thing, is the way it simply looked like before any *harkavah* (combining) was done to it. The more a person trains himself to think into the beginning point of each thing he comes across, this will weaken the fantasies of the imagination, even if a person is not directly trying to dismantle the fantasies.

### ***Weakening The Imagination Enables A Deeper Intellect***

When a person gets used to uncovering the beginning point of things that he comes across, he will come closer to the Creator, having a simpler sense of Him in his heart. Since the heart and the mind are ultimately interconnected, the mind will receive this information from the heart. However, now that the imagination in the person has been weakened, that will mean that the ability to compare and contrast information will also suffer. So if we weaken the imagination, won’t this hamper the mind’s intellectual abilities?

The answer to this is that if the heart has been purified from fantasies, this purity extends into the mind as well, which will uncover a deeper source of wisdom in the mind. The mind's thinking abilities are rooted in a source called "*ayin*", as it is written, "*Wisdom, where (m'ayin) is it found?*"<sup>94</sup> So although a weakened imagination will certainly hamper the mind's ability to compare together information – a function of the imagination, which has now taken a hit – the mind will not be negatively affected in the long run, for it has acquired an even deeper thinking ability. It will now have greater access to the deeper source of wisdom, "*ayin*".

### ***The Difficulty With Using The Power of 'Raishis' In Worldly Matters***

However, practically speaking, this *avodah* of fixing imagination, via replacing *harkavah* (combined images) with its *maaseh beraishis* (beginning point), is usually experienced only superficially when most people try to implement it. As we mentioned earlier, most people are experiencing *harkavah* in their thought process on an ongoing basis, which makes it very hard to train their minds to start attaching each thing to its *raishis*. Therefore, this method of rectifying the imagination is not a method we can recommend to all people.

If a person has an ability to imagine vividly, then he will have an easier time with this method [because he can strongly picture the original and true image of each thing]. But if a person can imagine that vividly and clearly, it will be most difficult for him to fix his imagination using this entire method presented.

Even more so, using the method of returning to *maaseh beraishis* contains a danger to it, for anyone who is easily drawn towards fantasy. In the example we mentioned earlier of a person who imagined a person with three ears, who should now imagine him with two ears, this will work properly if he can think of the person in terms of *abstract thinking*, by thinking of the original form of man as he was at the beginning of Creation. But if one is not able to think in the abstract, he is apt to imagine his own "original" form of man when he tries to think of how man is supposed to look like at the beginning of Creation, and there will be distortions.

In a case where one has imagined a kind of person who does not exist, such as imagining a person with three ears, this particular issue can be worked upon more practically, by looking at a picture of a *tzaddik*.<sup>95</sup> Then a person can imagine what the original prototype of man is supposed to look like, using the picture of the *tzaddik*.

But even this method contains a difficulty to implement. Using a picture of a *tzaddik* is not exactly the same thing as imagining the original form of man at *maaseh beraishis*, which was man at his holist and purest form. A *tzaddik* definitely bears a closer resemblance to the way man looked like at *maaseh beraishis*, but it's only a comparison, and it is not the same thing. Also, this method

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<sup>94</sup> *Iyov 28:12*

<sup>95</sup> *a righteous, holy, G-d fearing, pious religious Jew*

wouldn't be able to work for a person who doesn't think about *maaseh beraishis* that often, or if there are images that pop up in his imagination which aren't always pure.

When either of this is the case, it is not feasible to use the method of trying to return a fantasy image to its *maaseh beraishis*.

### ***Returning To The Beginning – Through Torah***

In contrast to the above method of rectifying the imagination - where one essentially fixes the imagination *after* it has occurred - there is another method that is similar to the above one, which can *prevent* an evil imagination from occurring in the first place.

This method will be based on the previous approach, with one difference: instead of returning to the 'beginning point' *after* having imagined something incorrectly, a person can instead connect his soul to the 'beginning point' in anything, until his imagination ceases from occurring in the first place.

How do practically make use of this power?

The Torah is called *raishis*, "beginning", for it is written, "*Hashem made me as the beginning of His way*",<sup>96</sup> thus, the more a person immerses his mind in Torah learning, his imagination is weakened accordingly. This is a fundamental, root solution which can prevent evil imagination from occurring in the first place.

However, this will only work if the person gets to the root of the matters in what he is learning. When one learns a *sugya* of *Gemara*, he must try to dig deep in order to get to the roots of the information. He needs to get to the depth of each point he comes across and to search for the root of each point. It is difficult to explain exactly how to do this, but if you can understand the general idea of this, you should be able to actualize it.

The more a person is drawn towards seeing the 'beginning point' of each thing [he learns in the Torah] and he digs deep to get to it, to that extent will his imagination be weakened.

This is the most fundamental and practical method of dealing with evil imagination: to train oneself to return to the 'beginning point' of each thing [that he learns about in the Torah]. It enables a person to leave behind the state of imagination caused by the sin of the *Eitz HaDaas*, and to somewhat return to the level of the *Eitz HaChaim*, within the soul; which further enables a person to attain more clarity and purity of mind.

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<sup>96</sup> *Mishlei* 8:22

## 1.7 | *Rectifying The Heart's Imagination 2*<sup>97</sup>

**Summary:** *In the previous chapter, we explained that the evil of the heart's imagination is based upon a desire to break rules and boundaries. This is the root of heresy, and it results in a desire to produce that which does not exist.*

*However, even when a person is attempting to produce that which doesn't really exist, he is not actually producing anything new, for it is impossible to imagine something which does not exist. Rather, the imagination works to take pre-existing images and combines them together to form a distorted reality. For example, a person imagines of a hand with seven fingers, etc.*

*We mentioned that the way to rectify the heart's imagination, according to our Sages, is through reconstructing the image, by returning it to its original form. This is called applying the power of "maaseh beraishis" upon our power of "maaseh merkavah."*

*Our power of "maaseh beraishis" can see the initial form of something, whereas our power of "maaseh merkavah" will combine together several factors upon the initial form. Since medameh/imagination uses "merkavah" in order to combine images in the mind to form an erroneous mental picture, the main advice in rectifying this is through imagining the raw form of the image; to return the image to the way it looked originally. This is how an image is returned to its "maaseh beraishis" – its beginning form.*

*Additionally, it was explained that in general, one needs to train himself to returning to the beginning point (the "raishis") of each thing he comes across. In this way, a person leaves the "harkavah" form of what he has imagined and he has instead returned it to its "raishis" (beginning) point.*

*This power is also known as "temimus" (simplicity). The deep root of this ability is the power to recognize the Creator as the Beginning source of everything. Through getting used to this process, the imagination will be trained to avoid producing any false mental pictures.*

*This fixation does not occur through the imagination's power of "harkavah" (combining images); rather, it is accomplished through using the power of "raishis" (returning to beginning) in the soul, which is a higher point in the soul than "harkavah" (The terms "maaseh beraishis", "raishis", "temimus", and "peshitus" are all synonymous terms). Now we will explain an additional way to fix the heart's imagination: through the very "harkavah" (combining) aspect that fuels the heart's imagination.*

### **Two Kinds of "Harkavah": Accurate Visualization (Tziyur) and Fantasy (Medameh)**

First, we will introduce this chapter with the following. The ability of "harkavah" – combining together images in the mind – contains two uses. When *harkavah* is combining together accurate

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<sup>97</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-007-three-solutions-evil-imagination>



images in the mind, it is called “*tziyur*” (visualization). When it is imagining an inaccurate version of the image, it exaggerates the reality of the image and distorts it – “*medameh*”.

It seems as if *tziyur* and *medameh* are in essence of the same kind of imagination; they are both abilities in the mind to mentally picture something. However, there is a fundamental difference between them. Through *tziyur*, a person combines together existing images in the mind, to form an accurate picture of something in reality. Through *medameh*, a person combines together images in the mind in a way that leads to a fantasy; an inaccurate version of reality.

So if one is interested in repairing his damaged ability of *harkavah* which empowers the false imagination, he needs to develop the ability of *tziyur*, of accurate mental visualization, in whatever he is involved with. In other words, there are some images our mind we can think of which are an accurate portrayal of the image, and if we can keep our imagination focused on such images, it trains the imagination to become more accurate and to stick to the bounds of reality. We are mainly referring to images of holiness [such as imagining the *Kosel*, or *Me'aras HaMachpeilah* and other holy places].

Getting used to this trains our soul to imagine a picture the way it really is, and the effect of this will be that even when we the object we are imagining is not actually in front of us and we cannot palpably see it, our ability of *harkavah* will be able to conjure the image in our minds in a real way, using the power of *tziyur* (accurate mental visualization) that is contained in our *seichell*/intellect.

We should mention at this point that this particular method is describing the actual goal of where we want to get to, in rectifying our imagination. We need to keep in mind this end goal even at the start of the rectification process – “*sof maaseh, b'machshavah techilah*”, “the end of the actions, is first in the thoughts.” Although we cannot fully reach the goal yet, as with any other *avodah* we have, we still need to attempt to actualize it to some level, long before we are there.

Practically speaking: one needs to get used to accurately imagining things that exist, once or twice a day, until it becomes second nature to him.

### ***The Relationship Between Imagination/Visualization and Thought/Intellect***

Now we will say a very deep point. As mentioned, *medameh* is when we imagine the non-existent. This is the heart's imagination, which earlier we explained as an offshoot of the mind's imagination. When the mind is working properly as it should and it is strong, a person will not imagine the non-existent. This is because the *seichel*, the intellect, (in the brain), is a total antithesis to the entire concept of imagination/*medameh*.

If the mind is weakened – when it is not being put to enough use – it loses its power and it will be subject to whatever information is coming in from the heart, which it is connected to. That is what causes the mind to imagine things which do not exist. (This is the depth of the statement of the

Sages, “A person does not sin unless a spirit of folly enters him.”<sup>98</sup> The “spirit of folly” essentially refers to the imagination, the power of the *yetzer hora*.)

The more a person is making use of his actual power of thought (*machshavah*), his mind is more active, and the imagination’s ability to combine together information (*harkavah*) will be weakened accordingly. When imagination is in control over the mind, though – it breaks boundaries as it wishes to. This happens when there is a lack of use of real thought (*machshavah*) in the mind.

We can see this concept expressed in the difference between men and women. Women generally have a stronger and more vivid kind of imagination than men, and this is linked with the statement of the Sages that “woman have light *daas* (less intellect)”.<sup>99</sup> Men usually have a stronger intellect, thus their imagination is usually weaker.

### ***Simple Thought and Complicated Thought***

To explain this in more subtle terms, the mind contains two thinking abilities: simple thought<sup>100</sup>, and complicated thought<sup>101</sup>.

An example of “simple thought” would be a thought about the fact that there is a Creator. Any other thoughts after that involve a combination of various thoughts, which means they aren’t “simple”. There are levels of how complicated a thought can get, but any other thought than the thought that there is a Creator is always going to be a complicated thought, consisting of various combined thoughts. The only simple thought that exists is the thought that there is a Creator.

The first principle of our faith is, “I believe, with perfect faith, that there is a Creator.” The second principle is, “I believe, with perfect faith, that He is the One who brought everything into existence.” The second principle is already complicating the first thought, even though it is relatively simple, because it is going further into what the first thought encompasses. This is definitely the case when a person is bringing proof that the Creator is the sole creator of everything, such as what the *Chovos HaLevovos* discusses in the section of “*Shaar HaYichud*”. It is moving away from the first, simple thought that the Creator exists and it is further complicating the matter.

(Understandably, this too is an important aspect of one’s *avodah* of *emunah*, each to his own level. But if we want to know what a simple thought is, it will always remain true that the only simple thought which exists is the fact that there is a Creator, without getting into how this is defined. From that simple thought onward, any other thought is a complicated kind of thought.)

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98 *Sotah 2a*

99 *Shabbos 33b*

100 *machshavah peshutah*

101 *machshavah murkeves*

### *Awareness of Your Inner State Is Necessary In Order To Improve Character*

There are levels to how complicated a thought can be. A clear example of such complicated thought is the kind of thought that is necessary in order to learn Torah in-depth. The more a person delves into the depth of a *sugya* of *Gemara*, uprooting his previous thoughts and grinding each matter down, he is increasing the “*harkavah*” (combined thoughts) of his thought process. The more one strengthens this *harkavah*, the more his imagination will weaken.

However, sometimes we can find a person who has strong mental abilities [he has a ‘good head’], yet he is still subject to fantasies. At first glance, it comes across to us as a deep contradiction within the person. On the outside, he appears to be a person learning Torah in-depth, using his mind to its full extent. As soon as he sticks his head out of the window of the *Beis Midrash*, though, he may find his imagination taking him in all four directions. How are we to understand this deep contradiction?

The Kotzker Rebbe said that although it is normally not a good thing to do *mitzvos* habitually, the only exception to this rule is the *mitzvah* of learning Torah, where it is actually commendable if a person is habitually learning Torah. This is based on the blessing we say each morning of “*That we should become accustomed to the words of Your Torah*” (“*Shetargileinu B’Torasecha*”). However, besides for training oneself to get used to learning Torah, one needs to also develop awareness towards his inner state, of the inner workings of his soul that are taking place within him at the moment. If a person learns Torah yet he is unaware of his inner state at the moment, the good within him will remain concealed and out of reach, and instead the outer parts of his soul which haven’t been refined yet will take over.

There are people who sit and learn Torah for many years, and they spend a lot of time and energy every day on their learning, and they are even exerting themselves in Torah study as much as they can - yet they lack awareness towards their inner state. The inner layers of the soul are refined, but they are left concealed and out of reach when we are not conscious of them, and instead, the outer, unrefined parts of the soul will be at the forefront. For this reason, even while a person is learning Torah with exertion, it is still possible that he fantasizes.

(This is not the case, however, with anyone who is truly learning Torah in purity, holiness, and with self-sacrifice, for that would enable him to reach the root of the soul, whereupon his entire being undergoes a change. Here we are speaking about a lower level of Torah learning, where a person will still be vulnerable to fantasies).

When one is aware of the *harkavah* process taking place in his mind, it will be allowed to develop and it will be at the forefront. This will in turn weaken his imagination from dominating.

We do not mean, of course, that a person should be consciously thinking of this as he is in the midst of his learning; that would only hamper the quality of his learning and it wouldn’t enable him to stay focused on what he’s trying to think about. Rather, what we mean is that as a general course of action, a person should set aside some time of his learning where he becomes aware of his thought process.

### *Living Internally Vs. Living Superficially*

Although the following is not currently the topic, it is noteworthy to mention here at this point. We have just described here a concept that is very all-compassing in terms of the soul.

There are many actions we perform throughout the day, from morning until night. We can begin paying attention to these simple actions and just simply becoming aware that we do them. These include the actions of eating, drinking, talking, and even our breathing. We may be aware of these acts only superficially, but let us try to deepen our awareness towards these actions, by thinking of the inner forces that are at work behind them.

This awareness is the difference between those who are living superficially with those who are living internally. It is the difference between the sky and the earth! This difference, however, cannot always be seen by the eye. A person who lives his life superficially is doing the same actions as someone who is living internally (and many times even the external actions are different in the internal kind of person, if we look more closely), and an observer won't be able to see the difference.

A person who lives internally is aware of the inner workings behind the actions he is performing, whereas a person who lives externally and superficially isn't aware of where his actions stem from. Understandably, if one has never tasted yet of an internal kind of life, he will never know how vast the difference is between one who lives superficially with one who lives internally. Anyone who has tasted even a little bit of an inner, spiritual life is aware that all aspects of our *avodah* require both the external layer of our actions as well as an awareness to the inner workings in the soul that are behind them. This awareness clearly affects all aspects of a person's life.

To help us better relate to this, let us use a parable that illustrates the difference. Reuven is in Australia and he is talking on the phone, telling his friend Shimon that the weather there is hot. Shimon is hearing this information, and he believes Reuven that the weather in Australia is hot. They both know that it is hot in Australia, but there is a huge difference between how they know it. Reuven is palpably aware of this knowledge, because he is there. Shimon always knows that it is hot in Australia, but he does not palpably feel it like Reuven does.

Every Jew knows that the Creator exists. So what is the difference between a Jew who lives internally with a Jew who lives superficially, when they both believe in the Creator and they are both doing all the *mitzvos*? It is because the Jew who lives internally is more aware of the Creator's existence; it is more palpable to him.

Just as living internally affects how much one believes in the Creator's existence, so does it affect self-awareness towards the soul's abilities. A person who performs all of his actions externally and without inner awareness might be doing a lot of *mitzvos*, but it will barely affect his soul. Usually if a person is weak in his emunah and he doesn't feel the Creator that much in his life, even if he is a very intelligent and successful person in the business world, who is capable of executing much action, he will still lack self-awareness because he performs the *mitzvos* only superficially, unaware of his inner workings.

In fact, there are some people who have even learned about the soul's abilities and they even possess understanding of these matters, yet they contain a deep inner contradiction within themselves: even as they learn about the soul, they are not palpably feeling what they are learning about.

How can this be? If they are learning about the soul, why doesn't this automatically translate into greater self-awareness towards their inner workings? It is because they are learning the information intellectually, 'surgically' taking apart the information well, but without personally relating to it. It is therefore very possible that even when they work with themselves, they are still not yet aware of their soul abilities, and the soul abilities remain out of their conscious radar.

This problem can also exist in the physical. A person may be performing a certain action yet he is completely unaware of what he is doing. For example, a person might do something in middle of his sleep, which he is clearly not aware of. The same can be said of most of the world today, when it comes to self-awareness. Although there is more awareness during the daytime when one is awake than when one is sleeping, the abilities of the soul remain 'asleep' for the most part, because a person is unaware that they are there. "One who sits idle, is considered to be asleep."<sup>102</sup> When the soul's abilities are left out of a person's awareness, it is as if they are sleep.

Even if a person learns Torah and does all the mitzvos, if he lacks awareness towards his soul's abilities that are at work, he will be generally unaffected by all of his Torah and mitzvos (though he certainly gains some degree of holiness). "*Man is born a wild mule*",<sup>103</sup> and a person who never develops self-awareness towards his inner workings will remain that way until he dies; and his character might even worsen, with varying degrees of how low a person can sink, when he never becomes attuned to his soul. And since these very same people are for the most part dominated by imagination, they find themselves floundering, especially when it comes to matters of guarding their *kedushah* (personal holiness).

Recognizing the soul's abilities, and being consciously aware of them as they are taking place, is needed in all areas of life. Here are some common examples.

If a father gets angry at his child, and we ask him why he got angry, he will probably respond that he did this for the purpose of educating and disciplining the child, when it is very possible that he did so out of anger. Is the father at least *aware* that there was some motivation of anger mixed into his act of disciplining the child?

When a person is eating at the Shabbos table and he is not having intentions of the sake of honoring the Shabbos, is he at least *aware* that he is motivated by a desire to indulge?

A person whose life is based on inner *avodah* is naturally drawn towards this awareness of inner workings behind his actions. This self-aware spans all areas – from the most physical and superficial actions, to the more spiritual actions. When one is eating and sleeping; he can ask himself why he is

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<sup>102</sup> *Magen Avraham* 583:6

<sup>103</sup> *Iyov* 11:12

eating right now and why he is going to sleep right now. Surely when praying and when learning Torah, he clarifies to himself what his general motivation is.

(Understandably, the areas of prayer and Torah learning are vast, covering so many different motivations that one can have, and it is not so simple to know all of the motivations one has in them. But a person can still be aware of what *generally* motivates him in these areas, by becoming aware of the root motivation he has *while* he is actually praying and learning Torah).

### ***Refining The Power of “Harkavah”***

When one learns *Gemara* in-depth, learning the words of the *Rishonim*<sup>104</sup> and the *Acharonim*<sup>105</sup>, and he is regularly involved in this in-depth kind of study, along with an awareness towards the inner workings of his soul that are motivating him, he accesses the power of *harkavah* – combining together information and taking it apart. The more he exerts himself in this kind of study, the more he refines his ability of *harkavah*.

He will find that he doesn't like to veer from reality and engage in imagination; each person will find this to be true on his own level. What will happen as soon as his thoughts begin to wander and he is imagining something that is not aligned with reality? He will naturally dismiss the image in his mind, because his mind can no longer tolerate anything that diverges from reality.

The results will be best seen in the quality of one's dreams. When a person has not yet developed the ability of *harkavah*, his dreams contain images that are not true to reality. For example, he might imagine a pair of *tefillin* that is round, which are invalid for use. He might imagine himself wondering in the dream if such *tefillin* are kosher or not.

But if one has sufficiently exerted himself in in-depth Torah study and with awareness to his soul, he will not even dream of himself wearing round *tefillin*, because his own imagination has become more aligned with reality, so there is no room in his mind to think of such a thing. His in-depth Torah learning, together with awareness of his inner workings, will not allow him to imagine himself round *tefillin* - his mind cannot tolerate such a thing. And he surely will not be able to stomach any image that is complete fantasy. His soul abilities have been refined to the point that they cannot be at peace with seeing an image that is non-existent in reality.

This is the deep purpose of developing the ability of “*harkavah*” that prevents the imagination from producing fantasies: it is for a person to internalize that it is insensible to combine together facts or images when their sum total does not exist in reality.

A person can work to develop the power of *harkavah* by gaining a general awareness of the inner workings that are behind his simple physical actions, but even more importantly, at what the inner

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<sup>104</sup> Early commentators, spanning the 10th-15th centuries

<sup>105</sup> Later commentators, spanning the 15th-19th centuries

workings of his Torah learning are. The area of Torah learning is the main area where we can develop the power of *harkavah*, to refine the mind.

In that way, the power of *harkavah* will remain in its true place, which is the mind, and it will spread from there into the heart (this is in line with the concept of “*And you shall know today, and you shall let the matter settle upon your heart*”), where the *middos*<sup>106</sup> contained in our heart will gain their proper measurements and limitations. Our *middos* will then be kept in their ideal boundaries, and they will not be controlled by the imagination which abuses the boundaries of the *middos*.

### ***How “Harkavah” Improves Our Middos As Well***

There is a well-known statement of our Sages, “The mind can control the heart”<sup>107</sup>, which is a primary aspect of our *avodah* on this world. Simply speaking, we need to gain control over our emotions; for example, if a person has an extraneous desire, which is rooted in the heart, he should use his brain to control his emotions and overcome the desire, and if he is about to get angry, he can prevent himself from anger by using his mind to gain control over his emotion of anger; or at least overcome it for the most part.

But there is a more subtle understanding to this concept, and it is along the lines of our discussion. The mind, which is capable of rational intellect that gives proper definition to each thing, can place limitations on the *middos* of the heart. It fights the imagination’s ability of breaking those limitations - and this is the depth of how “the mind can control the heart.”

The mind is the seat of wisdom, which essentially gives proper definition and limitations to each concept we come across. Concerning the mind, it is written, “*Say to wisdom, you are my sister*”, and the Sages expound<sup>108</sup> on this verse that “If it is as clear to you just as your sister is forbidden to you, say [to it]; if not, do not say [to it].” The clearer a person has developed his intellectual and mental abilities [via Torah learning, as explained in the previous chapters], the more the mind will be able to control the heart’s emotions and to keep them within their functional bounds, preventing the imagination from abusing those boundaries and from introducing the non-existent.

Now that the Sages revealed to us that we can get our mind to control our heart, it follows that according to the level that we have refined our mind’s ability to combine together thoughts when we study Torah in-depth – the power of that we have referred to as *harkavah* – to that degree, the mind will be able to control the heart.

That being the case, if a person has greatly developed his mental process of *harkavah* through Torah learning, but for some reason his mind isn’t in that much control over his emotions, it is a sign that he isn’t connected enough to his Torah learning. It means that as he is learning Torah, he is not aware enough of the inner workings of what take place as he learns Torah. Since that is the case,

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<sup>106</sup> *character traits and emotions*

<sup>107</sup> *Zohar*

<sup>108</sup> *Shabbos 145b*

the abilities of his soul haven't been brought yet under his control, and that could be why he finds himself imagining of various fantasies even as he learns Torah.

### ***In Summary***

To summarize, the main task in rectifying the imagination involves gaining control over the *harkavah*, the combination of the thoughts, which have formed the imagination. Until now, it has been mentioned two important methods of how we fix the imagination.

The first method we explained is to return our ability of *harkavah* (the combination of our thoughts) to its beginning source (*raishis*), to its utter simplicity (*peshitus*) and original, wholesome purity (*temimus*). On a deeper level, this method can eventually lead us back towards absolute *emunah* in Hashem. A second method that we explained is, though using *harkavah* itself, which crystallizes the imagination to the point that the imagination will be pure to begin with.

There are, understandably, additional ways to rectifying the imagination and cleanse it. With the will of Hashem, we will continue to explain these additional methods. But if we want to define what the main part of our *avodah* is in rectifying the imagination, it involves these two methods explained until now, where we attack the imagination from within itself.

### ***A Third Method - Letting The Imagination Destroy Itself***

Now we will present another form of *avodah* to rectify the imagination. This method will be of a vastly different nature than any of the methods explained until now.

First, before we mention it, let us emphasize that the following way of *avodah* which we will explain has only been made known in recent generations, and most of our leaders did not use this method of *avodah*, due to the dangers inherent in the method, as we will soon see.

We explained that the imagination is stemming from a wish to break boundaries. We mentioned some examples of how we can see this: a person will imagine a person with three feet or with seven fingers [This kind of fantasy is an expression of a subconscious wish to alter reality and invent new realities]. Instead of challenging these ludicrous fantasies - as we have been explaining how to do until now - there is an opposite approach we can use to deal with these fantasies: we can simply let the imagination roam free, letting it expand endlessly as it wishes to, even helping it get there, until it finally explodes!

For example, if a person has imagined a person with seven fingers, he can keep adding on more fingers into the picture, until the fantasy looks totally ridiculous. The result of this will be that a certain point, the imagination will not be able to expand any further, because it has come to the limits of how much it can fantasize. Even the imagination itself will 'realize' that it is limited in how



much it can imagine. In this way, the imagination will cease on its own, and the person has thereby erased the evil imagination from within him.

Here is a clear example that illustrates this idea. There are some parents who take their children to the store and say to them, “Take whatever you want from the whole store! Anything you like, take, as much as you want!!” The point they are trying to show the child is to show him how unlimited indulgence is senseless and destructive. The child hopefully gets the message that it is harmful to have no restraint on his desires; when the child sees that there are no restrictions, this may get him to see the destructiveness of it. (Understandably, there are many views about this kind of method in educating our children, and I am not advising that everyone do this. We are just using this as an example that illustrates the concept of how you can let an unlimited desire ‘destroy’ itself by setting it free).

So there is a way to rectify evil imagination by allowing the imagination to expand endlessly with no restraint, until a person realizes that it is limited at some point and it cannot fantasize any further (relatively speaking). When hitting the point, a person can see for himself how ludicrous the imagination is, and that is what gets the evil imagination to ‘destroy’ itself.

As an example, let’s say we have a person imagining that he is traveling outside Israel, imagining himself in Switzerland. He can try letting the imagination roam free; he is now in Switzerland in his imagination, and once he is there, what does he do? Perhaps he wishes to go to all kinds of places there? He takes a “tour” though Switzerland - in his imagination, that is – and then “tours” the rest of the world as well, using his imagination.

At a certain point, he will realize: “Okay, that was nice, but where should I travel to next? Outer space...?” [Hopefully, he will realize the senseless of the fantasy, now that he has seen how far it takes him and that it was just a trick all along]. To emphasize, this practice should only be used by a serious-minded individual who wishes to do this for the purpose of self-improvement. If one is not like this, it is detrimental to practice it, for he will indeed think in his fantasies that he can travel to Switzerland, Austria, France, and any country he wishes to go to; and who knows where his fantasies will take him to?

This is a totally different way of tackling the imagination than any of the methods presented until now. In the earlier methods, a person is using the ability of *harkavah* to give proper definition to realities, and in that way, the fantasies weaken. The approach there is to avoid even the slightest divergence from all limitations and boundaries of reality, and the purpose is to internalize this perspective into the heart, which in turn rectifies the heart’s imagination. That was part of a more general and all-compassing *avodah*, for it is mainly about rectifying the heart, and it is not specifically trying to get rid of the heart’s evil fantasies.

But in the approach we are currently discussing, we are aiming for something more specific: to rid ourselves of the evil imagination. Since the evil imagination is built on a wish to break boundaries, we can know the key to stop it: instead of chopping down the imagination at its root, we can “give it its own space”, allowing it to expand as it wishes to – until the evil imagination eventually ‘destroys’ itself.

### ***Evil Destroys Itself***

The classic example we can use to illustrate this concept is: Amalek. The nation of Amalek currently exists, but in the end, Amalek will go lost. Amalek will cease in the future, by destroying itself. Currently we have a *mitzvah* to erase Amalek, but in the future times, Amalek will destroy itself, and from within itself.

How will this self-destruction take place? When something keeps expanding endlessly and with no restraint, at some point, it is destroyed, for the entire evil wish to break all boundaries thrives on expansion, and once it truly “realizes” that it cannot expand any further, this wish ceases; and that is how all evil in Creation [which wishes to have no boundaries on itself, because it does not want an Authority to rule over it] will end up destroying itself.

Taking this further, all evil, such as heresy (denial of G-d) and other evils, is really pre-programmed to its own eventual destruction. [On a deep note], it appears that heresy and other forms of evil seem to have their own place in Creation, as if they are part of reality, but the truth is that they cannot be part of reality – they are eventually destroyed. When a person sees a person who denies Hashem, he may think that this person has some validity in Creation, but in reality, this itself is heresy – the mere fact that he has attributed any validity to heresy *is* a form of heresy!

### ***Practically Applying This Solution of Letting The Imagination Self-Explode***

To illustrate further, we find this idea used on practical level, to solve problems with overeating. When a person feels a desire to eat more than he knows is necessary for him to eat, one of the ways of how he can overcome this urge is to keep filling up his plate with food, more and more, until it is overstuffed with food; and then force himself to keep eating and eating it, with no restraint. Now that he has seen for himself what happens when all boundaries are allowed to be broken and there is no restraint on a desire, his urges for food will be able to cease, for he has allowed its self-destruction.

The same idea can be applied to stopping fantasies. When a person lets the evil imagination roam free, letting it expand endlessly, at a certain point the imagination will reach a point where it will not be able to expand any further. Then it will destroy itself, because it has nothing to thrive on anymore.

### ***The Danger of Using This Approach***

We must emphasize that this approach requires caution, for it contains a danger. When a person lets the imagination roam free as much as it wants to, he might create a new problem for himself. If until now he had only been using his imagination on a minimal level, now he has opened up his imagination much further, allowing greater possibility for an unrestrained, evil imagination. This is besides for the dangers we already mentioned before.

Therefore, if one is interested in using this method, he must make sure to do the following. When a person realizes that he has reached the limit of his imagination and he cannot fantasize any further, he should intentionally go past that limit in his imagination. In this way, he shows himself that imagination ignores limitations, and that is what explodes the imagination. Only after coming to that point will the imagination self-destruct.

Compare this to a dog who runs away from its owner. It can only run away to a place where it knows how to get back to the owner; it will not go further than that point on its own. But if a man comes and takes the dog away from there to a place that is more distant from the owner, the dog loses its sense of boundaries and now it will not know how to find the way back to its owner.

The imagination works in the same way. It is an expression of a wish to break boundaries, but at the same time, it does not really want to reach the point where it will shatter all limitations, because if it does, it will no longer be in its 'familiar territory' where it is comfortable to roam around. So if we can get the imagination to 'realize' that it has been distanced from its 'familiar territory', it 'loses' its wish to break boundaries, because it is afraid of 'destroying' itself [understandably, all of this is taking place on a deep subconscious level], which causes it to cease functioning.

To illustrate further this idea, many times a person wanted something badly, and after he attains the desire, he is still frustrated, wishing that he had more. "*All of this is not worth anything to me.*" A week or two goes by, he forgets about this conclusion he came to, and the desire is back. He eventually gets what he wants, and then once again he is frustrated, he concludes that he is unhappy, and the cycle keeps repeating itself. But let's say he would have told himself the first time around that it's not worth it to try pursuing the desire he wants, and he is aware that it will feel somewhat painful to overcome the desire and let go of it. If he does this, the next time that the desire comes to again, he will have a much easier time at saying no to it.

Of course, this change does not happen so rapidly. It takes time. The point is to train the soul into realizing that every time we allow it to break boundaries, this will only be self-destructive and lead to deeper unhappiness. In this way, one prevents the wish to break boundaries from spreading itself in the first place, which in turn keeps him in control of the imagination from controlling him.

(On a deep note, there is also a holy side to the wish to break boundaries, where a person shatters his own human limitations by returning his own existence to the Endlessness of the Creator, where his own existence ceases, within himself).

### ***In Conclusion***

Let us repeat and emphasize that the above approach contains several dangers. For this reason, we do not find that our Sages made use of it in their *avodas Hashem*.

In addition, not everyone can make use of this method of letting the imagination destroy itself, because it should only be used by someone who knows how to use it sensibly, who does not get carried

away by his imagination. If a person meets that condition, only then should he make use of the approach here.

That is why the previous methods need to precede this one, in order for it to work properly. Without using the previous two methods, a person who tries to use the third method will consider it to be the main part of the process, when in reality it is only a secondary aspect and it should not be treated as the main solution.

Even more so, it will be dangerous to use this method, when one hasn't yet worked properly with the previous two methods. The third method mentioned in this chapter [letting imagination destroy itself] should thus never be considered to be the main aspect of the *avodah* in rectifying the imagination.

## 1.8 | *Mental Jumpiness – and the Solutions*<sup>109</sup>

*(Summary: Let us first summarize the previous chapters, which explained the ways of how we rectify the heart's imagination.*

*The first method we presented is through integrating together the abilities of “maaseh beraishis” and “maaseh merkavah.” Imagination thrives on combining together various images in the mind; this is the power of “markiv”, or “maaseh merkavah”. The initial, unchanged image before it has undergone any changes in the mind is known as “maaseh beraishis”; when one returns the image to the way it looked originally, he is turning the “maaseh merkavah” into “maaseh beraishis”, and this fixes what the imagination has done to the image in the mind.*

*It was also explained that on a general note, one who is drawn towards fantasy needs to get used to thinking about the beginning point of each thing. One should get used to the visualizing the initial image of something before the imagination exaggerated the image. Getting used to this will weaken the tendency to fantasize.*

*A second method of fixing the heart's imagination is based on using the soul's power of “harkavah” (combining images). Since each fantasy is comprised of a combination of several images in the mind, we can reconstruct the image in our mind. We explained several ways of how to this power.*

*A third method of fixing the heart's imagination is an entirely different approach than until now. Instead of contracting the imagination as in the previous methods, one can deliberately increase the fantasy and let it expand endlessly, until it finally ‘destroys’ itself. It is for one to deliberately enter the imagination and to keep adding mental images to the fantasy to the point that the fantasy looks absolutely unreal. In this way, a person will see for himself that imagination is a distortion of reality; this is how a person essentially lets the imagination “destroy” itself.*

*This third approach is based on the fact that even as a person is imagining something, he does not actually want to be disconnected from reality, and it is just that he has become too caught up and interested in his imagination without realizing. Subconsciously, a person does not really want to become disconnected from reality. Therefore, by allowing the imagination to run wild in the mind and to allow for a total disconnection from reality, the person will immediately wish to leave behind imagination and return to reality, because he has seen how absurd the imagination can be and how much it disconnects him from reality.*

*According to this method, when a person realizes that he is in the midst of fantasizing, he should let his imagination continue to come up with bizarre distortions of reality, until it finally ceases and ‘destroys’ itself. However, we explained that there is a certain danger contained in this method, because it may pull the person in too much and increase his tendencies towards fantasy. Therefore, this particular method is not for everyone to practice.)*

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<sup>109</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-008-using-power-orderliness-stop-imagination>

### ***Seder/Order and Dilug/Skipping***

After we have learned about the methods of rectifying the heart's imagination, now we will learn about another method of fixing the imagination, which is based on a very fundamental power of the soul.

There exist two opposite abilities in Creation – the ability of “*seder*” (order) and the ability of “*dilug*” (skipping). We have in ourselves an ability to give order to things, to go in a step-by-step manner; Creation was built upon a certain *seder* and it thrives on *seder*. We also have in ourselves the exact opposite ability than this: the ability to skip over things and not follow a step-by-step manner. This is called *dilug*.

(On a deep note, even *dilug* contains an aspect of *seder*; for example, the Maharal explains that miracles are also part of nature. However, this is not the normal kind of *seder*, for miracles are of a different kind of nature than the normal rules we recognize, with which how Hashem runs the world).

Our mind's normal thought process (*machshavah*) thinks in an orderly fashion; it reflects orderliness/*seder*. The mind thinks in an orderly, step-by-step manner. This is true when it comes to thinking about the mundane as well as when it comes to thinking of a Torah thought; the thoughts are orderly in their nature. A clear example of this is a mathematical equation, where each thought is based on a thought before it; it is all following a certain order.

In contrast, our imagination/*medameh* works through *dilug*, skipping. We can see this clearly from dreams. In a dream, a person can ‘skip’ from one dream immediately to a completely different dream. The imagination as well can do this. A person might be thinking of a particular imaginative thought, then then he immediately jumps to another imaginative thought, completely unrelated to the previous thought. It can all take place very quickly.

### ***Developing The Power of Orderliness (Seder)***

The imagination can “skip” from one place to another place, or from one time to another time. A person might imagine himself one moment in Eretz Yisrael, and another moment he imagines himself somewhere else. A person might imagine that is eating *matzah* on Pesach right now, and a moment later he may be imagining himself sitting in the *sukkah* and shaking the four species on Sukkos. Understandably, these thoughts are nothing but fantasy, because it is not possible to skip from place to place or to skip from one time to another time.

Both of these powers of the soul, order/*seder* and skipping/*dilug*, are each necessary, and they each have their proper use. The only issue is how we use them and how to keep them in balance.

Since imagination thrives on skipping/*dilug*, if a person identifies in himself a dominant kind of imagination, it is a sign that the amount of *dilug* in his soul is greatly overpowering his power of *seder*. Therefore, in order to rectify the imagination, in addition to the methods given in the previous

chapters, there is an additional piece of advice to work with: to develop the power of *seder*. One needs train himself to do things that are orderly.

We can work on developing *seder* (orderliness) when it comes to the areas of action, speech, and thought [and in physical vision], as we will now explain.

### ***Orderly Actions***

Let's first explain how we can develop the power of *seder* when it comes to the realm of our actions.

A person can train himself to neatness and more physical orderliness. For example, he can try forcing himself to make the bed in the morning, and to make sure that his bedroom looks neat. (There are varying degrees of neatness, understandably). When leaving the *beis midrash*, he should make sure that the table he learned on looks neat enough for one to sit down there. (This is besides for the act of kindness and concern for others). In other areas as well, a person should try to make sure that he is being neat.

Of course, this should be done sensibly, and with appropriate measures. There is no need to act extreme when it comes to these things and to start becoming obsessive with neatness.

If a person keeps up these exercises for a few months, he will be able to recognize a change with regards to his imagination, and he will be able to see that it doesn't dominate him as much as it used to; it will have become greatly weakened.

We are not describing here a *segulah* (spiritual charm) or anything miraculous. It is a simple use of a power in the soul, to become more orderly, which weakens the imagination. It works very simply: the imagination thrives on skipping/*dilug*, so the more a person gets used to doing things in a neat and orderly fashion, the more he counters the nature of *dilug* that fuels imagination.

### ***Orderly Speech***

Another area where we can prevent the dominance of skipping/*dilug* that empowers the imagination is, through applying more orderliness/*seder* to how we talk.

When some people read, they skip over some words, as opposed to seeing each word one after the other. What is the root of this tendency? What causes people to skip over words when they are reading?

Although there can be different reasons for this problem, here we will discuss a particular reason that is of a more external nature. It is because of this concept of *dilug* that we have been describing so far. When *dilug* dominates the amount of *seder* in one's soul, the result is that a person will end up skipping letters or words when he reads, and sometimes he is not even aware of it.

(Sometimes people skip words when they read because they think very quickly. Their thought process is a lot quicker than their verbal process, so they have already read it in their thoughts, and that is why they skip the next word. However, this is a different matter which we are not discussing here).

There are varying levels of this problem of skipping letters or words in sentences, and it will depend on how much *dilug* is dominating over *seder*. When a person has a strong tendency to imagine, he tends to leave out words or letters in sentences he speaks, jumping around from one sentence to another, or just simply skipping letters in his sentences. It sounds like he has some communication problem, but there is a more inner reason for this. It's really because his soul is 'out of order', due to the strong amount of 'skipping' that dominates his mind.

(As a side point, many times when children have *keriah* (reading) problems, often, the problem is because of "*dilug*" that we have been describing. If that is the case, the problem needs to be treated accordingly [as opposed to putting him on medication]. Of course, sometimes it is for a different reason. It can be because the child thinks very quickly, or it can come from a lack of concentration, and other reasons. Each case needs to be dealt with accordingly.)

If one recognizes this issue with himself and he is interested in getting rid of the problem, he should try getting used to reading slowly. This will in turn weaken the *dilug* and, with it, it will weaken the imagination.

This advice can also help a *baal korei* can improve his *leining* of *Kerias HaTorah*, as well as when one is reviewing the *parsha* of the week to fulfill his own obligation. The main goal we are trying to accomplish here is to weaken the imagination.

### ***Orderly Thoughts***

After a person has worked on the previous steps – applying more orderliness/*seder* in the areas of action and speech – he can now progress to a third step: orderly thought.

It is common for our thoughts to quickly move from one topic to another topic. This is true about every person to some extent, and it varies accordingly. We are not referring to *imaginative* thoughts, but to our power of *thought* itself, which also moves very quickly from one thought to another thought.

It takes more work to apply orderliness to our thoughts and to train ourselves to think in a more organized, step-by-step manner. But if someone is successful with it, he will reap much benefit.

If one is trying to think in a more orderly manner and he is having a hard time, there is a practical piece of advice for working on this: he should think of the letters of the *Aleph Beis*, in order: *Aleph, Beis, Gimmel, Daled*, etc.

The next step is to try reviewing orally what you just learned in the *Gemara*. (Some people can easily remember what they learned because they have a strong imagination. Others do not have such



a strong imagination, so in order for them to remember and review what they learned, they need to give order to their thoughts, as we are saying here). For example, if one has finished learning a section of the *Gemara* from beginning until end, he should try remembering the outline of the discussion in the *Gemara* from the beginning through the end, step after step.

Deepening this method, a person who has finished learning the *Gemara* in-depth can review the direction of the discussion, step after step, beginning from the *Gemara*, then the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* he has learned, and analyze the differences between their words, so that he has clear about what he has learned.

### ***Orderly Vision***

We have explained three possibilities in which we can slow down skipping/*dilug*, though developing the power of orderliness/*sefer*: in the areas of action, speech, and thought. Now we will speak of a more superficial method which can lessen *dilug*: through applying *sefer* to our visual faculty.

Usually, when a person looks at things, his eyes simply dart around in all directions, and there is no order to what he looks at. (The reason why this is so is not for our current discussion). The Sages say that “the eye sees, and the heart desires”,<sup>110</sup> meaning that our physical vision of something can arouse the *yetzer hora*, the imagination. This is because imagination thrives on *dilug*, and *dilug* is mainly manifest in the power of vision.

Since *dilug* is mainly activated by the eyes, we can learn another method of advice that can be used to counter *dilug*, besides for the earlier three methods: We can slowly train our vision to see something in a step-by-step manner.

When most people lay eyes on something, the eyes are quickly skipping around in many directions without focusing on any one area. For example, when a person looks to the right and then he looks to the left, he usually does not take into his vision the space that is between the right and left. He just quickly turns to the opposite direction, ‘skipping’ over the entire middle space between the opposite ends.

To work on this, we can suggest that a person set aside about 2-5 minutes a day where he will practice looking at things slowly, taking in the vision in steps, with a more focused kind of vision that isn’t darting. For example, try looking at one tile of the floor at a time, without taking in all of the tiles into your vision. It is better to try this with holy objects, such as by opening a *sefer* (or other holy objects) and looking at one letter at a time.

In the next step of the exercise, deepen your focus on what you are seeing. When looking at a letter, try examining the shape of the letter and keeping your focus there, without seeing the other letters next to it.

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<sup>110</sup> Rashi Bamidbar 15:39

The main area in which we can rectify the problem of *dilug* is with the eyes. The *yetzer hora*, the evil imagination, is aroused when we lay our eyes upon something. Thus the main area in which we can rectify *dilug* is, in the eyes. Besides for the methods mentioned earlier, of fixing the problem of *dilug* in the realms of actions, speech, and thought, we can rectify the root of the problem of the *dilug*, which manifests in eyes – when we train our vision to be more orderly and to see something in steps. It fixes the evil imagination at its root.

(As an aside, these exercises of focused vision can also help children who have problems with concentration. Many times a lack of focus can be because there is too much *dilug* in the soul; when the ratio of skipping/*dilug* is far more than the amount of *orderliness/seder*, in the soul. We can fix concentration problems through focused vision. For example, we can take a certain object and ask the child to keep concentrating on it, and we can keep furthering his power of concentration as we get him used to this. Slowly as the child gets used to this exercise, we will be able that his ability to think has been sharpened and is getting stronger, and much of the problems with concentration that he had will be gone. This advice is tried and proven, and the positive results of it can be clearly seen.)

### ***Rectifying The Imagination - Through Disconnecting From Materialism***

Now that it was explained the four general areas (action, speech, thought, and vision) where we can develop the concept of *orderliness/seder*, which counters the imagination's tendency to "skip" around between thoughts, let us now discuss an additional way to rectify the imagination – from an altogether different angle.

The root of imagination began with the sin of Adam, when he ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*. We mentioned earlier the words of the Vilna *Gaon* and the Sforino, that the *Eitz HaDaas* is also called "*medameh*", the imagination. In other words, before the sin, imagination was not a part of the soul. Only after the sin, when man received the curse of "*You are earth, and to earth you shall return*", did man enter into an imaginative state. Ever since then, imagination has become an inseparable part of one's life. This is the deep implication of the curse, "*You are earth*" – in other words, you are on the *level* of earth, where the imagination is rooted.

Although we are currently explaining how to rectify the heart's imagination, and not in the lower level imagination which makes a person resembles "earth" [in the first chapter we mentioned that is the lowest level of *medameh*], still, when imagination dominates a person, the person identifies himself with "earth", with the earth that he is cursed to return to after death. Since imagination initially dominates a person, it is difficult to separate from it.

But if a person has separated himself to some degree from the pull towards materialism, from "earth" – meaning, if he has merited to disconnect somewhat from pursuing materialism, and he has become more connected to the spiritual – this will have directly weaken the imagination. The more a person removes himself from the state of "*You are earth*", by leaving the pursuit towards materialistic interests, his imagination will be weakened accordingly.

Of course, this does not mean that his imagination will completely cease. But if a person has gotten to this point, it means that the heart's imagination will be left in its own separate compartment, and the gain of this will be that it will no longer be affected by the lower use of the imagination, which pulls a person downwards to resemble "earth". His heart's imagination will be under his control, for he has weakened the lower level of the imagination which seeks to pull him towards earth and materialism.

When the lower imagination (the downward pull towards earth and materialism) is dominant, the rest of the layers of the imagination are pulled with it, and that is how the imagination is given power over the person. But if a person has separated himself to some degree from the materialistic world, the part of the imagination which pulls him downward towards 'earth' doesn't control him is greatly narrowed and it can't control him as much. This will in turn have an effect on even the higher layers in the imagination, so he will not either be dominated by the higher levels of the imagination.

Thus, whenever a person makes any spiritual progress, he becomes more elevated above materialism, and his imagination will then have less control over him.

In contrast to the other methods we have been explaining, this particular concept is not only coming to rectify imagination. It is meant for a greater purpose: to lift us above the materialistic world. It elevates a person above the earth - above the foothold of the *medameh* that is in the materialism of earth.

This solution should be used by one who is keenly aware of his inner workings and he is interested in giving inner order to his soul. Whenever a person senses that imagination is dominating him, he should disconnect himself somewhat from this materialistic world, and in turn, the imagination will be weakened.

This practice should only be used by one who recognizes well the abilities of the soul, who will have the clarity to lift himself above materialism and who can indeed be uplifted by this.

### ***Rectifying The Imagination – By Creating Boundaries***

Now we will explain an additional way to fix the imagination, which is based on a deep concept that pertains to the imagination. First we will emphasize that it will not be applicable to all people, and in order to use it, caution is required. We are only mentioning it in order to complete the discussion of rectifying the imagination.

Earlier, we explained that the root of the imagination is a deep wish to break the boundaries of our given reality. There are certain limitations in our universe, and the imagination would like to break those limitations, to "break the fence of the world" [reminiscent of the Serpent]. We also explained at length how the imagination works to combine together various pieces of information, forming a new reality from within the information. Hashem created each thing in creation with its specific boundaries and limitations, and the imagination takes a part of one thing and parts from

another thing, combining these images together, and that is how it accomplishes its wish to break boundaries.

To be clearer about this nature of the imagination, the imagination thrives on the idea of “also” (in Hebrew, “*gam*”). It combines together pieces of information, “also” from here and “also” from there, putting them all together, until it forms its final product. The imagination takes together two things or more, takes them apart, and adds on a third part, creating a ‘novelty’ that is essentially a distortion of the pre-existing data. This is the ‘*harkavah*’ aspect of the imagination – the fact that it combines together information.

From a deeper perspective, the ‘product’ of the imagination is not simply an attempt to create something that did not previously exist. It is a combination of something that is ‘also’ this and ‘also’ that – it takes aspects from different existing realities and then combines them together. Thus, imagination is fueled by the idea of “also”.

(Interestingly, we can note that the problem of stuttering, which is called “*megamgem*” in Hebrew, is from the word *gam*/also, and there is a connection between stuttering and imagination. When a person stutters, many times it is because his imagination is dominant, for it seeks to think of one thought and then “also” quickly think of another thought, which causes a person to stutter, because he cannot clearly express his thoughts when they are like this. When a person is thinking of two words that he wants to say and he tries expressing both of them at once, he stutters. We find that stuttering can be solved by focusing clearly on what you are about to say, so that the person will concentrate on expressing one word at a time and not be busy trying to express more than one word. Along the lines of what we are saying here, it is because he has gotten rid of the “also”-mode in his thoughts.)

Now let us think about this. What is the reason that a person would wish to take together two things in his mind and combine them? Our Sages explain, based on the verse, “*On that day, Hashem will be One, and His Name will be One*”, that all of Creation and everything in it is one reality, one existence. When we merit the redemption, we will see this unified existence. In our current dimension of time, the imagination in us is actually getting its strength from this unity, where everything is combined into one reality. That is why the imagination keeps combining together information. It is because, from a very deep perspective, all of reality is really one.

Earlier we explained how imagination rooted in heresy. This is the negative side to the imagination. But in the holy side to imagination, imagination is rooted in the deeper reality, where everything in creation is unified under one existence. In this deep point, heaven and earth are not separate, but one; night and day are not separate, but one. “*And it was night, and it was morning, one day*” – everything is connected together into one point. This is the deep source of where the power of combining together facts comes from – the root of the mode of “also” that the imagination operates with.

Now that we’ve learned that the imagination thrives on the concept of “also”, we can see another method in rectifying the evil imagination. The imagination is trying to break all boundaries of creation, so to counter it, one can remind himself of boundaries. The more a person has *yirah* [fear

of Hashem, which is essentially an awareness of His presence in front of him], the more his imagination will be weakened. This is because he has built clearly defined boundaries. (We touched upon this concept when we discussed the mind's imagination).

Since imagination is based on a combination of several factors that have come together to form the fantasy, it is based on an idea of “also.” In Hebrew, “also” is “*gam*”, but it is “also” called “*oid*” (more). The way we rectify “*oid*” (more/also) is, through a rearrangement of its root letters, forming the word “*ad*” (until). In other words, the way we rectify a desire to break boundaries is, by creating boundaries for ourselves; to know clearly that we may go “until” a certain point, and not beyond that.

### ***Rectifying The Imagination – By Returning Imagination To Its Source***

There is also a deeper approach than this. Since imagination is based on a combination of different factors together, the way it is rectified is, through returning the imagination to its source.

How can one do this on practical level?

As we explained, the source for combining together information in the mind really stems from the soul's deep desire that creation be unified into one collective unit. This is known as the point of “*echad*”, oneness. The imagination is really getting its strength from this place of “*echad*”, and understandably, instead of using it for this lofty intention, it seeks to unify together information for its own purposes. It wants “also” this and “also” that, and that is how it functions. The perfected level of imagination is when it is “*adameh l'Elyon*” (“I will resemble the One Above”), the level reached by the prophets, which is an all-inclusive point. It is a point where everything is returned to one point. Therefore, if one has a deep connection in his soul to the state of “*echad*” in Creation, experiencing the imagination is really an opportunity to return the imagination to its root, which is, the “*echad*”.

If one is not in touch with the concept of *echad* – and it is not enough for one to know about it, for he must feel a deep connection to it in order for him to be in touch with it – then he has nowhere to return the imagination to. For this reason, this concept can only be worked upon by someone who is connected with *echad*.

### ***In Conclusion***

To summarize, in this chapter we have mentioned some additional advice on how to rectify the imagination. We have said that some of these methods are meant to be practiced by anyone, whereas some of the methods here are only for individuals who are in touch with the higher levels here that were mentioned. With the help of Hashem, we have concluded here the ways of how we can rectify the heart's imagination.

## 1.9 | *Imagined Desires – and the Solutions*<sup>111</sup>

### *Imagined Needs*

In the previous chapters, we spoke about two general kinds of imagination: the mind's imagination, which works with mental comparisons, and the heart's imagination, which are fantasies of the non-existent.

In this chapter, we will speak about another kind of imagination, which also stems from the heart: when a person desires something in particular that he wants, so he fantasizes over it.

There are a few examples of this kind of imagination. The classic example of it is what *Chazal* say, “He who wants a hundred, will want two hundred.”<sup>112</sup> In other words, people imagine that they need certain things; they want to expand beyond that which they currently possess. A person has a hundred dollars and he wants to have two hundred dollars, so he will imagine the two hundred dollars.

Unlike the previous kind of imagination of the heart which we discussed where a person's imaginations wishes to break the normal rules (which is a less common kind of fantasy), most fantasies of people are about expanding upon that which they currently have. We can see that the world is filled with many desires which people are chasing, and this causes people to fantasize over that which they want. For this reason, most of the world is found in this particular kind of imagination.

### *Our Middos Are Affected By Our Da'as (Thinking Patterns)*

First we will look into the roots of this topic, in order to understand what the problem is with this kind of imagination. Then we will see, with the help of Hashem, the ways of how we can go about rectifying this kind of imagination.

We mentioned earlier that the heart contains *middos* (character traits) and *medameh*/imagination, which are both related concepts. The *middos* we have are each limited abilities, whereas the *medameh* in us is always seeking to go past limits. It was explained that although the concepts of *middos* and *medameh* are diametrically opposed to each other, they are both rooted in the heart.

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111 דע אה דמיון 009 דמיון של רצונות שורשו ותיקונו

112 *Koheles Rabbah* 1:34

Although we are not dealing here in particular with explaining the *middos*, we will need to at least present a brief description of the concept of *middos*, in order to continue and understand how the *medameh* works.

Our *middos* are called “*de’os*” (beliefs) by the Rambam – which hints to us that all our *middos* really stem from our *daas*, from our thinking mind. Thus, the *middos* of our heart are not stemming from the *middos* per se; they are rather stemming from the place where *daas* [which extends from the mind] meets the heart, and that is where the “*middos*” are formed.<sup>113</sup> Thus, the *middos* of a person are really an expression of the *de’os* present in his mind.

For this reason, the inner essence of the *middos* is defined as “*daas*”, and that is why the Rambam explains about the *middos* in “*Hilchos De’os*”, from the word “*daas*”.

### ***The Effect of the Ratzon (Will) on Our Middos***

Besides for the factor of *daas*, there is an additional root to our *middos*, which is of particular relevance to the topic of rectifying the imagination: the *ratzon* (will). The *ratzon* is the fourth to highest of the soul faculties, after the faculties of *havayah* (sensing reality), *emunah* (believing in another’s existence), and *oneg* (pleasure, by connecting to another’s existence). Through the power of *ratzon*, a person pursues his various interests.

So another root of our *middos* lays in our *ratzon*. For this reason, the imagination is also rooted in our *ratzon*. As mentioned earlier, Reb Yisrael Salanter writes<sup>114</sup>, “Man is free by his imagination and bound by his intellect. His unbridled imagination draws him mischievously in the way of his heart’s desire.” Thus, the imagination is a form of *ratzon*, of desires, that are present in his heart. Every imagination is accompanied by some *ratzon*, so the root of imagination is in the *ratzon*.

### ***Biological Factors That Affect The Will***

There is also an additional factor to the imagination that is fueled by the heart’s desires, which is of a physical and biological nature: the purity of the bloodstream (*akirus hadam*/murkiness of the blood). A person’s character traits, as well as his imagination, is influenced by the purity of the bloodstream he has been born with.

To give a general description, there are two root factors that contribute to one’s *middos*. The physical body is one source that affects *middos*, and it varies according to the biological makeup of the bloodstream. The other source of our *middos* is in the soul.

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<sup>113</sup> As this class was being given, the Rov clarified to a questioner that our emotions also work together with our mind to form our *middos*/character traits; therefore, all of our *middos* are a combination of *daas*/mind and *hergesh*/emotion.

<sup>114</sup> *Iggeres HaMussar*, printed at the end of *sefer Ohr Yisrael*

The *middos* are a vast topic, and although we are not coming to explain it here, we must mention briefly that these are the two roots of our *middos*, and they are very different from each other.

(Many people are confused in this area. When they notice contradictions between their *middos*, they do not know the source of this contradiction. Some of the *middos* are stemming from the nature of the bloodstream, which is one source of *middos*, and some of the *middos* are stemming from the soul, which is another source of *middos*. Depending on where the *middos* stem from (body or soul), the treatment will differ accordingly.)

The quality of the blood affects the *middos*, so it also affects the imagination – which is our current topic.

### ***Two Factors That Contribute To The Quality of Bloodstream***

Generally speaking, there are two factors that contribute to the distribution and quality of the bloodstream: a person's parents, and the foods that a person consumes.

The Sages said, “There are three partners in man – Hashem, his father, and his mother. The father provides whiteness, from which the bones, sinews, fingernails, brain, and whiteness in the eyes, are formed. The mother contributes to redness, from which the skin, flesh, hair, and blackness in the eyes are formed.”<sup>115</sup> One's bloodstream (his “redness”) comes from his mother. And if we consider the opinion in the Sages that “a woman's blood metamorphoses (turns murky) into milk for her infant”<sup>116</sup>, not only is an infant first formed through his mother's blood, but even after birth, a person nurses the blood of his mother [via the form of milk].

On a more subtle note, since a baby is formed from the droplet of his father, the father also contributes to the character and nature of the child. The *Ramban*<sup>117</sup> writes that to the degree to the parents have sanctified themselves during their marital union, that is what will determine the purity of character of the child.<sup>118</sup>

Therefore, as a very general definition, the genetic makeup of one's bloodstream which comes from his parents, is a contributing factor to his natural character.

(However, we do find that sometimes a lofty soul can be born to parents who didn't sanctify themselves during the marital union. A classic example of this was Avraham Avinu, who was fathered by Terach, a wicked person. Avraham Avinu's soul came from a higher soul root, for he is one of pillars of the *merkavah* (Heavenly chariot). However, in spite of his lofty soul, Avraham was still born to Terach on This World, and that certainly took its toll on him. This is the deeper reason of why he had to wait 86 years before he could be circumcised; he needed to first disconnect from his father's home, and only then was he eligible to enter into the covenant with Hashem).

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<sup>115</sup> *Niddah 31a*

<sup>116</sup> *Niddah 9a*

<sup>117</sup> *Rabbi Moshe ben Nachmani (Nachmonidies)*

<sup>118</sup> *Iggeres HaKedushah of the Ramban.*



Another factor which influences the bloodstream is the kind of foods that one consumes. There are three categories of food: things that are forbidden to eat, things that are permissible, and things that are a *mitzvah* to eat. Since the quality of the bloodstream can affect the *middos*, a person's *middos* are in turn affected by the various foods that he eats.<sup>119</sup>

The *Rambam*<sup>120</sup> lists the proper diet for a person in “*Hilchos De’os*”, which are the laws of character refinement. This shows us that besides for a person’s need to take care of his health in order to serve the Creator, eating properly also aids in character refinement, for it affects the quality of the bloodstream, which in turn affects the nature of one’s *middos* and the *medameh*/imagination present in them.

### ***Three Root Reasons of Imagined Desires***

Thus, to be general, there are three roots which affect the *medameh*/imagination:

1) The quality of one’s *da’as* (beliefs); 2) The power of one’s *ratzon*/will; and 3) The quality of his *akirus hadam*, “murkiness of the blood”, which is affected by one’s parents, as well as one’s food intake.

When a person desires certain things and as a result he is fantasizing about them, it is in the category of “He who wants a hundred, will want two hundred”, and he is motivated by either of the above three factors, which we will now explain more in detail.

1) ***Da’as (Beliefs)***. The first possible motivation of fantasizing about obtaining a certain desire, as we said, can be because of one’s *daas*, his current way of thinking.

We can see that there are many people who run after vanities of this world and they have formed certain beliefs about why they think these pursuits are all worthwhile. They have all kinds of rationalizations for their behavior. This kind of pursuing desire stems from an erroneous, impaired faculty of *daas*.

Thus, a person’s will or desire for something may be stemming from his power of *daas*, a desire to know about something. The power of *daas* exists both on the side of holiness, as well on the side of evil. Evil *daas* leads a person to evil *medameh*/imagination. As with everything else, *daas* can be used for either good or evil. Here we are speaking of its negative use.

2) ***Ratzon/Will***. There is a second possibility: sometimes, a person’s desire for something simply stems from a *ratzon*/will for it, with no relation to anything in his thought process of *daas*.

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<sup>119</sup> *Chullin 81a*

<sup>120</sup> *Rabbi Moshe ben Maimoni (Maimonides)*

This particular kind of fantasy takes place all the time, every day, whenever a person wants and desires a certain thing and he knows that it's bad for him. If you ask the person "Don't you agree that this not a good thing for you to pursue?" he may nod his head in the affirmative, yet he pursues the desire anyway. This is a kind of desire pursued out of fantasy which is stemming directly from the [negative] use of the faculty of *ratzon*, which does not involve the thinking process of the *da'as*. It is when a person wants something which, logically speaking, are not within his reach.

As with everything else that can be used for either holiness or evil, an intense *ratzon* in which a person wants things that are beyond his current reach can also be channeled for holiness, such as when a person desires to attain high levels of inner work in serving the Creator, even when he knows that he does not have the natural strength to get there. A person may know very well that he cannot reach high spiritual levels, yet he may aspire for it anyway, but the downside of this is that sometimes he may even delude himself that he has already reached those higher levels.

**3) *Akirus Dam/Murkinness of the Blood (The Quality of The Bloodstream)*.** A third possible factor that may be motivating a person to fantasize about obtaining a certain desire is, due to the quality of his bloodstream.

Although the imagination is always being influenced by some kind of *ratzon*/will, it isn't always founded on the faculty of *ratzon*; sometimes, a person fantasizes over something that he isn't particularly interested in.

It is a subtle matter to discern this motivation. Sometimes a person might become aware that he is only imagining that he wants something badly, when in reality, he doesn't really want it. He might feel a strong physical pull towards something, which is causing him to desire a certain thing, even though he does not understand what the source of this desire is.

This is generally defined as "the *yetzer hora*" (evil inclination), but to be more precise, this kind of unexplainable 'pull' comes from the quality of one's bloodstream, which causes him to feel some kind of pull or attraction to something that he does not have any conscious *ratzon* for.

If a person lives a very physical kind of orientation [and he is not that sensitive to the spiritual], he will probably not be able to identify the source of this kind of fantasy. Instead of attributing it to an external pull, he will think that he really does want that which he is fantasizing about.

This is particularly due to the fact that if the fantasy is indeed being influenced by the bloodstream, he will think that this desire is coming from within himself, because after all, the bloodstream is an inseparable part of the body.

But if a person is a bit more sensitive to the spiritual, he will be able to identify if this desire is really coming from his *ratzon* or not. He might be able to sense that he doesn't really want the thing he is fantasizing about, and that it is merely an external force which is pulling him towards something that he doesn't really want.

### ***The First Step: Identifying The Source of The Fantasy***

We have explained thus far that the root of all fantasy-based desires (which are in the category of “He who wants a hundred, will want two hundred”) stem from either of these three factors: A person’s *de’os* (beliefs), *retzonos* (desires), or *akirus dam* (murkiness of the blood).

If a person cannot identify the source of a fantasy and he is interested in tackling this kind of fantasy which stems from *ratzon*/will, his only possible option that he can employ is, to temporarily work on discerning any of these factors in his fantasies. He should slowly go about trying to discern if any of the above three factors are motivating the fantasy. In contrast, if a person has some understanding about the soul, though, he will be able to identify the source of the fantasy.

So it is first upon a person to understand what the root of his fantasy is (understandably, some instances will be easier to discern, and some will be more difficult; and in addition, each person is on a different level of discernment, depending on how much inner refinement he has reached). After one is aware of the particular factor that is fueling the fantasy, he can then go about the actual *avodah* of purifying and rectifying the power of fantasy.

### ***When There Is Extreme Disconnection Caused By The Heart’s Imagination***

Before we explain the ways of how a person can rectify the power of fantasy, first we will briefly mention on a general note, that there is also another kind of imagination, which is not as common, but certainly a concern that we need to discuss, for it affects more than a small amount of people.

As mentioned earlier, there is a power of imagination contained in the brain, and there is also a power of imagination contained in the heart. In the earlier chapters, we explained at length about the brain’s imagination which compares information (*dimuy milsa l’milsa*). But there is a different kind of imagination than this, which is found with children, and women (and it is also found with some men, to a certain degree). It is called the “left side” of the imagination, and to be more specific, it is found in the “back” of the brain.

In these people (children, women, and in some men who identify with this), their power to fantasize is a much more dominant part in the minds than their intellect. That being the case, when they experience the heart’s imagination, which causes them to want and desire something, sometimes the heart’s imagination and their “left side” of their brain’s imagination can ‘combine’ together. The combination is a detrimental one and it can cause them to behave like *cholei nefesh* (mentally/emotionally disturbed people).

Their brains’ imagination which [is undeveloped and thus] causes them to be drawn more after imagination (mental comparison) than their intellect, and when combined with their *daas* (or their *ratzon*, or their bloodstream) that activates their imagination, it can cause a very strong dominance of the imagination, to the point that may say things which don’t make any sense and which are not aligned with their actual reality.

In fact, sometimes this person might look like he is living a normal life, but he is really living with a very large amount of disconnection from reality. He/she might get married, have children, and behave normally to others, relatively speaking. But on the inside of this person, a complication has developed in his/her approach towards life.

We are not speaking here about a few people who live at the other end of the world. There are not a small amount of people like this, who struggle with this painful issue.

If a person does realize that he is drawn after fantasy in an extreme way, the first thing he needs to do is to strengthen the power of his intellect, that is, by developing a holy kind of intellect, through using his brain's power of imagination in his Torah learning. We spoke about this earlier (in Chapter 2) when we discussed the power of *dimuy milsa l'milsa* (mental comparison) when learning Torah. After a person has done that, he can then improve his heart's imagination, through the methods we described in earlier chapters [see Chapters 5, 6, and 7].<sup>121</sup>

This problem does not affect most people of the world, but we still had to discuss it, because there are a considerable amount of people who do struggle with this problem, and they are at a loss as to how to deal with this issue. For this reason, we needed to bring it up here and discuss it.

### ***Dealing With Fantasies That Stem From Impaired Da'as (Erroneous Beliefs)***

Now we will return to discussing how we deal with the **heart's** imagination. First we will learn about how to deal with **imagination that stems from one's da'as** his thinking patterns and beliefs.

As a general definition, in order to wage war with the imagination, one needs to strengthen the *seichel* (intellect) and turn it holy. The more a person sanctifies the intellect, the more he weakens any fantasies that are influenced by his *daas*.

To actualize this matter, if a person is drawn after this particular kind of imagination, he should try to learn areas in Torah which are not that practical in day-to-day life. The gain of this will be that he is not focused on practicality, [on the "world of action"], and instead he is involving his mind in the areas that are purely abstract thought.

When a person is learning areas of Torah that are focused on practical living [i.e. learning *halachos* that are relevant and common in his life], he will naturally try to think of what practical conclusions can come from this kind of learning (the "*halachah l'maaseh*"). But if a person is trying to weaken his imagination [we are talking here about fantasies that are caused by his impaired *daas*], he needs to set aside some time of the day in he will learn parts of Torah that having nothing to do with *halachah l'maaseh* and which are not of practical relevance.

(However, usually a person who is drawn after making all of his learning "practically relevant" is the type to make even this kind of learning to have some "practical" application in his life. He has a

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*121 Editor's Note: As explained in Chapter Two, Torah learning does not apply to women, so women will only need to work with improving their mental qualities alone, in order to counter extreme imagination.*

nature to make everything practical, even in what seems impractical. Even so, he can try learning parts of Torah that do not lead to any *halachah l'maaseh*,<sup>122</sup> and in this way, he can strengthen his intellectual side, without focusing on how he can make his learning practically relevant in his life.)

There is also a more specific application of the above concept. Rav Yisrael Salanter wrote that the advice in overcoming the power of fantasy is to concentrate with the intellect and strengthen its power, in order to counter the particular kind of fantasy that is challenging him. Let us explain this.

Firstly, we need to introduce this matter by saying that Reb Yisrael Salanter's approach of *mussar* is founded in his words of "*Iggeres HaMussar*", in which he defined that the entire *yetzer hora's* power thrives on *medameh*, the imagination. In conjunction with this teaching, Reb Yisrael Salanter's entire approach towards spiritual self-improvement is based on rectifying the power of *medameh*/imagination.

(As an aside, we should point out that many people learn *mussar* unaware of this fundamental point. Anyone who desires to get to the root of Reb Yisrael Salanter's teachings, in addition to learning his *sefer* "*Ohr Yisrael*", should learn in particular the "*Iggeres HaMussar*" of that *sefer*, which is the root of his teachings. There he elaborates at length about the power of imagination, and how all of spiritual self-improvement is essentially a war with the power of imagination; and that this is achieved by strengthening the power of our *seichell* intellect).

Based upon this, we have a specific method to tackle the imagination. Reb Yisrael Salanter writes (ibid) that one should learn a part of Torah which will counter his evil imagination. For example, if one has problems with envy and jealousy, he should learn about the parts of Torah that deal with the prohibition of "Do not covet", and what this means, and then he should delve into this matter deeply, contemplating all of the details of this commandment of the Torah, with in-depth analysis.

(As for how to strengthen the intellect over the imagination, we elaborated upon this in the earlier chapters, when we discussed the idea of *dimuy milsa l'milsa*, mental comparison, in Talmud study. We essentially defined there that the more a person uses and strengthens his intellect, the more his imagination is weakened. Therefore, we were brief here about this point, because we already explained it earlier).

### ***Dealing With Fantasies That Stem From The Ratzon/Will***

The root method in working to purify **imagination which stems from *ratzon/will*** is, understandably, through learning the art of *bittul haratzon*, nullifying the will.

Although we are not discussing here how to work on improving the *middos*, (which merits its own complete discussion<sup>123</sup>), it is relevant at this point to briefly mention the root methods of working on our *middos*, in order to understand how we uproot imagination that stems from

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<sup>122</sup> Editor's Note: Such as learning the laws of *Kodshim* (Temple sacrifices) & *Taharos* (laws of ritual purity & impurity)

<sup>123</sup> Refer to the Rav's four-part series of *Fixing Your Earth, Fixing Your Water, Fixing Your Wind, and Fixing Your Fire*.

*ratzon*/will. There are two fundamental approaches which one can use to improve all of his *middos*. One approach is to work on the *middos* themselves, separately. There is another approach to work on the *middos*, which is not through working on the *middos* directly, but through nullifying the root of all the *middos*, which is the *ratzon*/will.

These two different approaches are at the core of the differing approaches between the *baalei mussar* (those who taught the way of *mussar*/self-discipline) and the view of Chazon Ish. The approach of the *baalei mussar* is to work on the *middos* separately, and this is a subtle inner work. The Chazon Ish, however, believed that that the main aspect of working on the *middos* is to work with the very root of the *middos*, which is the *ratzon*.

Contrary to what many people thought - that the Chazon Ish supposedly opposed the entire idea of *mussar* - one who studies closely the words of the Chazon Ish will see that he only differed in the approach of how to go about *mussar*, and not that he completely invalidated the *mussar* approach. Instead of working on the *middos* separately, the Chazon Ish's view was that the *middos* are not worked upon directly. Instead, they are worked upon through the concept of nullifying the will. This is because the will is at the core of all of the *middos*. If one learns how to nullify the will, he removes the very root that enables bad *middos*.

The core of the Chazon Ish's approach is to work with the root, as opposed to working with the branches, of an issue. If a person is interested in improving a certain detail or aspect of his character, he might improve that particular aspect, but he does not improve as a whole. That is the drawback of working upon details. Yet, if a person tries to work upon the root of his issues, the amount of inner work he will have to do is as difficult as the trial of *Akeidas Yitzchok*. Only individuals have the strength of character to improve themselves at their root. Therefore, the recommended approach is *to work upon the general whole via the small details*.

This is not merely an intellectual definition. It has subtle ramifications upon the soul. To illustrate, when a person wants to get rid of a particular negative desires, if his underlying intent is to gain control over his *ratzon* from taking him over, then "the body is dragged after the head" and he will be able to uproot the negative *ratzon* in the process, as he gets rid of the particular desire. But if his intent is merely to improve upon a certain small detail, the self-purification that he will attain from this is only minimal, and it will not improve him as a whole.

To be general, the power of *ratzon* is ever-constant, but when a person is awake during the day, usually it is his intellect that is at the forefront of things, and his *ratzon* is not that active. But when a person goes to sleep and his intellect becomes dulled, the *ratzon* can come out from hiding. Any person can sense that when he sleeps, his *ratzon* becomes more active [in his dreams].

There is a deep *avodah* to work on the *ratzon*, by learning how to nullify it, and in its place, to do the will of Hashem. It is also known as the *avodah* of becoming completely "*ayin*" (nothing), to feel totally nullified to Hashem, and it is an awesome inner work. However, this particular *avodah* is only for special individuals, who are capable of it.

As for most of us, the way to work on the *ratzon* is not feasible if we try to nullify it and force it to only want to do Hashem's will. Instead, the way for us to work on our *ratzon* is to make small improvements on particular details and aspects of our character, with the underlying intent of uprooting the negative *ratzon*.

### ***Nullifying Your Will/Fantasies Three Times A Day***

There is well-known advice from Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l on how to nullify the *ratzon*. He advised that a person should try for three times a day to do something against his will. However, it must be done with the awareness and an underlying intention that you are not just trying to get rid of the particular desire at hand, but that you are trying to learn how to go against your entire power of *ratzon* in general.

With regards to our subject, fixing the imagination, it is upon a person to nullify his fantasy-based desires for three times a day. One can try this with even things that he desires minimally, and he doesn't have to try it with things that he is fantasizing about badly. Also, it doesn't have to be practiced with the very thing you are fantasizing about. Instead, the goal is to learn how to weaken your *ratzon* for something, and in turn, the root of the fantasy - the *ratzon* - will weaken with time.

### ***Weakening The Imagination Through Contemplating Emunah***

Besides for the above mentioned advice of nullifying the will three times a day, there is an additional advice which is based on a deep point that is mentioned in the *Iggeres HaMussar* of Reb Yisrael Salanter.

Reb Yisrael Salanter said that a person does not improve as a whole if he is only trying to improve on some small details, but if he works to improve himself as a whole, his other small details will be improved with this. Then, continues Reb Yisrael Salanter: If a person wants to improve as a whole, he should work on his *emunah*.

Reb Itzele Blazer<sup>124</sup> wrote that Reb Yisrael Salanter's approach is based on the concept of *yiras ha'onesh*, fear of punishment, and therefore the emphasis of *emunah* is with regards to fearing retribution from Hashem. However, in any case, the underlying theme is always *emunah*.

A person may be learning *mussar* for many years, yet he fails to grasp that the main part of our *avodah* is to active the power of *emunah*. As is well-known, when Reb Yechezkel Levenstein first came to Radin, he heard a talk from Reb Yeruchem Levovitz about *emunah*, and from then he was fundamentally changed for the rest of his life.

However, the subtleties contained in the way of going about *avodah* has been a matter of disagreement throughout different parts of *Klal Yisrael*, and each person should follow the way that

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<sup>124</sup> *Kovchei Ohr*, 10

is according to his soul's root. But the common denominator between all paths is that the entire concept of *Avodas Hashem* is always about activating the power of *emunah*. This is the basis of why Reb Yisrael Salanter said that the main part of a person's *avodah* is to radiate the light of *emunah*.

Furthermore, Reb Yisrael continues that if *emunah* would be consciously revealed in one's heart, a person would never sin, and there would be no need to work on *middos*. But since *emunah* remains hidden in the soul, this leaves a person with no choice but to work on his *middos*. Then Reb Yisrael goes on to explain that our *avodah* of revealing *emunah* is via the power of our *seichell* intellect. This particular matter divides into two parts: the power of *tziyur* (mental visualization), and the power of learning a specific area in Torah that can counter fantasy.

Reb Yisrael Salanter's conclusion is that our personal *avodah* is based on two root concepts: strengthening the power of our *seichell* intellect, and strengthening the power of *tziyur*/mental visualization. This is all a general, brief description of the entire *mussar* approach of Reb Yisrael Salanter.

With regards to our current discussion, now that we have learned about Reb Yisrael Salanter's emphasis on refining our power of imagination and strengthening the power of our intellect, and that the root of all our *avodah* is to activate the potential of our *emunah*, we have learned an additional method to deal with the imagination. Through strengthening our *emunah* – which we can do by studying words of *Chazal* that describe the importance of *emunah* – we essentially strengthen our intellect and weaken the imagination as a result.

Examples of such statements of *Chazal* about *emunah* are “A person cannot touch anything prepared for his friend, even a hairsbreadth”<sup>125</sup>, and “A person cannot lift his finger here below [on this world] unless it was announced above [in heaven]”<sup>126</sup>, and “The sustenance of a person is determined for him from Rosh HaShanah until Yom Kippur”<sup>127</sup>, and other such statements of *Chazal*, which are all about *emunah*.

(However, Reb Yisrael Salanter did not speak about actively using the power of *emunah* as a way to strengthen our intellect and thereby weaken the imagination. But in other places, it is mentioned that that this is the method of *avodah*).

When a person internalizes the *emunah* that he can only attain that which has been decreed upon him to attain, this in turn weakens his *ratzon* for that which he had wanted and fantasized about, for he becomes aware that it is pointless to have all of these *retzonos* if it hasn't been decreed in Heaven that he will have it.

There is a well-known fundamental which the Vilna *Gaon* said, that if a person stole something, it was certainly decreed in Heaven that he will obtain this item, but since he didn't have enough merits, it came to him through the sin of stealing. Even if he wouldn't have stolen it, it would have come to him through some other (permissible) means.

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<sup>125</sup> *Yoma 38b*

<sup>126</sup> *Chullin 7b*

<sup>127</sup> *Beitzah 16b*



There is also a similar concept in the words of the Ibn Ezra, who asks: How could the Torah command a person not to covet another's possession, if he is not in control over his emotions? The Ibn Ezra answers that just as the simple villager doesn't covet the princess, because she is not designated for him, so must a person relate to another's possession or another's spouse as a forbidden object that is not within his reach.

The above lesson teaches us that when a person deepens and strengthens his *emunah*, he realizes that he doesn't have to get everything he wants. In this way, a person can learn to get rid of his *retzon* for something that he desires, and in turn, he will stop fantasizing about it.

However, when it comes to spiritual ambitions, one must not use this idea of nullifying the will, because those are desires that we should keep. The *avodah* of *bittul haratzon* (nullifying the will) is only for meant for uprooting *retzonos* of the body, not the spiritual *retzonos* of the soul.

(On a subtle level, there is also an *avodah* to nullify even spiritual *retzonos*, so that one can avoid sinking into his own ego and instead aspire for spiritual levels purely for the sake of Hashem's will. However, this *avodah* is only for individuals. If most people would try to nullify their spiritual *retzonos*, there is a danger that instead of rising spiritually, they will instead forfeit spiritual interest altogether and then fall into sin, G-d forbid).

### ***Weakening Desire-Based Imagination Through Developing Boundaries***

Besides for the above three methods of *avodah* (fixing the power of *daas*, nullifying the *ratzon*/will, and nullifying the imagination via the power of *emunah*), there is also an additional method that we can use in order to repair desire-based fantasies. We elaborated upon it earlier [in Chapter 6]: the power of establishing boundaries. [When one gets used to the general concept that man is ultimately leaved and bound to certain rules, this attitude will help him let go of the desires that he is fantasizing about.]

### ***Weakening Our Imagination Through Spiritual Maturity***

There is yet an additional method which one can use in order to deal with desire-based fantasies. It is based on the clear principle that all fantasies that a person imagines about are within his field of perception.

A person doesn't imagine about something that he cannot conceptualize at all. Consider the difference between the way a little child fantasizes, with the way an older child fantasizes. A young child will imagine about various dolls or toys, and when he gets a little older, he will imagine about a certain ball he would like to own. A teenager will fantasize about a certain car he would like to ride in, and an adult will fantasize about what he wants his house to look like and some other things he would like to own.

Everyone can recognize that our level of fantasy changes as we get older. We imagined about certain things when we were three years old, and we imagined about other things when we were five years old. At the age of seven, we imagine about different things, and when we are twenty years old, our fantasies are much different; and so forth. (There is always some memory of the past which remains stamped in one's mind, so one might continue to fantasize about the very things he liked when he was a child. However, this is but a faint imprint. Generally speaking, his imagination now is far more different than when he was a child).

What we can notice from this is that when a person has become a bit more mature and he is on to the next 'stage' in his life, he no longer fantasizes about the things that interested him when he was at a lower, less mature stage in life. Thus, if a person has attained some degree of self-purification since his previous stage in life, his fantasies weaken with it.

This kind of *avodah* does not deal directly with the imagination, and it is rather a general piece of advice which can help a person leave a lower, less mature stage in his life and rise to a higher, more mature stage.

### ***Dealing With Imagination Influenced By Quality of Bloodstream***

An additional source of fantasy stems from the "murkiness of the blood", the quality of one's bloodstream. In order to deal with these kinds of fantasies, a person needs to purify his physical body.

The general method to attain purification of the body is through fasting and various forms of physical suffering. The specific method of attaining purification of the body is through eating a lighter diet, and more importantly, to make sure to eat food that comes from a *seudas mitzvah*, or any meal in which holiness plays a role.

To the degree that one is watching what he eats, in turn, his fantasies weaken. The same is true for the converse: the more one gorges on heavy kinds of food, the more his imagination will dominate.

In addition to the effect of food on one's bloodstream, the genetic makeup inherited by one's parents also influence the bloodstream. In order to deal with the fantasies that are produced from this source, one needs to purify the blood that he inherited from his mother. The *Gemara* says [with regards to acquiring Torah], "One should vomit the milk which he nursed from his mother."<sup>128</sup> This means that one needs to purify his body, and the body will have to undergo some kind of discomfort in order to become purified above its base physicality.

Without this process of purification, a person cannot have true spiritual growth and service to the Creator. Dovid *HaMelech* said, "*In iniquity I was born, and with sin my mother conceived me*".<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *Berachos 63b*

<sup>129</sup> *Tehillim 51:7*

Every person has fantasies which are inherited from his parents' behavior upon his conception. In order to purify this source of fantasies, one needs to undergo some degree of purification to the body, which can be accomplished through fasting or other forms of physical discomfort.

The amount of physical discomfort that one can handle is different with each person and according to the level he is on. It is also a factor that depends on the level of the generation one is in, and it must also be in accordance with one's teachers. Therefore, there are no iron-clad rules for how to attain purification of the body.

Whatever the case, a person must undergo some level of purification of the body, in order to rectify the fantasies that are produced from his bloodstream, which were influenced by his parents. This includes being careful about one's food intake, making sure to eat only light and refined kinds of food (each person can try this on his own level) – either through having holy intentions while eating, or through eating foods that are from a *seudas mitzvah*.

It may be difficult to sanctify the act of eating, but one should still try to do it on his own level. This will purify the quality of his bloodstream, and in turn, it will weaken the fantasies that are produced from it.

## 1.10 | *Rectifying The Animal Soul*<sup>130</sup>

**Summary:** *In previous chapters, we examined the various kinds of imagination present in our power of “medameh”: the mind’s imagination, which works through mental comparisons; “tziyur” (mental visualization), and imagined desires (which stem from ratzon, the will). In this chapter, we will now deal with the other uses of “medameh”.*

### ***The Mixture of Good and Evil Throughout All of Creation***

As it was explained about at length earlier, *medameh* [which usually refers to the imagination, but in this chapter we will see that it can refer to an aspect in the soul that is trying to imitate] is the foundation of one’s *middos* (character traits), for the words *middah* and *medameh* share the same root letters. That essentially means that when any of the *middos* become exaggerated past their healthy limits, it is always stemming from the power of *medameh*.

Now we will mention a very fundamental point which is relevant in understanding the root of the power of *medameh*.

Ever since Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), everything in Creation became a mixture of good and evil. There is now nothing in the world which is totally holy or totally impure. Rather, we will find some impurity in even something that contains holiness, and vice versa. Understandably, there are varying degrees of percentages in this. Sometimes there is a minute amount of evil in something, which becomes nullified by a greater amount of holiness in the thing (like the rule in the laws of *kosher* of being “nullified by a sixtieth”), [and sometimes, there can be some small amount of good in something, but is overshadowed by the rest of the evil that is found within it].

Therefore, even in one’s good *middos*, there is a hidden spark of evil. For example, even when one is using the trait of conceit (*gaavah*) for holiness, he also contains some percentage of evil in his *gaavah*. And when someone has evil conceit, there is also a spark of holiness contained in the conceit.

Another example: If someone says that he is about to learn Torah for the sake of Heaven, we can know with certainty that he is not totally learning for the sake of Heaven. And if a person is eating the Shabbos meal because he is in the mood of dining on good food, we can be certain that he is not doing this 100% out of gluttony; there is certainly some degree of motivation within his act of eating to fulfill a *mitzvah*. There are varying levels, of course. In some cases, he is for the most part eating the meal out of gluttony, and not because he recognizes the holiness of Shabbos.

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<sup>130</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-010-way-view-our-middos>

So there are always two sides to every act of man. In any situation, one can examine which part of the act belongs to good and holiness, and which part of the act belongs to evil. The *avodah* of a person, understandably, is to try to increase the intentions for good and holiness.

### ***The Earth Aspect Within The Faculty of Medameh/Imagination: The Power To Resemble***

Earlier, it was explained that the lower aspect of “*medameh*” (imagination) is called “*adamah*”, earth. The *sefarim hakedoshim* teach that the word *adamah*/earth is from the word *adameh*, “I will resemble” [alluding to the nature in a human being to compare himself with another being and try to resemble the other being].

As mentioned, everything in Creation is a mixture of good and evil, therefore, in the concept of “*adamah*” as well we can find two functions of *medameh*, a good function of *medameh* and an impaired kind of *medameh*. First let us explain the good level of *medameh* that is found in the “*adamah*” aspect.

In the way of the world, when a person plants something in the earth, the law of nature is that it will produce something which is similar to that which was planted. If someone sticks grape seeds into the ground, naturally, a grapevine will grow from there. (However, the Torah says that part of the curse upon mankind after the sin is, “*Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you*”,<sup>131</sup> which was not just a curse, but a change in nature).

Thus, the main property of *adamah*/earth is that when it receives something, it will produce that very thing which was put into it, in a broader version of it. This broadening that the earth does to something is called “*harchavah*” (widening/expansion).

### ***Harchavah (Expansion)***

Now let’s reflect on the following. What is the root of this matter that the earth produces from that which was planted into it, particularly the fact that it broadens and expands it?

In the glosses of the *Maharitz* to the beginning of sefer *Nefesh HaChaim*, it is explained the roles of the four elements of Creation: fire, wind, water, and earth. The main, active elements are fire, wind and water, whereas earth activates the potential of the other three elements. But the earth will not produce an exact copy of that which was planted in it; rather it produces something of similar properties, in greater quantity. A person plants one seed in the earth, and afterwards a big tree will emerge, which will be similar to the properties of the seed.

This particular aspect of the earth, which produces an abundance of the amount that was planted into it, is rooted in “*medameh*”, which is essentially an expanding force that produces more of the original data. Thus, the “*medameh*” aspect that is revealed in *adamah*/earth doesn’t produce new

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<sup>131</sup> *Beraishis* 3:18

information. Rather, it breaks the limitations of something [thereby expanding it further]. This is the power of “*harchavah*” (widening) which is contained in *adamah*/earth [which gets its strength from the power of *medameh*].

But if the *medameh* is impaired to begin with, the *adamah*/earth will subsequently produce “thorns and thistles” [an impaired version of the original data]. So while the earth can widen and expand that which is planted into it and it doesn’t uproot it from place, it doesn’t always produce in abundance more of the same thing. Instead, thorns and thistles might grow in its place. The force of *medameh* is always existing, but when it has taken the wrong direction, instead of producing more of the same, it will change the properties of that which is planted into it, and produce something else in its place.

This impaired aspect of *medameh* is a root of ruination for man. It is what causes a person to have misconceptions about how he should go about his own self-growth.

Instead of working on oneself according to his own unique abilities and personality, a person will seek to compare himself to another person and want to resemble that other person. Reuven may want to become similar to Shimon, and Shimon may want to be similar to Reuven, and so forth.

In summary, there are two different manifestations of *medameh*. One way is the ideal kind of *medameh*, in which more of the same information will be produced from the original data; similar to how a seed is planted in the ground and a large tree sprouts from it. The other is the impaired use of *medameh*, in which the *medameh* will not produce something similar to the original data; instead it will exaggerate the information and produce something “new”.

### ***Learned Behavior From Others: The Impaired Use of “Medameh”***

The above concept is also contained in the words of the Maharal, regarding what the Torah writes about the difference between Kayin and Hevel’s offering. Regarding Kayin, the Torah says that “Kayin was a man of the earth”, whereas Hevel “also” brought an offering.<sup>132</sup> The Maharal says that the Torah is really criticizing Hevel’s attitude. Instead of being inspired from within himself to bring an offering for Hashem, Hevel only brought an offering because he saw that Kayin brought an offering. He “also” decided to bring one, but not of his own originality.

Kayin brought an offering that was “fruits of the earth”. The “earth” here is a reference to the *adamah*/earth aspect in *medameh*, which produces something similar to that which was planted into it, more of the same. In contrast, the offering of Hevel was only brought because he was trying to resemble Kayin. There was a very big difference between these two offerings.

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<sup>132</sup> “And behold, Hevel was a shepherd of the flock, and Kayin was a man of the earth. And Kayin brought of the fruits of the earth...and Hevel also brought” (Beraishis 4: 2-4)

The lesson we can learn from this is that impaired *medameh* is when one is not using his own unique *middos* (character traits), and he is rather using the *middos* of another person, because he compares himself to that other person and wants to resemble him.

### ***Middos That Come From The ‘Animal’ Soul, vs. Middos That Come From The ‘G-dly’ Soul***

As mentioned in earlier chapters, we contain a group of *middos* that stem from the *nefesh habehaimis*, the “animal” level of the soul, and we also contain a group of *middos* that stem from our higher aspect of the soul, the “*nefesh HaElokis*”, the “G-dly” aspect of the soul.

These two forces in man (*middos* of *nefesh habehaimis*, and *middos* of *nefesh haElokis*) also have a deeper root in the forces of Creation. Let us first reflect: What is the essential difference between the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis*, and the *middos* of the *nefesh haElokis*?

Chazal state, “*This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him*” – “I” and “Him” means (that “I”) to resemble Him; just as He is compassionate, so shall you be compassionate.”<sup>133</sup> Let’s consider the trait of compassion (*rachamim*) and where its source is. Our *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul) can be compassionate to another, and our *nefesh haElokis* (G-dly soul) can have compassion for another. But there is a big difference between these two kinds of compassion.

When we are utilizing the trait of compassion of our *nefesh haElokis*, it is an offshoot of Hashem’s own trait of compassion, so to speak. “Yisrael, the Torah, and the Holy Blessed One, are one.”<sup>134</sup> The “G-dly” aspect of our soul (our *nefesh haElokis*) can act compassionate to another because it is an extension of the Creator’s own compassion; all the souls of Yisrael are integrated [at their core] with the Creator. (There are also deeper levels than this, but that is not for now).

Thus, the *middos* of both our *nefesh habehaimis* and our *nefesh haElokis* are not “new” *middos*. Rather, they are an extension of the *middos* of the Creator. Before the Creation, there was nothing other than the existence of the Creator. After Creation, Hashem put human beings into existence, and they are all rooted in the souls of Yisrael, who were the “first thoughts” of Hashem, so to speak. For this reason, the *middos* of the *nefesh haElokis* found in a Jew’s soul are a continuation, so to speak, of the *middos* of the Creator.

To describe this in sharper terms, it was mentioned earlier that the *middos* of the Creator are revealed through the Torah, and the Torah is revealed through man (the soul of a Jew). This is like the statement, “There are three ties bound to each other – the Holy Blessed One, the Torah, and Yisrael.”<sup>135</sup> Therefore, the main revelation of Hashem’s *middos* takes place in the souls of the Jewish people, through the “*bris*” (covenant) between Hashem and the Jewish people, which is the Torah.

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<sup>133</sup> *Maseches Sofrim* 3:17

<sup>134</sup> *Zohar*

<sup>135</sup> *Zohar Achrei Mos* 73a

In light of the above, the *middos* present in the *nefesh haElokis* are not independent. Rather, they are a continuation and extension of Hashem's *middos*. Thus, the *avodah* of a Jew with regards to his *nefesh haElokis* is to recognize that his *middos* are but an extension of the Creator's *middos*. This extension of Hashem's *middos* is essentially the depth behind the entire concept of *medameh*.

In other words, the main, basic aspect of *medameh* is the power to continue and expand something. Just as planting one seed in the ground will result in many crops that will sprout forth from it, so do the *middos* of Hashem extend into the soul, where [the *medameh* in] the soul produces a continued version of Hashem's *middos*.

[Man is a resemblance of G-d, so to speak]. When creating man, Hashem said to the angels, **נַעֲשֵׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ וּכְדַמוֹתֵינוּ** - "Let us make man, in our image and in our likeness." The word "in our image" refers to the mind of man (*mochin/seichel/chochmah*) which is an offshoot of Hashem's mind, as it were; and the word "in our likeness" refers to the character traits of man (*middos*), which are a resemblance of the Heavenly *demus* (likeness).

### ***Attaching Ourselves to the Middos of Hashem***

Based upon the above, we can now understand the following, fundamental point in a person's personal *avodah*.

There is a well-known statement of *Chazal*: "What is the meaning of what is written, "After Hashem your G-d you shall go" – is it possible for a person to go after the *Shechinah*? Isn't it written, "For Hashem your G-d is a fire that consumes"? Rather, it means for a person to go after Hashem's attributes. Just as He clothes the naked...so shall you clothe the naked."<sup>136</sup>

In those words of *Chazal*, we learn that a person has an *avodah* to cleave to the Creator, via the means of cleaving to His thirteen attributes of mercy, which are written in the Torah (see *Shemos 34:6*) and in the prophets (*Michah 7:18*). But an essential question arises about this. The Creator is infinite, and therefore it follows that His *middos*/attributes are also infinite. *Sefer Tomer Devorah* states explicitly that Hashem's compassion is unlimited, unlike human compassion, which has its limits. When a person sins, Hashem in his great compassion doesn't allow the destructive angels (created from the sin) to harm him, and this proves His limitless compassion. A person, however, is finite and limited, and therefore all human compassion is limited. How, then, can it be demanded of a person, who is so limited, to cleave to the Creator and to try to emulate His attributes, when the Creator is unlimited in His compassion, and a person is clearly not?

We have no choice but to arrive at the following deep conclusion. The [Heavenly] *middos* of Hashem can be shined upon a person, way above the limitations of his own *middos*.

To understand this deeper, if the *middos* of a person would be independent of the Creator's *middos* and they would remain in their limited state, there would indeed be no way for a person to

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<sup>136</sup> *Sotah 14a*



cleave to Hashem's *middos*. But since a person's *middos* are a continuation (*hamshachah*) of the *middos* of Hashem, it becomes easier to understand how a person can cleave to these *middos* of Hashem. Since each *middah*/trait that a person possesses is a continuation/*hamshachah* of Hashem's *middos*, the *middos* of a person are connected to the unlimited.

Although we have explained earlier that the word *middah* means “measured”, which implies that it is limited, when one's *middos* are seen as a continuation and extension of Hashem's *middos*, they are only defined as “*middos*” to show us until how far it is extending at this current point. Since the *middos* of a person are unlimited [at their deeper root], any of a person's *middos* can keep extending and continuing further past its source. Therefore, *middos* are not to be understood as intrinsically limited [rather, that they can keep continuing from their source].

### ***The ‘Animal’ Level of The Soul Wants To ‘Resemble’ Others***

Thus, the deep inner workings behind the *middos*/traits manifest in our *nefesh habehaimis* (the “animal” level of the soul)<sup>137</sup> is that they are a means of *hamshachah*/continuation, which is an aspect of *medameh*. However, in order to understand this subtle definition, first we need to understand the very concept of the *middos* present in the *nefesh habehaimis*.

In the *middos* of our *nefesh habehaimis*, we have good *middos* and bad *middos* (we will not get into here about the difference between good and bad *middos*, which is another matter). Each of the *middos* in the *nefesh habehaimis* is not independent of a previous source – rather, each of these *middos* are trying to “resemble” something else [i.e. learned behavior].

There is well-knowing saying of *Chazal* that had the Torah not been given, we would have learned *derech erez* (decent behavior) and good *middos* from observing animals. We would have learned modesty from a cat, and we would have learned about stealing from an ant.<sup>138</sup> This is actually a function of *medameh*/resembling.

A person can try to be like someone else or want to resemble good behavior that he has observed, and this is a use of the power of *medameh*. It can be used for either good or evil purposes. A person may want to imitate a person who has good character, and these are the good *middos* in the *nefesh habehaimis* at work; or a person may want to imitate evil behavior, and these are the bad *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis* at work. In either case, though, the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis* are always using the power of *medameh*/resembling.

So there are two different possibilities of how a person gains good *middos*. One way is to cleave to the *middos* of Hashem, through the understanding that all of a person's *middos* are a *hamshachah*/continuation of Hashem's *middos* which are being shined upon him. [This is the higher method.] The other way of gaining good *middos* [which is the lower way] is to want to become

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<sup>137</sup> Editor's Note: The *middos* of our *nefesh habehaimis* refer to the basic level of character traits and ethical behavior, such as basic human compassion, basic decency, basic consideration for others, etc.

<sup>138</sup> Erwin 100b

similar to Hashem – which is the simpler understanding of “Just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate.” However, the very idea of trying to “resemble” comes from the *nefesh habehaimis*.

The *middos* of our *nefesh habehaimis* – whether we are dealing with the good *middos* in it, and surely when it comes to the bad *middos* in it – are functioning based on *medameh*. The *nefesh habehaimis* wants to get itself to ‘resemble’ and imitate what it observes [whether for good or bad].

Based on the above, we can have an insight into the words of *Chazal*, “Jealousy, desire, and honor take a person out of the world”.<sup>139</sup> These three negative character traits – jealousy, desire, and honor – remove a person from reality and place him into “imagined” reality, *medameh*; and that is how these negative *middos* remove a person from his own, inner world.

### ***Before The Sin and After The Sin***

The sefer *Nefesh HaChaim* explains at length that after Adam sinned with the *Eitz HaDaas*, the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) entered him. In terms of the soul, this meant that before the sin, evil was seen as outside of the “I”, and after Adam sinned, a person now sees evil as part of his “I”. As a result, man thinks that any faulty character traits are part of his very essence, and this is the depth of all ruination.

Similarly, Reb Yisrael Salanter<sup>140</sup> brings an argument if evil is an angel of Hashem, which is external of the person, or if it is a nature in man, which is internal. Reb Yisrael Salanter concludes that they are both correct views, depending on before the sin or after the sin. Before the sin, evil was seen as an external force, and after the sin, evil is seen as part of man’s nature.

Based on what we have learned in this chapter, we can now apply an additional facet of understanding about this matter. Before the sin, the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis* were viewed by man as an external force, which are not part of his nature. After the sin, man now views the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis* as part of his “I”, so he thinks that these base character traits are a part of his very essence.

### ***Resembling/Imitating vs. Continuation/Extension***

Here is the gist of the concepts we are explaining here. The *middos* of our *nefesh habehaimis* are functioning through *medameh*, and therefore these *middos* are not independent. So it is not to be understood that we have certain *middos* in our *nefesh habehaimis* and that we ‘also’ have the faculty of *medameh* in it. Rather, the entire concept of the *nefesh habehaimis* is rooted in, and functions

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<sup>139</sup> *Avos* 4:21

<sup>140</sup> in *Iggeres HaMussar*

through, *medameh* – and this is the part of our nature which strives to compare ourselves with others and to want to imitate others.

As a result, if a person compares his own *middos* to others and he wishes to resemble those who have good *middos*, he will gain good *middos* from this, but if he wants to be like people who have faulty character, he will gain bad *middos* for himself.

Earlier, we explained that it appears to us, upon initial understanding, that our *middos* become “widened” [expanded] through *medameh*. Upon deeper reflection into this matter, in light of what has been said above, the definition is totally different than this: **The entire structure of all our *middos* is nothing but the power of *medameh*!**

And now that we have learned that this defines the very concept of the *middos* in our *nefesh habehaimis*, this definition gains even greater meaning when we consider the concept of our *nefesh haElokis*, the higher, “G-dly” dimension of our soul [that the *middos* of our *nefesh haElokis* are entirely working through the power of *medameh*].

It is upon us to understand: If all our *middos* function through *medameh* (both the *middos* in our *nefesh habehaimis* and in our *nefesh haElokis*), what then is the essential difference between the *middos* of our *nefesh habehaimis* with the *middos* of our *nefesh haElokis*?

Upon reflection into this matter, there is a huge difference between the kind of *medameh* which empowers the *middos* in the *nefesh habehaimis*, with the kind of *medameh* that empowers the *middos* in our *nefesh haElokis*. The *medameh* of our *nefesh haElokis* reflects the concept of “*b’tzalmeinu, u’kedemuseinu*” (“*In our image, and in our likeness.*”). In other words, it works through *harchavah* (widening/expansion) of Hashem’s *middos* upon the human soul. In contrast, the *medameh* which empowers the *middos* of our *nefesh habehaimis* works in a different way: it is trying to “resemble”, or imitate, others [it is used on a higher level when wanting to resemble Hashem, and it is used on a lower level when trying to be like other people].

### ***Extending Hashem’s Middos Onto The Soul***

What is the concept of *harchavah* (widening), in which the *nefesh haElokis* extends the *middos* of Hashem upon the soul? And how does it work using the power of *medameh*?

The basic function of *medameh* is that it can “widen” something (it takes something and expands it). It acts like the earth, which produces more of the same, using the original data. This nature of the earth is actually rooted in the entire definition of Creation. *Chazal* state that “Before creation, Hashem was one and His Name was one.”<sup>141</sup> With creation, Hashem made an endless amount of beings, and 600,000 souls in the Jewish people. Here is the root of *harchavah* process. It all started from Hashem’s Oneness, and, so to speak, Hashem divided His Oneness into 600,000 souls of the

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<sup>141</sup> *Zohar parshas Beraishis*

Jewish people. This is the root of the entire nature of the earth, which takes something in its potential state and brings it outward, resulting in many products that come from an original root.

The concept of *harchavah*, which is the very power that the *nefesh haElokis* works with, is the basic element of the entire Creation, as in the verse, “*Everything was from earth, and everything will return to earth.*”<sup>142</sup> This is because everything was created from the very power of “*In our image, and in our likeness*” – a *harchavah*/expansion of Hashem’s *middos*.

However, the above is the perspective of the *nefesh haElokis*. The *nefesh habehaimis* has an entirely different orientation. Although it is also rooted in *adamah*/earth, it is a lower use of the earth; it is in the category of “a destitute, who has nothing of his own.” It has no content from within itself, because it is [an] impaired [earth]. The only possibility for improvement it has is to try to imitate the good behavior of others and thereby develop good character traits. But it does not activate the potential of anything dormant within it, for it has nothing of its own which it can bring to fruition.

Being that this is the nature of the *nefesh habehaimis*, a person might try to imitate a certain quality or good character trait that he sees in another, but the danger is that he might *chas v’shalom* wish to imitate the bad behavior of others.

Thus, we have seen here the fundamental difference between the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis* and the *middos* of the *nefesh haElokis*. The force of *medameh* in the *nefesh habehaimis* imitates that which it sees by another, as if trying to ‘capture’ what it observes in others – it ‘takes’ something which does not ‘belong’ to itself, so to speak, and it is trying to ‘wear’ it. In contrast, the force of *medameh* in the *nefesh haElokis* will expand upon the *middos* of Hashem and extend them into the soul, activating them from their dormant state.

### ***The Proper Perspective Towards Acquiring The “G-dly” Character Traits***

Based upon the definition outlined above, what is the effect of *medameh* in the *nefesh habehaimis* upon *middos*, and the effect of *medameh* in the *nefesh haElokis* upon the *middos*?

Let us now think. When a person is activating the power of *medameh* in his *nefesh habehaimis*, trying to imitate another person’s character traits, it really means that he has no intrinsic connection to that character trait which he is observing. In contrast, when one is using the *middos* of his *nefesh haElokis*, he is acquiring the good trait via the means of ‘temporarily borrowing’ it. It is the part in the soul in which one can feel that any of the good *middos*, which are a *hamshachah*/extension of Hashem’s *middos*, are a part of my “I”.

This particular aspect in the soul [in the *nefesh haElokis*], however, is a power that can be used positively or negatively. On one hand, there is a positive side to it, because if a person feels that a certain good character trait is a part of his very “I”, it is more likely to take up permanence in his soul, so he will constantly be making use of this good *middah*. On the other hand, there is a

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<sup>142</sup> *Koheles 3:20*

downside to this attitude, because it will cause a person to think that the good *middos* are due to his own accord and that they originate entirely from himself; he is failing to realize that all good *middos* are nothing but an extension of Hashem's *middos* upon him.

What, then, is the proper attitude that we need to have towards the *middos* of our *nefesh haElokis*?

There is a verse, “*In Your hand, I place my spirit.*”<sup>143</sup> Besides for the simple meaning of this verse which is true, which is that a person entrusts his soul with Hashem every night when he goes to sleep, *Chazal* expound this verse to mean that Hashem “lends” a person his soul every day, and at night when a person goes to sleep, the person is giving back the “borrowed item” (his soul) to its Owner. Our soul is therefore like a borrowed item from Hashem. We are allowed to benefit from it while we have it, but it is only temporarily owned by us.

Therefore, the idea is that our soul is not completely ours, it really belongs to Hashem, but for the time being that Hashem lends it to us, it is temporarily ‘owned’ by us, with a status of a borrowed object. That is also how we need to view the *middos* of our *nefesh haElokis*. On one hand, the *middos* in our *nefesh haElokis* belong to us right now, because we temporarily own our souls. On the other hand, one must recognize that any of the *middos* in the *nefesh haElokis* are but an extension of Hashem's *middos*.

Unlike the false perspective of our *nefesh habehaimis*, which thinks that its *middos* are intrinsically its own, the deep perspective in our *nefesh haElokis* recognizes that any of the [good] *middos* are but an extension of Hashem's *middos*.

Anyone who reflects deeply about this will discover this inner, truthful perspective. He can notice that the *middos* present in his *nefesh habehaimis* are not really “his” [rather, they are learned behaviors which have been picked up from others], whereas he can feel the *middos* of the *nefesh haElokis* as being a part of his “I.”

To clarify this point, one must not view his *middos* as being solely the *middos* of Hashem and not his own. This would only be true when we consider the state of before Creation, which was called “*ayin*” (nothingness), where there was nothing but Hashem's existence and no one in Creation to continue the *middos* of Hashem. Now that we live after the Creation, which is called the state of “*yeish*” (the material world), our *avodah* is to reveal “*ayin*” amidst the state of “*yeish*”, by revealing the existence of the Creator upon this world.

Therefore, it is essential for a person to feel that the *middos* of Hashem can become a part of his own “I”. But certainly, if a person goes too far with this and he feels that his *middos* are absolutely his own, and not an extension of Hashem's, this is a subtle spark of heresy.

Thus, the proper and balanced perspective to have is, that on one hand, we must view the good *middos* as being our “own” good *middos*, which we are ‘temporarily borrowing’ from Hashem; on the other hand, we must also return all of the good *middos* to their root, by recognizing that good *middos* only reach us as a result of *hamshachah*/extension of Hashem's *middos*.

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<sup>143</sup> *Tehillim* 31:6

Usually, a person relates to the *middos* of his *nefesh habehaimis* as “his own” *middos*. This is certainly the case when it comes to the faulty character traits, which most people are drawn towards [i.e. a person tends to think that his bad *middos* are a part of his very essence]. And if a person thinks that the good *middos* in his *nefesh habehaimis* are his own, this stems from negative conceit (which is also a trait of the *nefesh habehaimis*).

This erroneous perspective towards the *nefesh habehaimis* is the total antithesis to the proper perspective mentioned earlier, in which the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis* will try to imitate the *middos* of the *nefesh haElokis*. In the erroneous perspective being described here, a person will distort the view of the *nefesh haElokis*, which sees *middos* as a part of the “I”, using it with regards to the *middos* of his *nefesh habehaimis* (and in fact, even the perspective of the *nefesh haElokis* is but one side of the coin, because a person also needs to understand that even the *middos* of his *nefesh haElokis* are but an extension of Hashem’s *middos*), which, in reality, are only being ‘borrowed’ by him temporarily from Hashem. He is applying this perspective to the *middos* of his *nefesh habehaimis*, and he will therefore think that his *middos* originate in himself and that they are absolutely his own.

This erroneous perspective is like a “spark of idol worship”, which we mentioned in earlier chapters as one of the evils contained in *medameh*. It is the temptation of “*And you shall become like G-d*”, which was essentially a spark of idol worship, which had caused man to think that his *medameh* (the fact that man is a resemblance of G-d) is his very “I”.

### ***Rectifying The Nefesh HaBehaimis***

Now that we have explained at length the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis* and of the *nefesh haElokis*, it is now upon us to understand well the difference between these two groups of *middos*.

Based on what we have outlined thus far, the proper way to view the *middos* of our *nefesh haElokis* contains two parts to it. One part is to recognize that the *middos* of the *nefesh haElokis* are felt as a part of our “I”, and additional part is to recognize that the *middos* of the *nefesh haElokis* are entirely a *hamshachah*/extension of Hashem’s *middos* upon the soul.

### ***The Two Aspects Of How We View The “G-dly” Middos***

These two aspects together comprise the proper view that we need to have towards the *middos* of our *nefesh haElokis*, and one of these attitudes alone will not suffice.

If a person remains with the perspective that his good *middos* are part of his “I” but he does not recognize that they are ultimately an extension of Hashem’s *middos* upon him, he remains separate from the Creator, Who is the Source and Root of all existence.

On the other hand, when a person uses the *middos* of his *nefesh haElokis* to try to resemble the *middos* of the Creator – for example, he acts merciful because he is trying to emulate Hashem’s

mercy, as *Chazal* say to do – he is not acknowledging the *hamshachah* process, and he is simply trying to imitate the *middos* of Hashem, which is a nature of the *nefesh habehaimis*. As a result, his *nefesh habehaimis* will then have somewhat of an effect on his *nefesh haElokis*, because he is using his *nefesh haElokis* with the attitude of his *nefesh habehaimis*.

The downside to the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis* is that a person will [usually] attribute these *middos* as his own and view them as a part of his very “I”. In retrospect, the correct perspective to have towards the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis* is that they do not originate in the person. Rather, the *nefesh habehaimis* is trying to imitate the behavior of others. Having this attitude towards the *middos* in our *nefesh habehaimis* is what rectifies the *nefesh habehaimis*. On a deeper level, the *nefesh habehaimis* is rectified when it succeeds in imitating the *middos* of the *nefesh haElokis*.

To understand this in subtler terms, since the *middos* of the *nefesh haElokis* are entirely a *hamshachah*/extension of Hashem’s *middos*, the *nefesh habehaimis* is rectified via the means of the *hamshachah* that is carried through the *nefesh haElokis*, for the *hamshachah* of Hashem’s *middos* can extend [via the *middos* of the *nefesh haElokis*] all the way until the lowest point of the *nefesh habehaimis*.

However, practically speaking, the *hamshachah* of the *nefesh haElokis* will not be able to extend all the way throughout the entire *nefesh habehaimis* until the time of the future, with the resurrection of the dead. In our current era, we cannot reach total self-perfection, and therefore the only way right now to correct the *nefesh habehaimis* is to view its *middos* as nothing but a means of imitation of another source. This perspective is [currently] the depth of rectifying all of the *middos* in our *nefesh habehaimis*.

### ***Two Distinct Approaches Towards Character Improvement***

As mentioned earlier, there are two, fundamental approaches towards character improvement (*tikkun hamiddos*). There is a way to deal with each of the *middos* separately, and there is an approach that tackles the root of the *middos*: nullifying the will (*bittul haratzon*).

(Within *bittul haratzon*, we mentioned two ways to do it. One way is to contemplate, in the mind, to give up a desire for something. Another way is to verbalize, with passion (“ignited lips”, as Reb Yisrael Salanter describes it) that we are giving up the desire. This particular method, “ignited lips”, is the root of Reb Yisrael Salanter’s entire approach towards character improvement and self-discipline.)

It is with this in mind that Reb Yisrael Salanter founded his entire approach that all of character improvement depends on refining the power of imagination. Since the root of man’s *avodah* is *tikkun hamiddos*/character improvement, and the character traits found in the “animal” soul (the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis*) do not come from their own independent source – rather, they are learned behaviors picked up from others [a nature that stems from the “*medameh*” aspect, which

seeks to imitate], the way of *avodah* of dealing with the root is thus to deal with the power of *medameh* [the imagination].

However, in light of what has been explained in this chapter, we have an additional approach to dealing with the character traits of the “animal” soul: through developing the attitude that the “animal” soul has no inherent character traits of its own, and that it is entirely fueled by *medameh*/imitating.

In other words, in the initial, unrefined state of “animal” soul, before it is improved, a person will perceive his own learned behaviors as part of his own character. He will compare himself to others and then try to imitate their character traits, but those character traits that he imitates are not his own; they are learned behaviors and thus are not an intrinsic part of his character. But when a person shines the “G-dly” dimension of the soul (the *nefesh haElokis*) upon the animal soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*), he reveals the perspective that the animal soul’s nature to imitate doesn’t have to be used with regards to imitating the character of others; that he doesn’t have to be like Hevel, who only brought a sacrifice to Hashem because he was trying to imitate Kayin. Rather, he elevates this nature to imitate, by gaining the awareness that his *middos* are an extension of Hashem’s *middos* that are revealed in the Torah, which are enabled to reach him through the G-dly dimension of his soul.

This very perspective, which is contained in the “G-dly” part of the soul can be shined upon the “animal” part of the soul [and thereby improve it].

### ***The Difference Between The Character Traits of Yisrael and The Gentiles***

Now that we have sharpened the difference between the *middos* of the *nefesh habehaimis* and the *middos* found in the *nefesh haElokis*, we can now understand the well-known words of *Chazal*: “There are three traits [that are distinct] in Yisrael: They are compassionate, they are bashful, and they do kindness.”<sup>144</sup>

It would seem that these three particular worthy traits are only in the Jewish people, because *Chazal* say that they are found in the nation of Yisrael. However, we can all see that gentiles can also have these traits. Sometimes, a gentile can act compassionate to others, and perform kind acts, etc. So why are the traits of compassion, bashfulness, and kindness unique to the Jewish people?

The answer to this as follows.

Let’s say we ask a person why he has compassion on others, or why he performs kind acts for others. He may answer, “Because that’s what I was raised to do”, or, “I’m continuing the ways that my parents did.” If this was the particular reason that was motivating him right now in being compassionate or kind, that’s one thing, but if this is his general attitude throughout life of why he acts compassionate or kind to others, he is acting entirely from the “animal” level of his soul, which tries to be similar to others and which forms learned behaviors (in other words, *medameh*).

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<sup>144</sup> *Yevamos 79a*



With this in mind, let's now consider the difference between the soul of a gentile and the soul of a Jew. The gentiles do not have a *nefesh haElokis* (G-dly dimension) in their souls; they only possess a *nefesh habehaimis*, the “animal” level of the soul. The trait of compassion which the “animal” soul is capable of exercising, which a gentile can perform, is a result of learned behavior, due to animal soul's characteristic to try to resemble others and imitate them (*medameh*). So if a gentile shows compassion to another, he must have compared himself to another person whom he saw being compassionate, and he sought to imitate that person. That is the source of where he is drawing forth his compassion from.

In contrast, the trait of compassion inherent in the Jewish people is essentially a trait of compassion that is “borrowed” from Hashem, making a Jew the “temporary owner” of this trait. That is why *Chazal* defined the trait of compassion [as well as bashfulness and kindness] as unique traits of the Jewish people.

### ***Each Person Is Drawn Towards Imitating Certain Behaviors***

In light of what we have understood above about the “*medameh*” aspect present in the *nefesh habehaimis* and in the *nefesh haElokis*, we can now understand another important point about *medameh*/imagination/imitating.

There is something to wonder about the ability of *medameh*: It manifests differently with each person. Reuven might see Shimon getting angry and then imitate Shimon's anger, whereas Shimon may see Levi acting conceited and then imitating Levi's conceited nature, etc. It is upon us to understand: Why is Reuven drawn specifically towards imitating the trait of anger that he has seen in another, as opposed to other character traits he observes in others which he doesn't imitate? Likewise, why is Shimon drawn towards imitating the trait of conceit in particular, and not any of the other character traits that he sees in others?

The answer to this lies in understanding a statement of *Chazal*, “He who sees a *sotah* (a wayward wife, suspected of adultery) in her ruination, should abstain from wine.”<sup>145</sup> From this we learn that there is a negative point in the soul which seeks out evil. (As to what motivates this evil desire, that is a separate discussion, and we are not dealing with that here).

There is also a verse, “*Those who love Hashem despise evil*”<sup>146</sup>, which implies that if one does not love Hashem, he will love evil. From the above two teachings, we can see that the force of *medameh* which seeks to compare itself with others and imitate others is also influenced by one's personal affinities. If a person feels particularly drawn towards imitating the trait of conceit, or anger, it means that his own force of *medameh* has a particular preference for those traits that it is trying to imitate.

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<sup>145</sup> *Berachos* 63a

<sup>146</sup> *Tehillim* 97:10

### *How “Medameh” (Imitating) Is The Root of All Evil*

From a deeper understanding, a person is not born with any of the actual character traits that he practices. Rather, he is drawn towards certain character traits, based on the personal preference of his own force of *medameh*. The evil inclination will cause a person to think that any of his evil character traits are inherently a part of him, and this is mainly how it sways people into having an erroneous perspective about themselves [causing people to think that each of these bad *middos* are a part of their essence]. But the truth is, as we have explained here, that there is only single force in the animal soul: *medameh*, which seeks to imitate the character of others. It is the single root of all the evil character traits.

Anyone who is familiar with the words of Reb Yisrael Salanter [in *Iggeres HaMussar*] and studies his words in-depth will see that this fundamental understanding is often the theme running throughout his words: the root of all faulty character traits is only one negative force – *medameh*/imitating.

This can be explained further. The main characteristic of *medameh* is the very fact that it claims resemblance to something. To give an illustration of this, the *Gemara* says Queen Esther “appeared” (“*nidmis*”, from the word “*medameh*”) to each of the nations as being of their origin.<sup>147</sup> Their *medameh* was at work, claiming that Esther resembled a particular people, because each of these nations felt that they resembled her.

Any of the faulty character traits that we may possess are therefore not an intrinsic part of our nature that we are born with. Rather, they are entirely a product of the force in the soul of *medameh*, which causes a person to imitate certain character traits that he sees in others. Although we have distinct names for each of the faulty character traits, such as conceit, lust, anger, and etc., the truth is that they are always a product of *medameh*. It is the force of *medameh* causes a person to want to imitate those character traits that he has seen in others.

So for example, when we consider the trait of *gaavah* (conceit), we should understand that it is not actually “*gaavah*” per se, and it would be more precise to look at it as “*gaavah d’medameh*” – a trait of conceit that is nothing but a branch and result of the force of *medameh*/imitating. This is because the single root negative force in us is the nature to try to be similar to others and to thereby imitate any of these learned behaviors.

What is the root of this matter? Hashem created a force of evil, which He placed in the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra*, the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil”. Now that evil existed in Creation, the Serpent could coax Chavah into eating of the *Eitz HaDaas*. It convinced her using the power of *medameh* – meaning, it convinced her to compare herself with the *Eitz HaDaas* (specifically, the “*ra*”/evil aspect of the *Eitz HaDaas*). But there is no inherent evil in man.

Even after Adam and Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra*, and evil entered them, this did not mean that evil became a part of their essence. Rather, it meant that ever since the sin, the force of *medameh*/imagination/imitating leads people to believe that evil is a part of their essence, their

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<sup>147</sup> *Megillah 7a*

very “I”. The force of *medameh*, which entered man due to the aspect of evil contained in the *Eitz HaDaas*, is what causes man to think that the evil which has entered him is a part of him.<sup>148</sup> In contrast, the true perspective is that there is only evil contained in Creation: the nature to imitate anything that is evil. That was essentially the “*ra*” (evil) contained in the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra*.

### ***The Proper Attitude Towards Sinning and Repentance***

Now that we have understood how evil is not a part of man’s actual essence, we can have the correct perspective of how to do *teshuvah* (repentance) from a sin. When a person falls into an act of sin (G-d forbid), the first thing he needs to do in order to repent is to recognize that on his current level, the sin is part of him. The *Nefesh HaChaim* says that before Adam sinned, evil was an outer force; although there is a verse “*Man is born as a wild mule*”<sup>149</sup>, before the sin, this was an external force, outside of man, and it was not internal. After man ate from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra*, the outer force of evil has turned into a part of him.

But after a person recognizes that his act of sinning belongs to the aspect of evil found in man, correction can now occur. If a person, after sinning, immediately attributes it to an external force that is not part of him, then he will never even begin the steps of *teshuvah*.

To give an example of how to apply this understanding, if a person falls into the sin of stealing from someone else (G-d forbid), understandably, the first thing he needs to do in order to repent over what he has done is to return what he stole. After that, he needs to do the steps of *teshuvah*, which is to regret the sin and confess it [and to resolve not to commit the sin again]. Only after that can he correct the root of his folly, by viewing the sin as an external force that is not a part of him. But if he reverses the order of these steps, and instead he immediately begins the *teshuvah* process by viewing the sin as an external force, then he will simply be fooling himself and excusing himself from his incorrect behavior.

### ***Evil Is Only Present In The “Animal” Soul, Not In The “G-dly” Soul***

There is a verse, “*From the mouth of the Above, evils shall not come forth.*”<sup>150</sup> This teaches us the principle that anything which extends forth (*hamshachah*) from Hashem cannot contain any evil in it. Evil never comes “directly” from Hashem, so to speak. Rather, it comes from an absence of the

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<sup>148</sup> During this class, the Rav was asked: “How can a person ever know if he is doing the right thing, since his entire “I” is perceived only through his imagination, and thus we never know if our motivations are coming from our actual “I” or our imagination?” The Rav responded: “There is no way to ever know if you’re doing the right thing. (This is the concept called *safek d’kedushah* – holy doubt; we must always be in doubt about if we are doing the will of Hashem or not). For this reason, we have to keep purifying ourselves more and more – not only on a major scale, but on every last detail in our life.”

<sup>149</sup> *Iyov* 11:12

<sup>150</sup> *Eichah* 3:38

light that extends forth from Hashem.<sup>151</sup> When there anything becomes separated from its Source, this is what creates the reality known as evil.

Here is an example of this. *Chazal* state, “Every *tzaddik* [in the Next World] is singled by the canopy of his friend”.<sup>152</sup> One of the explanations of this matter is because there is a concept of “the jealousy of scholars”, which, although it has the benefit of causing an “increase of wisdom” as the Sages state<sup>153</sup>, and although this is a holy kind of jealousy, it is still jealousy, which is one of the traits that remove a person from the world<sup>154</sup>, and a trait which causes “rotting of the bones”.<sup>155</sup>

### ***The Proper Perspective Towards Learning From Stories of Tzaddikim***

Let’s now translate these concepts into practical action. Let’s consider the idea of reading stories of *tzaddikim*. Is this a good thing to do, or not? In light of what we have said here, reading stories of *tzaddikim* awakens the faculty of *medameh* in a person, for a person reading about how the *tzaddikim* acted will wish to imitate the *tzaddikim*, because he will want to resemble them and how they acted. One of the greatest errors that a person can make, which is commonly the case with aspiring teenagers and adolescents (and in some adults who are still at a childish level) is to fall into the trap of aspiring to reach the high levels of the *tzaddikim*. It is an awakening for holiness, but it becomes ensnared by the animal soul’s tendency to imitate other people, and this can lead to a person to his downfall.

But if a person is reading stories of *tzaddikim* as a means to improve his own current level, he is acting sensible, because he is using the stories of *tzaddikim* as an incentive to reach a little bit higher than where he is now, which is within his reach. From a deeper understanding, he is actually using his *nefesh habehaimis* in a holy manner, as a means to reach his *nefesh haElokis*, and it is like “*The ladder was footed in the ground, and its head reached the heavens*”.<sup>156</sup> In this way, a person draws forth inspiration from reading stories of *tzaddikim*, on a practical and realistic level that is within his reach.

Although *Chazal* said that “One is obligated to say, “When will my deeds reach the level of the deeds performed by my forefathers?”<sup>157</sup>, his does not mean that one should simply ‘try to be like’ the *Avos*. The intention of *Chazal* is rather that every person in his soul has the root of “Avraham”, the root of “Yitzchok” and the root of “Yaakov.” The three *Avos* were the roots of the traits of lovingkindness (Avraham), awe (Yitzchok), and truth (Yaakov). Just as the traits of Hashem extend into one’s *nefesh haElokis*, where the soul is then able to receive those G-dly traits, in a similar vein, did our *Avos* bequeath these traits to their descendants.

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<sup>151</sup> Editor’s Note: as explained at length in *sefer Daas Tevunos of the Ramchal*

<sup>152</sup> *Bava Basra* 75a

<sup>153</sup> *Bava Basra* 22a

<sup>154</sup> *Avos* 4:21

<sup>155</sup> *Mishlei* 14:30

<sup>156</sup> *Beraishis* 28:12

<sup>157</sup> *Tana D’vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 25

## **Conclusion**

This is how we fix our entire *nefesh habehaimis*, the animalistic part of the soul: to recognize that our *middos* are not intrinsic. We do not – and cannot - have any *middos* of our own. Our bad *middos* come from our *medameh* – we have compared ourselves with others and picked up bad *middos* from our surroundings. The good *middos* we have are only *middos* that we learned from the way we grew up and from our surroundings, and therefore we haven't really developed the power of our good *middos*.

We gain good *middos* only when we “compare” ourselves with how we are supposed to act – the *middos* of Hashem. This is the good kind of *medameh* we can utilize, which will counter the evil kind of *medameh* we have been utilizing until now.

The more and more a person recognizes this – not just to internalize this matter in his heart, but to let it penetrate into his animalistic part of the soul – the more he we will fix the animalistic part of the soul.

## **Questions & Answers With The Rav**

**Q:** *If so - that every middah we have can only come from Hashem – does that mean that we do no really have rachamim (compassion) on others, but only if we are medameh (resembling) ourselves to Hashem, who has rachamim?*

**A:** Very good question; this is a very fundamental question. However, all our *middos* really come from our *medameh* – we pick up good *middos* from others, because we compare ourselves to others. For example, we have *rachamim* towards others because we picked it up from somewhere, so we are comparing ourselves to what we saw, and that is how we act merciful. Many people act kind because they were simply raised in a home where kindness is practiced; but is that the only reason why we should be kind – because we were raised that way? This is a good example of how our *middos* are never intrinsic, but rather from how we compare ourselves to situations.

When we remain with our *middos* which stem from our *medameh*, although such *middos* can definitely help us open ourselves up to that good *middah*, still, we shouldn't remain our entire lives with such undeveloped *middos*. Any of our good *middos* which we simply picked up from others are not intrinsic – they are just coming from our power of *medameh*/comparing ourselves to others, and therefore we need to develop our actual *middos*. So we cannot base our good *middos* in life on how we grew up and what we learned from others – these good *middos* are just *middos* from our *nefesh habehaimis* - because we are simply comparing ourselves to others - and thus we have to develop our *middos* more.

**Q:** *Doesn't our pull towards evil simply stem from the pull towards evil, and not from comparing ourselves to the evil middah?*

**A:** All of the bad *middos* come from our *medameh* – we compare ourselves to those who we saw having the bad *middah*. A person who gets angry, for example, only gets angry because he saw someone else get angry, and thus he learns anger and picks it up from others. When a person has *gaavah*, although we call it “*gaavah*”, it’s really a manifestation of *medameh*, and it’s just being played out through *gaavah*. The problem with *gaavah* isn’t stemming from one’s *gaavah* – it’s stemming from his *medameh*, which has caused him to learn and pick up *gaavah* from others.

The fact that there is a general pull towards evil is a separate issue, and it is not what we are discussing. We are discussing the cause for all bad *middos*. All bad *middos* are not simply because we have bad *middos*, but because we have compared ourselves to others who we saw that have the bad *middah*. Therefore, the solution to all bad *middos* is not to deal with the actual bad *middos*, but to uproot the power of *medameh*/comparing ourselves with others, which is the root cause of the bad *middah*.

**Q:** *Is there any middah in our nefesh habehaimis which stands on its own and does not come from our medameh?*

**A:** Yes, because there is a general pull towards evil – a desire for evil. Before Adam and Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, people had a pull towards evil, but we did not perceive our “I” as having any evil in it. After Adam and Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, imagination entered us, and now people start out life thinking that their actual “I” contains evil, because a person compares himself with evil, and thus he learns how to act evil.

**Q:** *How can a person ever know if he is doing the right thing, since his entire “I” is perceived only through his imagination, and thus we never know if our motivations are coming from our actual “I” or our imagination?*

**A:** There is no way to ever know if you’re doing the right thing. (This is the concept called *safek d’kedushah* – holy doubt; we must always be in doubt about if we are doing the will of Hashem or not). For this reason, we have to keep purifying ourselves more and more – not only on a major scale, but on every last detail in our life.

## 1.11 | *Shedding Faulty Character & Connecting To Hashem's Middos*<sup>158</sup>

*In this last chapter, we will conclude the topic of “medameh” [which can take on the form of either imagination, comparing, or imitating]. Understandably, for all areas of Torah, there is always more to explain. We have focused here only on presenting the roots of the matter. We will continue here to explain about “medameh” that is found in our nefesh habehaimis (“animal” layer of the soul) and in our nefesh haElokis (“G-dly” layer of the soul).*

*As explained earlier, the point of “medameh” in the soul has no other use of its own, other than to imitate. The power of “medameh” is not just part of the many abilities of the soul; it is more than just a fundamental ability in the soul. The true definition is that since man is called “adameh”, the **only** function in the soul is essentially “medameh”.*

*However, “medameh” manifests differently in each person. Therefore, each person is “medameh” himself to a particular thing or person he is drawn towards. But the common denominator between all people is that the only ability in our soul is “medameh”.*

*We also explained the difference between our nefesh habehaimis (animal soul) and our nefesh haElokis (G-dly soul). The “medameh” found in our nefesh habehaimis has nothing of its own, thus it seeks to imitate something else in order to gain an identity. This form of “medameh” cannot actually draw forth virtues from others, however. Instead, it attempts to imitate and copy that which it is drawn towards.*

### ***The “Animal” Soul Denies Its Own Nature of Imitating***

[In spite of the fact that all of the character traits found in our “animal” soul are essentially learned behaviors that we have picked up from others], a person will usually deny this fact. A person will tend to think that his *middos* are uniquely his own, and that he did not gain these *middos* from imitating others.

Deep down, the “animal” soul denies the reality of its own power of *medameh*. For this reason, the force of “medameh” is sometimes referred to as a “spark of idol worship”, a subtle form of declaring oneself as a Creator, just as Pharaoh declared that he made the Nile. The very fact that one denies his nature to imitate others, where he thinks that all of his virtues have been acquired on his own, is an offshoot of idol worship, and that is the depth of the evil contained in the force of “medameh”.

This denial of the reality of “medameh” is stemming solely from the *nefesh habehaimis*, whereas the perspective of the *nefesh haElokis* is to recognize that it contains no *middos* other than *medameh*,

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<sup>158</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-011-conclusion>

from which it seeks to resemble the *middos* of Hashem, and this is accomplished via the means of revealing the *middos* of the Torah; that is how it “draws upon” itself the *middos* of Hashem.

Thus, the function of *medameh* in the *nefesh haElokis* is essentially a means to extend the *middos* of Hashem upon the soul (this is called *hamshachah*/continuation), via the means of the Torah.

### ***The Sadness That Results From Medameh/Imitating***

In light of all that has been said until now, we can now understand that there is a relationship between imagination and sadness, which we mentioned about in the first chapter.

When a person realizes that his “animal soul” (the *nefesh habehaimis*) has one single characteristic – its force of *medameh* [which wants to imitate the character traits of others] - he will come to realize that he is empty from any qualities of his own accord. He will feel like “destitute one, who has nothing of his own”. Coming to this realization can make a person experience a deep, profound kind of sadness that even his “animal soul” can become depressed from. We will explain why.

*Chazal* describe a measurement called “*amah atzuvah*”, which is a hint to the word *atzvus* (sadness), implying that when something is constricted to an exact measurement, there is resulting sadness. Sadness results whenever a person feels constricted to where he is, and he feels too contained. There is partial constriction, and there is sometimes total constriction, which is the meaning of the term “destitute one, who has nothing of his own.”

Whenever a person is deficient in something, it can bring him to sadness, but when a person comes to feel like the “destitute one, who has nothing of his own”, he is in a state where he can feel the most absolute kind of sadness that the soul can know of.

### ***The Absolute Level of Sadness***

In the side of holiness, there is also a power of “absolute sadness”, and that is when we mourn the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, where we express sadness over the general state of destruction that we are in, for the *Beis HaMikdash* kept up the [spiritual] existence of the world. But the “animal” level of the soul uses “absolute sadness” in an impaired manner. When one perceives that there is nothing in his soul other than *medameh*, [the force that wishes to imitate], this discovery about the soul can be so disillusioning to the person that it makes him experience a very deep and absolute state of sadness.

Since most people are in any case not aware of what their animal soul contains, and they instead think that there are many *middos* in the soul and they are unaware that there is nothing but *medameh* in the soul, they do not reach this kind of sadness. They have an erroneous perspective about themselves, so in turn, they bypass this deep sadness we are describing here. Even when people experience despair or sadness, it is usually not because of this discovery about their soul. It is simply



because they feel empty inside themselves, without a clear understanding that the only force in their soul is *medameh*.

### ***The Absolute Level of Conceitedness***

Others, upon realizing that there is nothing in their soul other than the force of *medameh*, will go to the opposite extreme. Instead of experiencing profound sadness, they will become immensely conceited about themselves. They prefer to run away from the reality of being a “destitute one, who has nothing of his own.”

They are drawn to the opposite extreme of sadness, because they don’t want to meet up with the sadness, and so instead they run away to the opposite extreme of the sadness, and they stay there on an extreme level. So when one realizes that there is nothing in his soul other than *medameh* and that he has “nothing of his own”, he may instead become very conceited about himself.

The root of this perspective came from Esav, who is called “*Edom*”, which as the same root letters as the word “*medameh*.” The holy use of *medameh* is the holy use of the power of “*adameh*”, “I will resemble”, man’s power to elevate himself to holiness, where he becomes the true level of “*adam*”, man. Esav/Edom, though, used “*adameh*” for evil. He embarrassed his firstborn rights by selling them to Yaakov, which later became the source of his own sadness, when he realized that it had been taken away from him. On the other hand, the prophet said about Esav that no matter how high of a level of success that he ascends to, Hashem will bring him down from his success and haughtiness.<sup>159</sup>

*Chazal* said that when Yaakov Avinu saw the angels ascending the ladder on his dream, he saw that the angels who represent Bavel were climbing 70 rungs, which meant that they would last for 70 years, and that Media would last for 52 years, Greece would last for 180 years, and Edom [Rome] kept climbing the ladder, with no end in sight. Yaakov then grew afraid, because he feared that the exile of Esav/Edom would never end. Hashem reassured him not to be afraid, and He said to him, “Do not fear, my servant, Yaakov. Even if he (Edom) climbs all the way until he is sitting next to Me, I will bring him down from there.”<sup>160</sup>

The other nations of the world have their limitations and end, but Edom seems to have no limitations. What is the reason? It is because Esav’s thinking is “*Behold, I am going to die*”, he feels the despair that he has nothing of his own, and as we explained earlier, the feeling of being a “destitute who has nothing of his own” can result in either one of two extremes: sadness, or conceitedness. Instead of feeling sad and empty about himself, Esav chose the other extreme, conceitedness, as Pharaoh said, “*The Nile, it belongs to me*”. Instead of reaching the feeling that there is nothing in the soul other than *medameh* and that a person has nothing of his own accord, there is the other extreme that Esav went to, of thinking that he is everything.

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<sup>159</sup> *Ovadyah 1:4*

<sup>160</sup> *Vayikra Rabbah 29*

According to the amount of conceit that a person has, that is how much corresponding emptiness he will or will not feel. [If he has a lot of conceit, he won't feel any emptiness in himself, and if he is not that conceited, he will feel the emptiness]. Therefore, the deep reason of why most people do not become so terribly conceited about themselves is because they have not yet uncovered their own inner emptiness.

When a person is aware that the force of *medameh* is the only characteristic in the soul, he understands that his entire existence must be used to come to resemble Hashem, as it was said [of man, that he was created] “*In our image, and in our likeness.*”<sup>161</sup> But if a person runs away from recognizing *medameh* and he goes to the opposite extreme, he will view himself as being an all-inclusive and godlike being, such as Pharaoh's attitude that the Nile belonged to him and that he had created it, which is a perspective of total idol worship. That is where absolute conceitedness stems from, and it is a result of running away from recognizing the force of *medameh* in the soul.

### ***The Inner Workings Behind These Two Extremes***

These two opposite extremes (sadness and conceit) which result from discovering *medameh* are also rooted in an understanding about the four elements of the soul: earth, water, wind, and fire.

There are two groups of elements that oppose each other, and those two groups of elements also work together with another element. Fire and water are opposing elements to each other, and earth and wind are opposing elements to each other. Fire and earth both share the property of dryness, and that is what enables them to work together, in spite of the fact that earth is a cold element and fire is a hot element.

“Dryness”, or [a feeling of] emptiness in the soul, results from the perspective that “*medameh*” is the only power in the soul. On one hand, this perspective can lead one towards the element of earth, which causes him to feel very nullified, which leads towards absolute sadness. On the other hand, it can lead to the opposite of this, the “dryness” of fire, which is the source of the trait of conceitedness. That enables a person to ignore how *medameh* is the only force in the soul, and to instead inflate his own sense of self-worth, to the point that he will think that he is the source of everything, and that everything else should become like him. This is the depth of the “spark of idol worship” which lays in *medameh*, which is due to the the “animal” level of the soul's impaired use of the power of *medameh*.

### ***The Fundamental Understanding About Our Soul***

Based upon the above, we can now understand the following deep point. If a person is using the power of *medameh* but he doesn't have the perspective that the *medameh* is the only force in the soul, it means that he is really not using his power of *medameh*!

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<sup>161</sup> *Beraishis 1:26*

Whenever a person uses *medameh* [whether for good or for bad], if he thinks that *medameh* is just one of the many abilities in the soul, he is only using the *medameh* on a “branch” level, and he is never accessing it at the “root”. As a result, there is very little he will be able to do with his power of *medameh*, because he is never using the root of *medameh*.

In contrast, if one has clarified well what’s in his soul and he has reached the discovery that there is nothing in his soul other than *medameh*, he will be able to do a great deal using his power of *medameh*. On a deeper level, the entire ability of the prophets was that they were able to provide a mental picture to the information that they received, as is written, “*And in the hands of the prophets, I will resemble*”.<sup>162</sup> The prophets had reached “*adameh l’Elyon*” (I will resemble the One Above), meaning, that the prophet reached the attitude that all of the abilities in the soul are nothing but the power of *medameh*. From this understanding, their power of *medameh* received great strength.

To give a parable that illustrates what we mean, if you have a barrel that has once faucet, and you open the faucet, the force of the water coming out will be much stronger, but if there are ten faucets in the barrel and you open up all ten faucets, the water will come out of each faucet at a much lighter speed.

Compare this to the structure of the soul, which has many powers that are essentially one single power, *medameh*. If we view our soul as having many different abilities and that the force of *medameh* just happens to be one of these many abilities, there will be much less of an effect of the power of *medameh* upon the soul. But if we view our soul with the perception that it only contains one single power, *medameh*, then all of the abilities in the soul will become centralized into one place, and we will see them all as being part of *medameh*, which in turn will give the power of *medameh* greater strength.

The more that *medameh* is strengthened in this way, the more a person is able to reach “*adameh l’Elyon*” - to “resemble” the Creator.

### ***“Adameh L’Elyon”: Resembling Hashem – Through Recognizing That Medameh Is The Only Force In The Soul***

This particular perspective, the fact that there is no power in the soul other than the power of *medameh* alone, will also have bearings on the lower uses of *medameh* [the imagination], but on a deeper note, the ability of *adameh l’Elyon* also stems from this perspective.

As long as a person views his soul as a conglomerate of many various forces that are not connected with *medameh*, and he attempts to use *medameh* to reach *adameh l’Elyon*, we can say without a doubt that he will not succeed, because he will not be able to climb to such a high level when his power of *medameh* is weak, for he hasn’t yet strengthened it, because he thinks that it is just one of the many forces in his soul.

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<sup>162</sup> *Hoshea 12:11*

There is also a deeper way to define this concept. In order for a person to resemble the One Above, he must access the perspective of “Just as He is the Individual One in the upper realms, so is man the individual one, in the lower realms.” Meaning, to the degree that man recognizes that his only power is *medameh*, and he channels that power to resemble the Creator, he gains the characteristic of being an “individual”, and in turn, he will have the strength to completely reach the Individual One of the world.

But if a person has the attitude that he has many soul abilities which are unrelated to *medameh*, he does not make it possible for himself to use the power of “individual”, and then he can't elevate his existence to come to “resemble” Hashem.

However, we must know that this *avodah*, of connecting to the Root of all roots, is the highest use of *medameh*. But even if a person hasn't even begun to start reaching for this lofty level, he can still arrive at a clear attitude that the only power in his soul is the power of *medameh*. This in turn will greatly strengthen and fuel his power of *medameh*, and then he will be able to accomplish much using his power of *medameh*. The more a person clarifies and refines his power of *medameh* and its role, the greater of an effect his power of *medameh* will be able to accomplish.

### ***Accessing The Power of “Medameh” Of The G-dly Soul***

Even more so, as it was explained about at length earlier, the characteristic of the “animal” level of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*) is to imagine the non-existent, and as we have already mentioned in the previous chapters, most “imagination techniques” that people use today stem from the methods of gentiles, which have unfortunately now spread into the lives of Torah Jews. Those approaches are based on the idea of imagining the non-existent, and it is not based on the understanding that our entire power of *medameh* is but a *hamshachah*, a continuation and expansion, of Hashem's *middos*.

We have explained that when one truly uses the power of *medameh*/imagination for holiness, he does so using the light of the *nefesh haElokis* (the “G-dly” level) in the soul, which does not imagine the non-existent [i.e. imagining that one is drawing forth power from his own soul in order to improve himself], but rather that he reveals the power of *medameh* as a reality that recognizes [that it has no inherent power of its own, and] that it all it can do is draw forth power from Hashem onto the soul. Therefore, whenever a person wants to make use of the imagination, he first needs to develop it in holiness, which draws the matter he that is trying to imagine about, upon his soul [this is the process of *hamshachah*/extension].

Even more so, even when if a person is using the imagination for something purely worldly – for example, if he is imagining light, air, anything physical, he first needs to use the imagination in a way that draws forth holiness upon himself. He should take a holy image in his mind and then work with that image, accomplishing with it what he would like to do with his imagination.

But even if a person is using his power of *medameh* of the *nefesh haElokis*, with the awareness that it is nothing but *hamshachah*, if he hasn't yet arrived at the perception that there is nothing in his

soul other than *medameh*, and instead he thinks that he has many various forces in his soul and that *medameh* is just one of these forces, he will not be able to accomplish anything even through the means of *hamshachah*.

When he tries to draw anything upon his soul, there will instead be a great ‘mixture’ of many forces in his soul. In his perception, there are many forces in his soul, and the force of *medameh* is just one of these many forces, so when he tries to use *medameh* via the means of *hamshachah*, he thinks he is working with just ‘another’, additional power in his soul. There will be a mixture of forces that he draws upon himself: he thinks that his *middos* are his own, because he is unaware that their entire source is *medameh*, and mixed with this is the external force that he is trying to draw onto himself.

In other words, if a person does not use the power of *medameh* in a holy way, his “animal soul” will misuse the power of imagination, and it will imagine the non-existent. He will be working with fantasies, and he will create a mixture of reality and fantasy in his soul. But even if a person uses the power of *medameh* correctly, through *hamshachah*, and he is not imagining the non-existent, if he views *medameh* as just one of the many forces in the soul, he creates a “mixture” in the forces of his soul, because part of it will be reality, the forces of his soul which do exist, and the other part of it will be the forces that he is trying to draw upon himself from external sources, via the means of *medameh*.

Thus, there are two detriments that result from viewing the soul as a collection of many different souls and with a lack of awareness that their entire source is the power of *medameh*. One negative result of this is that a person won’t be able to draw anything upon his soul through *medameh*. A worse result is that even if he does draw anything upon his soul through *medameh*, a “mixture” will get created in his soul, and as a result from this, there will be an imbalanced perspective created in his soul. Thus, a person needs to reach the understanding that there is nothing in his soul other than the power of *medameh*. At first, this perspective can only be received on an intellectual level by the person, and after becoming aware of it, one needs to then internalize it deeply into his heart, where it becomes an inner, fundamental perspective to him.

This is the deepest kind of self-nullification (*bittul*) that one can reveal in his soul, because from then on, a person will recognize that none of the powers in his own soul are his own at all, and that they are rather a form of *hamshachah* (extension of Hashem’s *middos*), which are revealed by way of the Torah.

### ***A Deep Way Of Shedding Character Traits and Gaining Good Character***

In light of what has been said here, let us understand the following point which is very deep.

There are situations in which a person needs to “switch” his *middos*. For example, if a person wants to make the transition from sadness to happiness, or from laziness to alacrity, etc. How indeed can a person have the ability to make the transition between *middos*?

As long as a person believes that his *middos* are his own, he cannot switch something that is “his own” with something that is not part of him. But if a person has the understanding that his *middos* are not actually his own, and that they are rather entirely an extension of Hashem’s *middos* which is allowed by the power of *medameh* in the soul, and that they are “temporarily borrowed” from Hashem (as explained in the previous chapter), then when there is a need for him to “switch” any of the *middos*, he can “return” his “borrowed item” to its Source – and then “draw” upon himself a different character trait.

This concept is not a mere idea. We are saying that as long as a person feels that his *middos* are his own, it will be most difficult for him to switch his *middos* when he needs to, and in contrast, when a person recognizes that his *middos* are “borrowed” from Hashem and that they are only allowed to reach him due to the process of *hamshachah*, he can draw upon himself through *hamshachah* any of the *middos* that he needs to use right now, ‘giving back’ the *middos* that he borrowed until now which right now he doesn’t have a use for. If he needs a different *middah* later, he can make the switch again, and draw upon himself a different *middah*.

### ***A Fundamental Approach Towards Character Improvement***

This approach, of “switching” one’s character traits, via drawing the *middos* of Hashem upon the soul [the power of *hamshachah*, which is enabled by *medameh* in the *nefesh haElokis*] is a totally different approach towards character improvement than the more popular approach that people have towards character improvement. Through it, a person attains a fundamental inner power which helps him deal with his own inner forces, and with character improvement in particular.

When one comes to a clear and deep recognition in his soul that there is nothing in his soul other than *medameh*, he will arrive at a deep *bittul* (self-nullification), and from then on, his *middos* will be revealed to him via the means of *hamshachah*.

First one needs to reach this perspective on an intellectual level, and after that, he must be able to feel it, as much as he possibly can, on his own level: Our *middos* are but an extension of Hashem’s *middos*, and they are not our own.

As a result of acquiring this fundamental attitude, whenever we want to nullify a certain *middah*, we don’t have to employ various methods that enable one to “break” the *middah*. Instead, the main *avodah* in improving our character should be focused on the realization that we have no inherent *middos* of our own. In that way, the soul will almost completely disconnect from that *middah* that we want to rid ourselves of right now.

Of course, this does not invalidate the need to break bad *middos*, and this is because the *medameh* will still contain some subtle aspects that still need to be purified even after this. But when we nullify a certain *middah*, by realizing that it is not our own, we return the *middah* to its root.

### ***A Note Before Continuing***

Before we continue, we must point out that these last two chapters, especially the subjects we are about to explain, are only meant for certain individuals to work on, who have reached very high levels. Most of the world is not found on this level of self-work, and for them, the words here have no practical relevance to them. But in order for our understanding of this matter to be complete, we should study these concepts, in order to finish and complete our understanding [of the power of imagination].

### ***A Review of the Map of The Levels of “Medameh”***

In the early chapters, we mentioned the existing forms of “*medameh*”:

1. ***Medameh of “Adamah” (Earth).***
2. ***Medameh of The “Nefesh HaBehaimis” (The Animal Soul).***
3. ***Medameh of The “Nefesh HaElokis” (The G-dly Soul).***
4. ***Medameh of The Middos (The Character Traits, which are present in the heart).***
5. ***“Tziyur” (The Heart’s Power of Holy Visualization)***
6. ***“Mochin” - The Brain’s Imagination***
7. ***“Dimuy Milsa L’Milsa” (Mental Comparison)***
8. ***The Middos of The Torah***
9. ***The Middos of Hashem***

### ***Attaching To The Middos of The Torah***

We will now discuss the stage of attaching oneself to the *middos* of the Torah. But first, it is upon us to understand in the first place the root of the *middos* of the Torah.

*Chazal* state that at first, Hashem wanted to create the world with the “attribute of judgment”, but He saw that the world would not exist this way, so He included in it the “attribute of mercy”.<sup>163</sup> Since the world was created in a way that “Hashem gazed into the Torah and created the world”<sup>164</sup>, that meant that when it first rose up in Hashem’s thoughts to create the world, the fact that He included the “attribute of mercy” into creation was also a part of how “Hashem gazed into the Torah and created the world.”

One of the names of the Torah is “*rachmana*”, “merciful”. This is because the “attribute of mercy” which Hashem included into the act of creation is not just a trait of being merciful, but that the Torah itself is revealed in the form of the “trait of mercy”. Therefore, the Torah is revealed via

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<sup>163</sup> *Beraishis Rabbah* 12

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 1

the means of the trait of mercy, and thus the term “*rachmana*” (merciful) has become the title of the Torah; one of the ways of how Torah is revealed is thus through “*rachmana*”.

Now let us reflect. When a person is learning Torah and he is exerting his mind to understand it, naturally speaking, he does not have the power to understand the depth of the Torah, because the Torah is called “*longer than the earth in measurement, and wider than the sea*”<sup>165</sup>, so it is above human comprehension. Therefore, the way to connect to and merit acquiring the Torah is, via the means of the general principles and “*middos*” of the Torah, and through this means, a person is able to approach the Torah and to give definitions to what he learns.

### ***The Way To Deeply Connect To The Torah***

Therefore, as long as person has not yet come to the perception that there is nothing in his soul other than *medameh*, he believes that his *middos* are his own, and so when he delves into studying the Torah and its *middos* (such as when he is learning any part of the Torah that is expounded through the 13 *middos* that Rabbi Yishmael taught, or the system of the 32 *middos*, etc.), his *middos* are not aligned with the *middos* of the Torah. The perception that he has towards his *middos* will be in contradiction with the *middos* of the Torah, and as a result, his understanding in Torah will be incomplete, and then the Torah will not be able to settle well upon his soul.

(However, if a person exerts himself in studying Torah, he attains a certain level of purification upon his soul, according to the degree that he has exerted himself. He will thereby attain some level of the Torah’s light, which will enable him to understand Torah at least on an intellectual level. But since the actual level of his soul is not aligned with the Torah, due to his erroneous perception that he has about his own *middos*, he will not be able to reveal the complete and deep connection to the Torah which is known as “Yisrael and the Torah are one.”)

*Chazal*<sup>166</sup> state about learning Torah that at first, the Torah is called by Hashem’s Name, and in the end [after a person immerses himself in its study and he becomes a Torah scholar], it is called by his own name [the name of the Torah scholar who exerts himself in it], for it is written, “*The Torah of Hashem is his desire, and in his Torah he delves, day and night*”, which implies that it can belong to any person who immerses himself in it (*Rashi* *ibid*). In light of what we have been explaining until now, besides for the simple meaning of this that when a person exerts himself in Torah it is called “his” Torah, the deeper understanding of this is because in order to reach the level in which one’s Torah is “his”, one needs to nullify his own existence to the Torah’s.

According to the simple understanding of this matter, the exertion that a person has in his Torah study is an expression of physical exertion and submission of physicality to the Torah. But besides for the physical level of exertion, which is certainly necessary in order to acquire Torah, there is also

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<sup>165</sup> *Iyov* 11:9

<sup>166</sup> *Avodah Zarah* 19a



a more inner kind of exertion that is needed: a deep power in the soul of self-nullification to the Torah, which one needs in order to connect himself to the Torah.

In order to attain this self-nullification that is needed to connect oneself to the Torah, one needs to recognize that he has no reality of his own, because his entire reality and strength derives from *medameh*, and since the world was created in the form of “Hashem gazed into the Torah and created the world”, the world is entirely mimicking the reality of the Torah, so the entire world is a form of *medameh* (imagination) that is meant to reflect the reality of the Torah. The Torah existed before the world, and Hashem gazed into the Torah and created a world which would be meant to become a resemblance of the Torah. Thus, all of reality as we know it is meant to resemble the Torah’s reality.

The gentile nations of the world, who did not merit the revelation of the Torah, are not able to perceive their existence as being part of the Torah’s reality. They perceive their existence as an existence that is separate reality unto itself. But the nation of Yisrael, who rose up first in Hashem’s thoughts to be created, who stood at Har Sinai and received the Torah, are connected in their root to the Torah, on the deep level of “Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one.” Thus, the nation of Yisrael is entirely a *medameh* (the imagination and resemblance) of the Torah.

### ***Becoming Aligned With The Torah: Finding Our Unique Part In The Torah***

Thus, in order to completely acquire our Torah learning, one needs to etch deeply into his soul the perception that he has no imagination, perception, or *middah* of his own – and that all of his *middos* are nothing but a means of becoming “similar” to the Torah’s reality.

However, it is upon us to understand that if the root of all the souls in the Jewish people is in the Torah, how is it that we see differences between one Jew and another? We can see clearly that Reuven is not like Shimon, and Shimon is not like Reuven, etc. What is the reason for all of these differences, if all of Yisrael are meant to be a resemblance of the Torah?

The answer to this is that it is explained in *sefarim hakedoshim* that the 600,000 souls in the Jewish people are parallel to the 600,000 letters of the Torah. [Thus, each Jew has his own unique “letter” in the Torah to reach]. Since every Jew has a root in the Torah, the power of *medameh* in every Jew’s soul is drawn toward a certain part in which it can become “similar” to the Torah, and this is the depth of the power of *medameh* in the soul.

### ***Attaching Ourselves To The Middos of Hashem***

When it comes to the Root of all roots, which is to attach ourselves to the *middos* of Hashem, which generally includes “the 13 traits of mercy” – in order to connect ourselves with these traits, a person must first reach the level of “You shall resemble him; just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful.”

As mentioned earlier, resembling the *middos* of Hashem doesn't just mean that we should try to act compassionate or kind simply because we want to emulate Hashem's compassion or kindness. Rather, it means to recognize that a person can only have good *middos* as an extension of Hashem's *middos*. It works in the same way that we explained before in regards to attaching ourselves to the *middos* of the Torah.

But in order to merit the level in which one's *middos* are an extension of Hashem's *middos*, we need to reach the inner perspective that there is nothing in our soul other than the power of *medamehl*/imitating.

### ***The Order Of Steps In Fixing Our Imagination***

As we conclude this book, it is very important to emphasize that one should not attempt to begin with trying to implement the concepts explained in these last two chapters, which are higher levels. If a person tries to do it, it is almost certain that he will open a terrible and absolute kind of sadness in his soul, as we explained about earlier.

If a person immediately works on the higher stage, which is to recognize that the soul has nothing of its own and that all it can do is to imitate the behavior of others, this is a high level of acceptance which most people are not on the level of coming to terms with. It will cause a person to feel empty and deficient. Most people will either become terribly sad from it, and some people instead will take the opposite extreme, running away into a conceited and inflated version of themselves.

Therefore, in order to work on the points which we discussed until now, one needs to first work on all the steps of the *avodah* that were laid out in the beginning chapters, step after step. Let us summarize the *avodah* of working to improve the power of *medamehl*/imagination, practically speaking: First, a person should simply work with his power of imagination, by learning the art of mental comparison (*dimuy milsa l'milsa*), a power that is present in the "animal" level of the soul. One should try to develop the positive use of the power of imagination, using the methods described in the earlier chapters.

At this initial stage, a person's imagination will only be at the level of the "animal" soul, and this imagination contains a mixture of good and evil, because it hasn't yet been refined at that point. A person at this initial stage will not be able to view his *middos* as being an extension of Hashem's *middos*, and on a deeper note, the *middos* he recognizes in his animal soul are indeed not even coming from that higher source. However, as is the way of the world, in the first step towards improvement, one needs to work with the "animal" level of the soul.

Even in this first step, however, one needs to keep to all of rules of using the imagination properly, which we described in the earlier chapters. Also, at the first stage, the point is not to work with the imagination that much, but to develop the power of the intellect, to develop a holy mind, and the imagination should only be used minimally.

Only after that stage, can a person rise up the ladder of steps that has been laid out in this book, step after step, until the final stage, where one recognizes that there is nothing in his soul other than the power of *medameh*.<sup>167</sup>

### *Questions & Answers With The Rav*

**Q:** *How do we know if we are having a real thought (machshavah), or if it is just imagination (dimyon)?*

**A:** We are usually imagining. Anyone has never developed his thoughts is imagining most of the time. But when a person penetrates into the Torah and into the reality of Hashem, he is in touch with reality. Most people's thoughts are imagination, except for a few rare people who are totally immersed in learning Torah and who are attached with Hashem.

Only someone who is truly connected to the Torah – someone who learns Torah *lishmah* – has come out of his imagination. Anyone else is still in his imagination; except for a little light of the Torah which has penetrated him a little bit. It's possible that a person lives his whole life and he never even had one true thought, because all of his life is spent within his imagination.

**Q:** *If we are supposed to think that our middos are not our own, how do we work on our bad middos, since they are anyways not our own? Are we supposed to think, "I am working on a bad middah that is not my own...?"*

**A:** We have to realize that all of our bad middos are not a part of us, like a "strange god" that resides in us. Someone who realizes this more and more had begun to experience his personal redemption.

**Q:** *How am I supposed to view my imagination – is it that "I" have in myself a power to imagine, or is that my very "I" is being felt through my imagination?*

**A:** The latter.

**Q:** *How is that my "I" is being felt only through my imagination, if imagination is merely part of the thoughts?*

**A:** The sensing of our existence, *havayah*, is initially felt through one's imagination.

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<sup>167</sup> *At the end of the class, the Rav added on: "It should be noted that not everything said here applies to all people. Different people need different methods. If someone is finding these matters to be helpful to him, then he can continue to learn about these matters we will discuss, but if someone is not finding these matters to be helpful, then it's just wasting time from his Torah learning, and there is nothing wrong if he doesn't continue anymore with these classes; it's better for such a person to just sit and learn in the beis midrash. There are also those who will only get more confused if they hear about these matters – for such people, it's better for them not to come at all, because learning about this will only be harmful to them. For whatever reason, such people's souls are not meant to work on these matters. These lessons are only for those who are finding them to be of practical help – otherwise, to come hear about these matters and to try to work them is just bittul Torah."*

*Q: How can a person progress from working on one good middah to working on another good middah?*

A: When working on our middos, we aren't supposed to be working on all of the many details of this. What we have to do is work at the root of our middos. If we work at the root of our negative middos – which is our imagination – then all of the various details of all our bad middos will improve as well. Our main job in working on our middos is to work at solving the root of bad middos – which is to uproot our imagination and refine it.

However, this only works when a person works on his middos with that attitude, that the root can solve all the branches of the problem. If a person just works at the root of the problem but he's not aware that this also solves the many branches of his problem, it doesn't work. We can solve all our problems when we work to get rid of the root of the problem, but only if we go into it with that attitude.

# 2

## *Problems Caused by Imagination*

*The next 6 chapters  
were previously  
printed in the sefer  
דע את מחשבותיך*

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*These final 6 chapters were previously printed in the Hebrew sefer דע את מחשבותיך .*

## 2.12 | *The Imagination*<sup>168</sup>

### *Intellect and Imagination*

A person is created with two main mental powers - the power of *chochmah* (intellect) and the power of *medameh* (Our emotions rule over our minds imagination).

It is written, “*Let us make man in our image (betzalmeinu) and in our form (kedemuseinu).*”<sup>169</sup> We are taught<sup>170</sup> that the word “*betzalmeinu*” refers to the power of the intellect. In other words, our human intellect is an example of how we are created “in the image of Hashem”. In contrast, the root of the word “*kedemuseinu*” is “*medameh*”. This word is usually interpreted as the “imagination”.<sup>171</sup>

### *Two Levels of the Imagination*

We can divide the concept of imagination into two types - ‘higher level imagination’ and ‘lower level imagination’. ‘Higher level imagination’ is based on mental reasoning and grounded in reality. In contrast, ‘lower level imagination’ works in tandem with the emotions. It is not connected to mental reasoning, and it leads to a complete fabrication of reality.

‘Higher level imagination’ involves discriminating between different pieces of information. It involves an intellectual analysis of existing facts and it extrapolates this information to new scenarios. It relies on real and substantial information in order to transform potential information into reality. In contrast, ‘lower level imagination’ does not involve reality at all. Since it is not grounded in reality, it leads to a completely false assessment of each situation.

A prime example of our mind being dominated by ‘lower level imagination’ is when we dream. Our dreams are usually dominated by fantasy rather than reality. In a dream, ‘lower level imagination’ takes over the mind of a person who is dreaming, and he believes he is riding a bus, while in reality, he is lying in bed. (Though he truly feels and believes that this bus-ride is true reality, obviously in this moment his rational mind is not grounded in reality and thus he is not being objective).

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<sup>168</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-thoughts-013-imagination>

<sup>169</sup> Beraishis 1:26

<sup>170</sup> Arizal

<sup>171</sup> It also shares a root with the word “*demus*”, ‘resemblance’, implying that man’s power of *medameh* also enables man to ‘resemble’ Hashem on some level. Alternatively, the fact that imagination is related to “likeness” or similarity may mean that a proper use of our imagination involves comparing and extrapolating from existing information and facts to potential scenarios.

Rather than merely being an inaccurate form of ‘higher level imagination’ – such as when a person fails to use his powers of inference or discrimination accurately – ‘lower level imagination’ takes people to a completely false and inauthentic place. This fantasy place may seem completely real. For instance, dreams feel real and intense. Though this dream or fantasy may still involve tangible objects or even fragments extracted from reality (such as the fact that a bus is a real object), the scenario as a whole is completely divorced from reality.

The source of ‘higher level imagination’ comes from the mind’s power of mental vision, a positive power of the mind which connects our senses to tangible reality, essentially enabling us to extend this information to that which is still in potential form. But what is the source of ‘lower level imagination’? Why does it cause people to imagine things which do not exist? And what is the detrimental effect of relying on this ‘lower level imagination’?

### ***The Relationship Between Emotions and Imagination***

We all possess both intellect and emotion. Whereas the intellect is rooted in the mind, the emotions are rooted in the heart. Our imagination and our emotions are interconnected. The word “*middos*” – our character traits, also identified as our emotions<sup>172</sup> – has the same root letters as the Hebrew word “*dimayon*”, imagination.

Ideally, our intellect should source or fuel our emotions. However, in cases when the mind is overtaken by our ‘lower level imagination’, our emotions are more likely to govern the intellect. Generally speaking, the weaker a person’s intellectual mind, the stronger is his ‘lower level imagination’. Conversely, the stronger one’s intellectual mind, the weaker one’s ‘lower level imagination’. The more a person is detached from actual *reality*, the more he relies on and relates to his *imagined* reality.

When our mind is strong and functioning properly, it can be assisted by the power of ‘higher level imagination’. But when our base emotions govern our mind, the ‘lower level imagination’ can run rife, leading a person to become detached from reality.

More specifically, our emotions are rooted in desire, the faculty of *ratzon*. For example, the two root emotions are *ahavah* (love) and *yirah* (fear), both of which fuel our desire. These emotions are powerful and can have both positive and negative effects. For instance, a negative effect of desire stemming from love may lead a person to chase after something that is beyond the scope of reality.

Consider a person who is so caught up in his desire to own a yacht that he either imagines that he *has* it already or he futilely chases after this impossible dream. A negative effect of fear may cause us to run away from something imaginary. Fueled by the imagination, our emotional fear may block us from realizing that this thing we are running from is really imaginary and not substantial.

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<sup>172</sup> See *Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part 2, Chapter 2*

In summary, when emotions dominate over rational thought, the imagination has the opportunity to govern our mind and may cause the mind to lose its ability to think rationally (objectively) or know the true reality. Ultimately, this process can lead a person to sin.

### ***‘Lower Level Imagination’ Distorts Reality***

The imagination can become dangerous and lead a person to sin when the mind is controlled by the emotions. Our ‘lower level imagination’ is used by the *yetzer hora* (the evil inclination) harnessing the power of imagination, in order to encourage a person to think or commit an act they otherwise would not commit.

For instance, the Snake in Gan Eden enticed Chavah to eat from the *Eitz HaDa’as* (“tree of good and evil knowledge”) by telling her that the fruit would give her powers like Hashem. In this way, the Snake relied on Chava’s imagination in order to persuade her. *Chazal* also teach that the Satan led *Bnei Yisrael* to commit the sin of the Golden Calf by showing them an image of Moshe’s coffin in the sky. Their ‘lower level imagination’ fueled their fear, and their fear led them to create the Golden Calf.

It is written, “*The inclination of the heart of a man is evil from his youth.*”<sup>173</sup> When emotions take over the mind, the logical, rationale part of our brain is weakened and the ‘lower level imagination’ may dominate. In turn, the imagination may fuel the emotions, creating a vicious cycle. We may become falsely convinced that we are following Hashem’s will, when in reality we are being led down a false path and being propelled by our base or erroneous desires. This is how we can fall prey to acting on sinful drives.

The *emes* (truth) refers to the only true reality – that is, the reality of Hashem’s existence and His *ratzon* (will) for how He wants us to live. It is written, “*You created me with a pure heart*”<sup>174</sup>. A “pure heart” desires the true reality and to do and follow Hashem’s will. However, when a person’s heart is ‘impure’, he cannot see the true reality. His vision of the objective light of reality (that is, the *emes*) is blocked by emotions. Thus, he chases after falsehood or wickedness without even realizing his error.

There is a fundamental difference between the *yetzer tov* and the *yetzer hora*. The *yetzer tov* brings the heart’s emotions up to the level of the mind so that “the mind controls the heart”<sup>175</sup>. A person then can see and follow *emes*. His heart may assist him to achieve realistic goals by fueling it with the power of *ratzon*. In contrast, the *yetzer hora* uses the ‘lower level imagination’ to fuel our emotions and try to confuse us with falsehood and imaginary concepts. It attempts to convince us to follow paths other than *emes*. A sign that the *yetzer hora* is dominating over our *yetzer tov* is if our mind is governed by emotions, rather than the other way around.

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<sup>173</sup> *Beraishis* 8:21

<sup>174</sup> *Tehillim* 51, 12

<sup>175</sup> *Sefer Tanya; Zohar III 124a*



The *yetzer hora* tries to trick a person into consciously and subjectively believing that falsehood is truth. Without a *yetzer hora*, we would realize immediately the pathetic nature of the ‘lower level imagination’. For instance, though it is quite absurd for a person to be fooled into imagining that he can become like Hashem, this is precisely what the Snake managed to convince Adam and Chavah!

Our souls naturally only want the true reality – that is, Hashem and His Torah. Our souls recognize that there is no reality other than Hashem’s will. Our *yetzer tov* helps us to search for, and follow this true reality. Our ‘higher level imagination’ is one tool we can use to assist us to put Hashem’s *ratzon* into practice. In contrast, our *yetzer hora* employs the ‘lower level imagination’ to appeal to our emotional side of the brain so that we are confused.<sup>176</sup>

### ***‘Lower Level Imagination’ Fools The Mind***

Until this point, we have explained that there are two kinds of imagination – ‘higher level imagination’ and ‘lower level imagination’.

The ‘higher level imagination’ can be usefully engaged in conjunction with our intellect to help us channel our emotions in order to achieve Hashem’s will. However, ‘lower level imagination’<sup>177</sup> can be dangerous if we allow it to dominate and rule over our intellect. It may rob us of our mental powers of clarity and leave us at the mercy of our emotions. This, in turn, leaves us vulnerable to confusion and subject to a distortion of *emes*. We may then be innocently fooled into following various, impure, selfish desires (a negative use of *ratzon*).

According to *Chazal*, a person only sins if a *ruach shtus* (spirit of folly) enters him.<sup>178</sup> In other words, a person only sins when the imagination takes over his intellect. ‘Lower level imagination’ acts like *shochad* (bribery). It ‘bribes’ the mind into thinking that falsehood is actually truth, thereby fooling one’s very *ratzon* (will). Since our *ratzon* is our driving force to make things happen in this world, a confused *ratzon* has the dangerous power to drive us in the wrong direction, convincing a person to ignore or override his teachers’ advice and lessons.

A person who lives and makes life decisions based on his ‘lower level imagination’ is really living in a dream-world, with his vision based entirely on egocentric or inauthentic desires or fears. Instead of subjugating himself to Hashem’s will, he is fooled into thinking that his lower drives **are** Hashem’s truth.

For instance, consider a person who dreams he is on a cruise. A strong, intact intellect would ground this person, enabling him to identify this vision as simply a daydream. However, a person

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*176 Editor’s Note: Refer to the adaptation of the author’s previous sefarim (“Building A Sanctuary of the Heart”, Parts I and II) for learning how to make self-introspection and purify the heart from erroneous desires.*

*177 Editor’s Note: And indeed, we initially start out in life with only knowing of the lower kind of imagination, and it is our avodah to leave the lower imagination and instead gain the higher kind of imagination, as will be described throughout this sefer.*

*178 Sotah 2a*

whose ‘lower level imagination’ dominates his intellect may become divorced from reality and believe this scenario is actually happening. This is an example of the ‘lower level imagination’ overpowering the mind, holding wisdom hostage and distorting the truth.

Another example of such delusion caused by ‘lower level imagination’ may be when someone writes out a check to pay a debt, despite there being no money in his account. Why would a person behave this way? He is so keen to pay his debt and take away the pressure of the debt-collector that this emotional desire clouds him from the reality of the situation – which is that he has no money in the bank. He is obviously not acting rationally and his mind has been overrun by his desires.

Such a person is living solely according to how he **feels**, with his emotions ruling over his higher soul and intellect. He wants things to be a certain way so badly that he detaches from reality and convinces himself that his desires are reality. Thus, he is actually living in a dream-world.

In summary, in the absence of strong intellect, the imagination can lead the emotions to take over a person’s common sense and rational decision-making. Such a person lives a life divorced from reality, detached from his higher soul and essentially distanced from Hashem’s will.

### ***A World Of Imagination***

The Snake convinced Chava that “just as Hashem can create universes, so can you create universes.”<sup>179</sup> If we presume that we can act like Hashem and create something completely new, we are being deluded by our ‘lower level imagination’.

Interestingly, the Snake targeted and enticed Chavah to sin, rather than Adam. Why did it try to ensnare Chavah rather than Adam? The Snake knew that the feminine mind is generally more prone to ‘lower level imagination’ (stemming from the fact that it is likely to have less *chochmah*). It sought to take advantage of the fact that Chavah may be more susceptible to the “spirit of folly” taking over her mind and thus more easily led astray.

In contrast, the Snake considered Adam more difficult to entice to sin. Unlike Chavah, Adam was created awake and he retained *chochmah* (wisdom) which could help his mind override his imagination. However, after he committed the sin, Adam also was equally subject to the temptations of ‘lower level imagination.’

Nowadays, both masculine and feminine minds are subject to the same enticement of the ‘lower level imagination’ and are thus equally vulnerable to the emotions overtaking them and being blocked from clarity. Most of us these days are swayed by our imaginations to the point where we are detached from reality. Our emotions rule over our minds. Even those who have learned Torah for

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<sup>179</sup> *Midrash Tehillim:1, Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer13, Midrash Tanchuma: parshas Tazria: 9 [Editor's Note: Elsewhere, the author explains how this power exists in the side of holiness as well in the form of the power to break our limits and reach the Endlessness of Hashem.] This is the holy use of the inherent aspect of “medameh” in man.*

many years and who know in their minds Hashem's *emes*, often experience life through the prism of a dream-like world.

When we wake from this long nightmare of this world, the Sages state that Hashem will slaughter the *yetzer hora*<sup>180</sup>. Since the 'lower level imagination' and the *yetzer hora* are integrated, this suggests that after Redemption, our minds will cease to be dominated or governed by our 'lower level imagination'.

In *Tehillim*, it is written that when the *Moshiach* comes we will exclaim, "**then**, *we were like dreamers*." <sup>181</sup> This implies that currently, before the advent of the *Moshiach*, we are living in a dream world. Only after the Redemption will we look back and realize that we were dreaming. In the future, we will see how the six thousand years of this world is merely an illusion. After Redemption, wisdom will overpower our 'lower level imagination'. However, until this point when *Moshiach* comes, our minds will often fall prey to the dominion of our 'lower level imagination', instead of realizing *emes*, truth.<sup>182</sup>

### ***Changing Our Thought Patterns***

We have explained that the danger of listening to our 'lower level imagination' is that it can fuel our emotions to the point where we are confused about truth. In turn, this may lead us to act on what we subjectively feel or desire, falsely convincing ourselves that this is reality and what Hashem wants.

If we imagine something unrealistic and then become emotionally attached to this goal or vision, we risk becoming egocentric. Following our own base desires is equivalent to acting like a spoiled child - like a little girl who sees a doll in the toy store and demands that she **must** have it right now because she needs it!

However, every person has the power of *bechirah* (free will). Superficially, we may learn to use our *bechirah* in order to give up our negative desires altogether. However, on another level, we can learn to channel our *bechirah* so that our mind is governed by our intellect or 'higher level imagination' instead of our emotions or 'lower level imagination'.

When we succeed in accessing and revealing our true inner will (which is really the will of Hashem<sup>183</sup>), our emotions will be less able to control our mind and actions. Instead, our actions and thoughts will be under the power of our rational intellect and we will be able to pursue realistic and true goals in line with Hashem's will.

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<sup>180</sup> *Sukkah* 52a

<sup>181</sup> *Tehillim* 126: 1

<sup>182</sup> Editor's Note: In spite of this predicament, it is still our *avodah* to try to avoid our 'lower level imagination' and only use 'higher level imagination' as much as we can, as will be explained throughout this sefer.

<sup>183</sup> See *Building A Sanctuary In The Heart, Part II, Chapter 26*

But revealing this true inner will and channeling our *bechirah* to achieve such truth takes hard work. If we do not work hard to break our negative desires, we will simply be enticed by the *yetzer hora* to always strive to gratify ourselves instead of Hashem's *emes*. As a result, we will remain living in a fantasy-world, constantly wasting our attention on dreaming about unrealistic goals or wasting our energy chasing them.

In contrast, working hard and breaking these negative desires allows us to access our real mind. In turn, a strong mind enables us to train ourselves to be in control of our emotions, rather than the other way around.

This process does not simply involve us trying to rid our heart from negative emotions in order to reveal our underlying positive emotions. Rather, once we use effort and truly desire to distance our minds from being controlled by our emotions, we may merit Hashem's assistance. He may strengthen our mind so that our mind can function as a powerful tool to control and direct our emotions. Such a strong mind can deliberately select only particular emotions which serve it well and channel them to achieve a life of truth and Hashem's will.

It is written, "*A pure heart G-d created me with*". Revealing our **da'as** (mind) essentially leads to a "*lev tahor*" (pure heart). When Hashem sees that we are working to gain control over our desires and emotions in order to gain a pure heart, He will surely assist us to achieve our goal. This in turn enables us to more easily identify and fulfill His Will.

### ***'Higher Level Imagination' – Transforming Potential into Actual***

The imagination can be useful and positive. When is imagination approved of by our holy Torah?

'Higher level imagination' can enable a person to achieve real goals by drawing on facts that currently exist and enabling a person to apply them to a currently potential scenario in order to draw it out into reality. In other words, our imaginative faculty can be beneficial and lead us to holiness if it is based on reality and authenticity.

For example, *Chazal*<sup>184</sup> teach that seeing *techeiles* (turquoise strings of *tzitzis*) can bring a person to have *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven) because the blue color reminds him of the sky, which in turn reminds him of the *Kisei HaKavod* (Throne of Glory). The *Kisei HaKavod* is a reality. However, a person may struggle to properly identify with it or achieve a mental vision of it because his physical senses in this World have not yet seen or experienced the *Kisei HaKavod*. In contrast, most people have seen the blue sky our 'higher level imagination' can rely on our sensory exposure to the blue sky to enable us to relate to and imagine the *Kisei Hakavod*, even though we have not actually seen it.

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<sup>184</sup> *Sotah 17a*

This is a good and holy use of our imagination, enabling us to access a spiritual truth to which our physical senses have not actually been exposed.<sup>185</sup>

### ***Evil Imagination: Imagining The Non-Existent***

When can the imagination become harmful and lead to evil?

The power of imagination' becomes evil when a person uses it to imagine something that is not realistic or is completely inauthentic. A person whose mind is governed by 'lower level imagination' may be convinced that falsehood is truth and truth is falsehood. In this way, his imagination serves to distance him from a life of *emes*, causing his willpower (*ratzon*) to channel his energy towards sin and lust, rather than towards Hashem's will.

### ***The Problem With 'Guided Imagery' Techniques***

Unfortunately, some recent non-Torah-based therapies employ people's 'lower level imagination' to attempt to help them overcome their issues.

For instance, a therapist may advise someone who feels unloved to imagine that he is loved. The therapist might reassure the patient that he can obtain love (or anything he wants) simply by using his imagination. He may instruct the person to convince himself that he is loved by imagining himself being loved by others, when, in reality, the person is not loved by anyone. So this process is based on falsehood.

Alternatively, if it is a gentile therapist, he may try to convince the Jew who comes to him to access the power of love in himself and thereby feel loved. However, this will still not work, because a gentile himself does not contain the very kind of self-love that a Jewish soul needs.

This form of therapy cannot assist a Jew, because the method of imagery employed is based completely on falsehood. Although the person may try to believe such imagery out of desperation, deep down, his inner soul knows the truth. Essentially, such 'lower level imagination' is employing the *yetzer hora's* power to conjure up a false reality.

Many of such "guided-imagery" therapies rely on 'lower level imagination', in a way similar to the Snake's persuading Chava that she could become "like Hashem" if she ate from the *Eitz*

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<sup>185</sup> Editor's Note: *The Mussar masters relied extensively on their imagination; see the author's Building A Sanctuary In The Heart, Part 2, page 168, where it is brought that Rav Yisrael Salanter zt"l used to hold his finger near a flame to feel a brief pain and help him feel a spiritual fire within. He used his higher level imagination to then extrapolate from the pain of his finger to the pain of yiras Hashem. Note however that most of us in this generation do not have strong enough imaginative faculties to make use of this ability.*

*HaDa'as*. In turn, this sin that Chava and Adam committed allowed an evil form of knowledge into the world which confuses people and conceals the truth.<sup>186</sup>

### ***The Torah's Way of Using the Power of Imagination in Therapy***

In contrast, a Torah-approved way of using the power of imagination to help someone who feels unloved is to teach him how to use his 'higher level imagination' to draw forth the inherent self-love that is contained deep within his Jewish soul. Though one's self-love may be concealed, it still exists in its potential form, and one can use the imagination to draw it out by mentally visualizing it.

To access self-love, a person may be taught to remind himself and work on believing that he has a *neshamah* (Divine soul). He can work at accepting and internalizing the truth that it is simply his physical body which is holding him back from feeling this self-love. A person can then use his imagination to visualize his *neshamah* being **revealed** from its potential state to its actual form.

This practice has the power to succeed because it is based on the *emes* (truth). In this way, a person can use his imagination to reveal his *potential* self-love and bring it down from his soul into his body, thereby exposing it to reality.

The *Eitz HaDa'as* was called the "tree of good and evil knowledge."<sup>187</sup> The good kind of *da'as* refers to the 'higher level imagination' (outlined above), whereby a person uses tangible and revealed knowledge in order to access the holiness within. In contrast, the evil kind of *da'as* within the *Eitz HaDa'as* refers to 'lower level imagination', which confuses a person into thinking that truth is falsehood and falsehood is reality, thereby leading him to use his *ratzon* to chase after sin.

### ***In Summary***

On the one hand, our imagination – in the form of 'lower level imagination' - can be dangerous, misleading and problematic. On the other hand, our imagination – in the form of 'higher level imagination' - can be used for holy purposes and can be spiritually beneficial.

The *yetzer tov* can help us use our 'higher level imagination' to transform something positive in our souls from its potential form into its active state. Thus, our 'higher level imagination' can be used to drive our emotions and our actions to further Hashem's will. In contrast, the *yetzer hora* employs our 'lower level imagination' as a tool to dominate over our minds, confusing us and blocking us from identifying Hashem's *emes*. We may then be subject to the risk of chasing after fantasy or sin.

In other words, our imagination can serve a positive function only when it is not severed from reality but rather is serving to **reveal** something that already **exists**. In contrast, 'lower level

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<sup>186</sup> *Sforno to Bereishis 3:1*

<sup>187</sup> *Beraishis 1:9*

imagination' tries to incite our emotions and clouds our better judgment, convincing us to conjure up or chase after something fabricated and lacking in truthfulness.

A person whose mind is governed by 'lower level imagination' is ignorant of the fact that he is essentially falling for the Snake's ploy and chasing after a false reality, essentially replicating the primal sin of Creation.

With the help of Hashem, we will continue to elaborate on the power of imagination in the upcoming chapters. May we merit Hashem's help to avoid the dangers of our 'lower level imagination' overtaking our minds, and to instead focus only on using the power of imagination for the purpose of holiness.

## 2.13 | *Experiencing Life By Existence Or By Imagination*<sup>188</sup>

### *Holy and Evil Imagination Are Both Rooted In Yaakov and Esav*

There is a source to everything in the holy Torah. The source of the power of imagination is found by the story of Yaakov and Esav in the Torah.

Man is called “*adam*”, while Esav is called “*Edom*”; *Chazal* state<sup>189</sup> that the other nations of the world are not called man/*adam*. Esav got the infamous title *Edom* because he demanded that Yaakov pour the red lentils down his throat when he was starving; red in Hebrew is *edom*.

There is another reason why Esav is called *Edom*. The word *Edom* also comes from the word *dimayon* (imagination). Esav wasn't considered to be a person, since *Chazal* say that the nations who come from Esav are not considered ‘man’/*adam*; if so, why is he even titled anything? It was because he made himself seem similar to what a person is supposed to be like. This was through his ability of *medameh*, to resemble. To compare, resemble or make oneself similar are all terms for *medameh* – they are all ways to use the evil power of *dimayon*/imagination.

This helps us understand a confusing story in the Torah. Esav was the first-born, and it seems that he was deserving of the blessings that his father wanted to give him. How was Yaakov able to trick him into selling it to him? Wasn't this unfair to Esav?

The answer to this is because Esav used the power of *medameh* to make himself resemble the ideal kind of person, while in reality, he was not. Yaakov used the power of *medameh* as well to dress up like Esav and get the blessings, but this was not the same kind of *medameh* that Esav represents. Yaakov used the power of *medameh* to reveal the truth, which was that it was he who deserved the blessings, not Esav. This was because Yaakov received the rights to the first-born through a sale, which was justified; therefore, at the time of the blessings, it was he who deserved it, not Esav. He was therefore allowed to use the power of *medameh* by making himself look similar to Esav, because he was doing so in the sake of the truth.

He did this precisely because Esav's whole power is the evil kind of *medameh*, and therefore, Yaakov used *medameh* for a holy purpose in order to counter the evil power of *medameh* of Esav. By doing so he took what was rightfully his; he used *medameh* to reveal the truth. (Although his father Yitzchok wanted to give the blessings to Esav, and Yaakov knew about this and initially refused to trick him, still, in the end he received the blessings by using *medameh* for this holy purpose).

What is the difference between the way that Esav used *medameh* with the way that Yaakov used *medameh*?

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<sup>188</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-thoughts-014-experiencing-life-existence-or-imagination>

<sup>189</sup> *Yevamos 61b*



When Yaakov used *medameh* to dress up like Esav, he wasn't creating anything new. He was revealing the truth, which was that he was the true first born. Rashi says that really Yaakov was supposed to exit the womb first, because he was conceived before Esav. Yaakov used *medameh* to receive what was rightfully his. Esav used *medameh* to create a new situation, because since he wasn't supposed to get the blessings – for he was not the true firstborn – his demand for the blessings wasn't justified; he made himself appear as the firstborn [by exiting the womb first], while in reality, he was the faker and the undeserving one.

Here we can see when that *medameh* is used to reveal what's here, it is a good and holy use of *medameh*, but when it is used as a means to create something new, it is evil.

### ***Death Only Occurs To Our Imagination***

There is a deep point contained in this.

When something ceases to function, we call this death. When something is functioning, it is considered to be alive. What is death, though? And what exactly is it that dies when “death” occurs?

It is really only imagination which dies! Our wisdom of our mind never dies; it is written, “Wisdom sustains its owner”<sup>190</sup>. Death only happens to one's imagination!

How does this happen? When it is totally clear to a person that imagination has ended, this signals the death to the imagination. When imagination dies, that is how it gets fixed!

When a person experiences life only through the prism of his imagination and he never realized this, then death to him will feel like the death of his reality [because such a person thinks that imagination is reality]. But when a person discovers that it is only imagination which dies - not his actual existence - then death will feel to him how “from a wound itself comes the recovery.”

Death is connected with the first sin in Creation. Adam and Chavah were warned that they would die if they would eat from the tree. Adam was convinced to eat from the tree because he wanted to be like Hashem; in other words, his imagination caused him to want to eat from it. “*For on the day you eat from it you shall surely die.*” The “death” which occurred when he ate from the tree was that he exited his mind and entered instead into imagination. To leave the mind and enter into the imagination is really a description of death!

The actual mind in a person is his very life (“*Wisdom sustains its owner*”), while the imagination, which is a fake reality, is not real - and thus it not considered to be “life”. From an inner perspective, Adam didn't “die” after 930 years of living on this world – he “died” as soon as he ate from the tree, because it was then that he left his mind and entered into imagination. It appeared that he was alive for 930 years, but that too was being imagined. Mankind has entered a deathlike kind of existence ever since the sin.

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<sup>190</sup> *Koheles 7: 12*

There is no such thing as death to our actual mind. Our minds cannot die. In the future, we will see that “*We were like dreamers*”. We will then see that death is only occurs to our imagination – but it does not affect our actual existence.

To illustrate what we mean, let’s say a person doesn’t have children, and he has a dream that he had a child. only for the child to die soon after being born. He wakes up from the nightmare. Now he’s back in real life, where he doesn’t have a child. Does he think now that the reason why he doesn’t have a child now is because he had a child in the dream that died? If he entertains such a thought he’s viewing life through imagination! The reality is that he doesn’t have a child because he never had one to begin with, and it has nothing to do with the bad dream he had.

*Chazal* say that the righteous are considered alive even when they die, while the wicked are considered dead even while they are alive. The depth of this matter is that a righteous person lives through his real mind, while a wicked person lives through his imagination. A wicked person, who lives through his imagination, is really living a deathlike kind of existence, even though it appears as if he’s alive. But he’s really living a dream; he’s walking on two feet, but he is living an imaginary and dreamlike kind of existence.

### ***A Mind Controlled By Imagination***

After Adam’s sin, the world entered into a state of imagination. We are really all living in a world within an imagination!

On a more subtle note, this is the depth of our current exile, which is called the exile of Edom. Edom comes from the word *dimayon* (imagination).

When a person is in a dream, he’s imagining everything. But a person, through his imagination, is also in a dreamlike state, even while he’s fully awake. Just like a person can have a dream that he dies, so do most people experience death in their life – when they are caught up in their imagination! There are people who never left their imagination their entire life, so their entire life is spent in a deathlike kind of existence.

If a person never left the imagination, he lives his whole life through his imagination and then dies in that frame of mind. Even when his soul comes back down again as a *gilgul* (reincarnation) he is still in his imagination, and the process keeps repeating itself. His very existence, throughout all his lifetimes, is being experienced through his imagination!

If a person wants to leave this kind of existence, he needs to develop a holy mind, which is by refining his mind through the wisdom of the Torah. There is no other way – any other way is just being imagined.

### ***Imaginations Fools The Mind***

It is written, “*And the eyes of Leah were brittle.*” The words of *Chazal* are well-known: The rumors were that Leah would marry Esav, and that Rachel would get Yaakov. Leah feared this and cried so much in prayer that her eyebrows fell out from stress.

The depth behind this matter is that Leah’s fear of marrying Esav was due to her imagination. She heard rumors that she would marry Esav, so her whole fear wasn’t based on reality; it was based on her imagination. She wasn’t seeing reality as it is; she was seeing a made up reality, which led her to become afraid. This is exactly imagination – when a person sees something, but he’s not seeing the actual reality.

Where else do we find this? Chavah saw the *Eitz Hada’as* that the fruits were “good”. She saw that it was good, but in reality, it was not. She was only seeing that it was good through her imagination.

The only way a person can really see reality is through using his real mind. This is also called *eni haseichel*, “eyes of the intellect”, (a term used by the *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*).

If a person never learned how to leave the imagination, he lives every part of his life spent in imagination. Even when we learn Torah it can all be just in our imagination! (On a deep note though, every Jew’s soul still has some real part of the mind left in it that is unaffected by imagination.)

We must realize that imagination is not just another problem our soul can have. It can fool a person *entirely*.

A liar isn’t believed even when he speaks the truth. Why? It is because even when he says the truth, the truth isn’t part of him, so even when he speaks the truth, it’s not really the truth.

Why do people have such a hard time living a truthful kind of life? On a superficial level, it is because it is hard for people to concentrate on what’s important in life. But there is a more inner reason: because even when a person thinks, he usually isn’t thinking, but just imagining a thought. Because people imagine so much, they have a hard time making use of their real power of thought.

For example, children get distracted very easily. A child is heading to go somewhere and then he meets a friend, getting distracted totally from what he planned to do. This is actually because a child doesn’t think – a child lives in imagination. A child always thinks that something is similar, which is a use of the power *medameh*; that is why children are jumpy.

### ***Developing The Mind***

Let us think about this a little more. A person consists of three factors: the actions, the emotions and the thoughts. These are three parts to our soul.

If a person's actions are based upon his imagination – he acts based on what he imagines - it can be said of him that he is mentally unstable. If a person all day or most of the day thinks that his imagination is a real action, this is clearly not healthy. All of us tend to imagine a little, but if it's only a little bit, a person is still able to have a normal life. But when the imagination gets a little overboard than the usual amount, that is when a person has a real problem: he leaves his natural state and lives a life of imagination. If this is the case, such a person is not healthy. We aren't addressing such kinds of intense issues here.

We are discussing here a more subtle kind of a problem: when people experience their emotions through their imagination. This is apparent when a person wants something and because he wants it so much, he imagines that he has it already.

This we can see clearly from a child. A child wants a certain toy and thinks that he has it already; a little girl sees a doll in the window of a toy store and wishes so much she could have it that she demands, "I *must* have it!!" The older a person becomes, the more his mind matures and he sees that just because he wants something, that doesn't mean he must have it.

In relevance to us, what happens when we get older? Are we gaining a new and mature kind of mind, or are we still thinking like a child (except for the fact that the variables have changed and now we want different things)?

When we were first children, we learned everything using our imagination. We received all our Torah knowledge through our imagination as well. Are we still using our old imagination to learn Torah, or are we currently developing a whole new kind of mind to think?

Usually, people are continuing how they thought as children, and they remain their whole life that way; the only change is that as adults, people want things that are simply bigger and better. Although adults are smarter than children, their thinking can actually be the same exact as a child's thinking. The only gain that an adult has is that he has expanded his imagination a lot more since he was a child....

Although it is true that an adult knows that there is such a thing as imagination, and that he can't get everything he wants - and thus he learns that you have to be realistic in life - still, he can still be living the same kind of life as a child. He is still living a childish kind of life. A person can be at the ripe old age of seventy and still remain with the same kind of thinking he had since he was a child.

This is many times, it can happen that people think that what they have imagined is real. It is because people are so used to thinking through their imagination that eventually there comes a point where people confuse imagination with reality. Just like a person acts upon his thoughts, so does a person act upon his imagination – when he thinks that imagination is the reality. In fact, a person might even think that what he is imagining is more real than even reality, and he thinks that there is no greater wisdom to be found than in the power of imagination.

For this very reason – and it is quite clear – a person doesn't also sense the existence of Hashem, because the only reality he knows of is the imagination, and he cannot sense any other reality other than what he imagines; he can't even sense the reality of Hashem's existence!

Imagination makes a person think that what he imagines is real, and it doesn't show a person reality the way it really is. If a person lives his life through imagination, he only knows how something exists through his imagination; all he can do is **imagine** how something exists.

Even when two people look at the same thing, they never see the same thing – if they are both living lives through their imagination. An example of this we can see is by Queen Esther, whom each nation claimed looked to like their own, while in reality, she did not look like any of them, due to her unique complexion.

### ***Senses Controlled By The Imagination***

Now that these points are clear, the question we must begin to ask ourselves is: How can we leave our imagination and instead enter into our real mind?

A person knows he exists, simply because he exists. We also sense our own existence, but our senses are not the only way we know we exist. This is because our senses can sense reality, but they can also be imagined. So we cannot know we exist based on our senses alone. We know we exist -- simply because we know so.

There are many things a person can imagine, but one thing we do not imagine is our own existence. We all know we exist; we are not experiencing this through our imagination. Your senses might even be imagined, but your existence is not being imagined. Why? It is because your power to recognize that you exist is in a place in the soul that is above your ability of imagination, and therefore, your imagination cannot affect your existence.

How do we know this is true?

Imagination is called *medameh*, which also means to compare. The entire concept of the imagination uses a human ability to compare things [at its root]. How does a person compare? He sees one thing and then another, and he can see that the second thing is similar to the first thing. But when it comes to a person, can you know he exists because you compare something else to him? There is no such thing. A person knows he isn't someone else. If I am not him, then I must be me.

What we are describing here is really a description of the innermost point of our soul; it is also called the *yechidah*, and it is otherwise known as the power of *levad* – “alone.”

A person needs to realize that his senses and his existence are not one. The senses are in a place in the soul that is covering over the recognition of our existence, so we need to remove the senses and see that our existence lies underneath it all, in the inner layer of our self.

By realizing one's existence, two things are accomplished: first of all, the person has revealed his actual essence, and in addition to this (which is no less important), a person has revealed reality: the depth of his own existence. Through this self-recognition, a person is able to come to recognize the ultimate existence, which is the existence of Hashem.

When a person commits a sin, it can always be felt through one or more of his five senses. This shows us that there is a connection between sin and the senses: the entire concept of the senses was brought about through sin. As soon as Chavah sinned by eating from the *etz hada'as*, creation was altered and now people only sense their existence through their senses. When a person experiences life through his imagination, he loses the self-recognition of his existence.

### ***Your Existence Is Above Your Imagination***

By contrast, when you recognize that your existence is above the reach of your senses and above your imagination, it is only then that you can have a real self-recognition. This is also the only way how you are able to come to recognize Hashem's existence.

Only your actual existence can show you what reality is. Our senses aren't guaranteed to last; people lose their vision and hearing in their old age. This is actually because the senses are based upon imagination, which doesn't last.

Reality itself never dies. The very concept of death is really all in imagination, as we explained; because death only happens to our imaginary existence, not to our actual existence.

*Chazal* say that Hashem created a light on the first day in which a person can use it to see from one end of the world to another; why don't we have access to this light? It is really because our vision is through our imagination, and imagination is not capable of seeing so far.

It is for this reason that a person can't either hear or smell something on the other side of the world; it is because our senses are only through our imagination, and the imagination is limited.

### ***Most People Are Living Lives Of Imagination***

We can expand this discussion a lot more upon the words of *Chazal*, but our main point here is to explain the root.

Our senses are experienced through our imagination, and thus a person who only feels reality through his senses is living a life led by imagination. When a person looks at something, he gets caught up in his senses and loses focus. Sometimes shutting one's eyes can help one concentrate a little, but it's still just a sensual kind of life: using one eye to see positive, another eye to see the negative, smelling with the nose, hearing with the ears...it's a scattered way of thinking. The problem with such a life is not that the person's mind is scattered. The problem is that the person is living in imagination – and imagination is split up into the five different senses.

*Chazal* say<sup>191</sup>, “The soul has five names: *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah, and Yechidah.*” The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that it is only our imagination which makes us think that there are five different parts to our soul. Really, we have one existence; our existence is not split up into five different parts. Our imagination though comes and makes us think that we have five different parts to our existence. Our existence is really one unit.

Ever since the first sin, people are usually only aware of their senses, but not their actual existence. A person’s intrinsic existence is very hidden from himself, and most people therefore end up spending their whole lives instead through their imagination.

*Chazal* say that most people have to endure some Gehinnom in the next world; this is because the angel appointed over Gehinnom is called *Dumah*, which is similar to the word *dimayon*, imagination. It is not because people sin that they have to endure Gehinnom; it is more than that. It is really because people are spending their entire existence in their imagination. When a person leaves his mind and descends to the lower part of his psyche – the emotions – this is the root of imagination. As we explained before, *middos* (emotions) has the same letters as the word *medameh*, imagination, because imagination is the root of the emotions.

A person has to reveal his own existence, and this cannot be done through any of the five senses; the existence of a person is not felt through any of the physical senses, because it is above the senses. It is an ability in and of itself.

When a person reveals his actual existence, he reveals a whole new reality than what he was used to living with until that point. But this does not mean that a person has to reveal a “new” depth to his life, or a “new” idea or a “new” source of vitality. These definitions do not bring out the concept. It is really a *revelation* of your own existence; upon revealing it, a person will realize that whatever he perceived until now was only through the lens of imagination.

Once a person reveals his actual existence, he sees and hears things from his own existence, and the same goes for the rest of his senses: his own *senses* will also be felt through his actual existence. These are highly developed senses which never die – they spread to the rest of one’s reality, and from there, to the rest of all senses that are holy. These are higher kinds of senses, illuminated the light of one’s intrinsic existence.

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191 *Devorim Rabbah* 2: 37

## 2.14 | *The Detrimental Effects of Imagination*<sup>192</sup>

### *“Yaakov” and “Leah” – The Roots Of Imagination*

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of [higher] imagination, which we have already mentioned before: one kind of imagination is when we compare knowledge, and the other kind of imagination is when a person compares two actions with one another.

Right now, we are speaking about the third, evil kind of imagination, which is also manifest in two ways.

One kind of evil imagination is when a person distorts the truth. An example of this is written by sefer *Mesillas Yesharim*, who writes that a person can feel like he is walking in the dark and imagine that objects are dangerous people.

This is the kind of imagination that *Yaakov* used when he used *medameh* to look similar to Esav; he distorted the truth [except that he knew how to use this power for good]. A person has this ability in to distort information - because the original fact and the new, invented idea look *similar*. Since *Yaakov* used this power of *medameh*, is known in the *sefarim hakedoshim* as an ability called “*Yaakov*”, and it can be used for good or evil [as we will explain].

Another kind of imagination is when a person imagines that something exists, when it really doesn't. For example, a person is walking in the dark at night and he thinks he sees a snake in front of him; he has used his imagination to make up something new. This kind of imagination is termed “*Leah*” – and it can also be used either for good or evil.

### *The Connection Between Leah and Imagining New Information*

The second kind of imagination, making up new information, is called “*Leah*.” What does this have to do with *Leah*?

*Leah* imagined that she would marry Esav. In the kind of imagination we find by her, she didn't exaggerate something, but she made up something totally new; she made up that she is destined for Esav (On a subtle note, she was destined for Esav because of her tendency to imagine in this evil way, but because she davened and cried so much that this shouldn't happen, she rectified her imagination and merited *Yaakov* instead).

With this kind of imagination, a person imagines something totally new that does not exist. For example, a person wants a car and imagines that he already has it. It's not that he's imagining that

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<sup>192</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-thoughts-016-detrimental-effects-imagination>



his old car has become new; that would be the first kind of imagination. In the second kind of imagination, a person makes it up totally.

Leah was able to take this kind of imagination and use it for good. She was really destined for Esav, and by the natural course of events she wouldn't have become one of the Matriarchs; each of the forefathers had only one designated wife. Sarah was destined for Avraham. Rivkah was designated for Yitzchok. Rachel was the future soul mate of Yaakov. Leah was not in the equation – she was really destined to marry the wicked Esav. Through her prayers and tears, though, she altered her destiny, and she became instead a second wife to Yaakov. She came up with something entirely new – she went from her future of remaining a non-Jew to being a Jew, and to become a fourth matriarch. Leah used this power of medameh for good.

Because she came up with something new, “medameh” when it comes to coming up with something new is therefore generally referred to as “Leah.”

### ***The Downfall Of The Imagination Is When Our Emotions Are In Control Of Us***

In terms of our soul, this applies to us as follows. In the mind, we have the three mental abilities of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*, and our mind also contains the power of imagination. When does the imagination become evil?

This can be in either one of two ways: either as a materialistic kind of imagination, or when the imagination makes the emotions take over.

The soul [generally] consists of three layers – action, emotion and thought. When the thoughts become negatively affected, they can either become demoted to the level of emotion and become controlled by them, or they can fall even lower into the actions. In either case, imagination is the cause.

When the thoughts fall to the level of the emotions, this is synonymous with the concept of using the imagination to make up totally “new” information. When the thoughts fall even lower to the level of the actions, this becomes the kind of imagination which “changes” information.

These are two different ways how the mind can fall from its level: either by imagining something totally **novel**, or in a different way - by **changing and distorting** the information. “*Yaakov*” is the term that implies imagination which changes information, and it is when the thoughts fall to the level of action. “*Leah*” is the term that implies the power to make up new information, which is when the thoughts fall to the level of emotions.

Now that this is clear, we can continue to the next step.

### ***Trying To Resemble Hashem***

Before we explain how to fix the problems with our imagination, let us first describe what exactly the problem is.

The two kinds of imagination really represent two root functions in our life: our mission to improve our middos, and to deal with the fact that man was created from “dirt.” Each of these plays a role in our life’s mission.

A person has a general avodah to cleave to Hashem, through perfecting his middos. *Chazal* say that the way one can ‘resemble’ Hashem is through having good middos (“hevay domeh lo”). That is one aspect of a person – his middos, which he must use to emulate Hashem.

Another aspect of a person was that he was created from the dirt of the earth; he has a body, which is the way the design of man. This shows us that there is another way for a person to emulate Hashem – not through his middos, but through the way he is designed. All the 613 mitzvos are the way a person is supposed to look in the spiritual sense, just like the physical body is made up of 613 bones and sinews. So the mitzvos, which are done by our body, are what represents the second part of our mission on this world.

These are two ways for how a person can come to emulate Hashem: through the middos/emotions, and through the mitzvos, which are performed by the body.

The first kind of evil imagination [changing and distorting information] can be fixed through doing mitzvos. The second kind of evil imagination [inventing new information] can be fixed through hevay domeh lo, “resembling the ways of Hashem”.

### ***Cleaving To The Middos Of Hashem***

When a person uses his *middos* and emotions to emulate Hashem, he must realize that his *middos* come from Hashem. If one thinks that his *middos* are his own, he is creating something from new, which is really evil imagination.

The *middos* which we aspire to have are *middos* which come from Hashem. They are not the same emotions we are used to. For example, the *middah* of Avraham Avinu is *ahavah* (love). The love that he had for Hashem was a revelation of Hashem’s *middah* of *ahavah*; it is not the same kind of love that a person has when he likes a certain type of food. It is a whole different kind of emotion.

*Chazal* say that a cat is modest and a stork is kind. Is this the same *middos* of modesty or kindness in a person? The *middos* of a person come from his *cheilek eloka mimaal*, from the fact that he is “a piece of G-d”. The *middos* found in a person are totally different *middos* and emotions than the good *middos* we find by certain animals.

If a person thinks his *middos* are his own, then he will have good *middos* and bad *middos*. But when a person reveals the root of his *middos*, all his *middos* will be good.

This is really the depth of working on our *middos*. Working on ourselves doesn't simply mean that we have to transform our bad *middos* into good *middos*, for example, by turning our anger into patience; it means that we reveal the root of our *middos* – the *middos* of Hashem - which is when we connect our *middos* to Hashem's *middos*. In other words, the way we emulate Hashem is by revealing His *middos* within ourselves.

That is how we use and repair the first kind of [higher] imagination/*medameh*: by 'resembling' Hashem, through improving our *middos*, in the perspective that was described here.

The second way we use and repair our imagination is different: when we use our materialistic body to emulate Hashem. This is practically reached when we use our body to perform the *mitzvos*. This is not the concept of revealing Hashem from within us, because Hashem is not materialistic, and therefore we cannot reveal Him from within our materialistic side of existence. But it is a different angle of revealing Hashem - it is to shine the revelation of Hashem onto our materialistic body (through doing the *mitzvos*).

### ***The Dismal Situation In The World Today***

*Chazal* (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a) say that the world will last for six thousand years.

Which world are we in? (There are four worlds – a world of action, a world of *middos*/emotions, a world of thought, and a world which is more sublime than even that.) If Adam wouldn't have eaten from the tree, we would have all been living in a world of thought. "*Wisdom sustains its owner*". That was the way things were supposed to be. This was revealed in some way at the giving of the Torah, and it will again be revealed in the future.

But because of the sin, we remained on this six-thousand year world – a world of *middos*/emotions. On the other hand, we are also living in an even lower world – a world of action. One of the most difficult things to understand is: Where are we? Are we in a world of emotions, or are we in a world of action?

The answer is that we are in both, and thus we have the advantages and disadvantages of both. We will explain this.

Before the sin, had Adam not eaten from the *eitz hada'as*, we would have lived in a world of thought, which is a higher world than the worlds of emotions and actions. The sin caused Adam to leave the world of thought and instead enter into a world of imagination, either for emotions or for actions. Death, which came to the world as a result of sin, is essentially a curse caused by imagination; it is a fall from the level of thought to the level of imagination.

The two kinds of imagination – exaggerating information, and making up new information – are all the result of Adam's sin. If imagination would have entered the world as a separate force in Creation besides for the other forces, then it wouldn't be such a problem. But the problem is that ever since the first sin, imagination came and corrupted the very fabric of the world. It has created a

new reality for the world, making us think that the imagined reality is the actual reality. On top of that, we have imagined more and more – since the sin, we have been piling up on ourselves another imagination upon another imagination!

The depth of the dire situation of today's world is that we are in an *imagination within another imagination*. We have even distorted and added even more changes to the new realities we have come up with. Our lives are full of imagination based upon another imagination.

It is a long time since Adam's sin. The world has changed a lot since then, and it is constantly changing – and it is all another imagination upon another imagination.

For example, you can ask someone, "Why do you do this?" and he responds, "Because that's what my father did." And why did his father do it? Because that's what his grandfather did – and why did his grandfather do it? If you trace it all back to the source, it was made up, and upon that it was only changed more and more until it got to be to what it was today – a total fabrication...

This shows us the impact of imagination on our soul. The Snake convinced Adam and Chavah to eat from the *etz hada'as* because they thought they would become like Hashem and be able to create universes. Where did such a desire come from? It is force in a person to desire a new, fabricated reality. What happens if a person imagines that he is creating worlds? It starts off as a total fantasy and then gets changed into different versions. All the changes being made are just distorting what's already in the imagination, fluffing it up even more than it already is.

### ***False Reality***

This brings out the difference between holy imagination and evil imagination which he mentioned before. Before, we mentioned that there are two ways how imagination is holy: through using our logic to compare facts, or through comparing one action we saw by our teachers to another action of our teacher.

When a person uses his logic to compare facts, what he learns from his teachers is true information. But when a person uses imagination in the second way, which is to deduce information on your own, you might still not be accurate; what you are taught by your teachers is true, but you don't always understand the depth behind how your teacher acts.

When a person uses imagination to compare something to another in this way (the second way), the person is actually not living in reality. Let us explain why this is so.

When a person compares facts, even if he doesn't make a perfectly accurate comparison, he is at least dealing with reality. He might be a little inaccurate, but at least he is involved with something real to begin with. But if the whole comparison is based on something made up, then this person never dealt with reality, so it's a much worse problem.

If we think about it, we are really living in such a way. We tend to copy and compare one thing to another, but it's all a fabrication that we make up. What happens when we do this? We won't

want to accept if someone tells us that we are off-base. Maybe a person will accept that his comparison is incorrect, but he will never want to accept that his whole entire way of thinking was incorrect to begin with, because no one wants to negate what they think is their own reality.

Any reality which we know of today – except for an inner reality which is so deep within us that it is very hidden – is based on a non-reality! All our comparisons we make between one thing and another is based on a false reality that was one time concocted. It's all imagination on top of imagination.

When this idea is absorbed by the soul, it can really shake a person up. The question is what we do with that discovery. Will we use this realization to revitalize ourselves, or will we just tremble about it?

### ***Imagination Ruins The Mind As Well***

Now we can understand with greater depth why the *yetzer hora's* whole power is with imagination. The *yetzer hora* is able to convince a person to make up new information when it comes to actions, emotions or thoughts.

The *yetzer hora* doesn't teach a person to live in imagination. It makes up totally new information, and upon that adds and distorts the information more than it already is. A person's mind trusts this distorted information and makes comparisons based on it, and this greatly ruins a person's mind.

Before, we mentioned two kinds of evil imagination – imagination that uses the emotions is when a person makes up new information, and imagination which involves the actions takes information and distorts it.

But when the thoughts as well are affected by imagination, the detriment is much worse. When this happens, all the information we learned from our teachers – even what was true – becomes corrupted and false from the imagination. The imagination causes a person to make inaccurate comparisons based on the information he knows, because the very information becomes corrupted.

When this happens, the teacher of a person becomes his *yetzer hora!* The *yetzer hora* is an evil teacher who misleads a person into falsity. With imagination, the *yetzer hora* is able not only to corrupt one's actions and emotions, but even one's very thinking mind gets stolen for evil purposes.

### ***Amalek, the Erev Rav and The Yetzer Hora – The Evil Power To Look Similar***

It is written, "*The first of the nations is Amalek.*" Amalek was the first nation to fight against the Jewish people, and because of this nation, other nations were able to copy suit and do the same. In doing so, they enabled other nations to compare themselves to Amalek, starting up with the Jewish

people the same way that Amalek did. Amalek thus enabled the other nations to use their evil power of *medameh*.

The evil of Amalek was that they created something new. In essence, it is not really impossible to fight the Jewish people, but Amalek came and created a new reality: It's possible to fight the Jews. Amalek taught the other nations that they can fight the Jews – this nation is the teacher of the other nations, and there is no greater false reality than this. They used the evil power of *medameh*, which is to create new realities that were previously nonexistent.

There is another evil that exists, the *Erev Rav* (the “Mixed Multitude” of Egyptians who left Egypt together with the Jewish people). These were people who looked like members of the Jewish people, but in reality they were not. Only the Jewish people were in the plan of Creation; the members of the *Erev Rav* are not part of the souls of the Jewish people.

In Persia as well, after the events of the Purim story, there were non-Jews who tried to save themselves by claiming that they are of the Jewish people. All of these instances was the use of the evil power of *medameh* – the power to create new realities which Hashem did not intend.

How are the Jewish people different from these fakers, the *Erev Rav*? The souls of the Jewish people are all part and parcel with the wisdom of Hashem; “*Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people are one.*” The *Erev Rav* used the power of *medameh*, making themselves “similar” to the Jewish people, but they are not part of the collective wisdom of Hashem.

This is the prime example of the evil of imagination – *medameh*, which also means to compare and resemble. All the forces of evil -- Amalek, the *Erev Rav* and the *yetzer hora* – use the evil power of *medameh*. Amalek creates false realities, which is evil *medameh*. The *Erev Rav* make themselves look similar to us, which is also an evil kind of *medameh*. And evil itself, the *yetzer hora*, uses *medameh*/imagination to convince a person to sin.

To summarize what we have said until now (we still haven't explained yet how to actually fix and improve our imagination), there are generally three kinds of *medameh*: in the actions, in the emotions and in the mind.

If we allow imagination to be in charge of our abilities, then we don't stand upon reality.

## 2.15 | *Guiding Your Imagination*<sup>193</sup>

### *Two Kinds Of Imagination: Exaggerating Facts and Making Up New Information*

We mentioned so far that there are two kinds of evil imagination: imagination which comes from the male aspect of the soul, which is an evil usage of the power in the soul called “*Yaakov*,” and the imagination which comes from the feminine aspect of the soul, which is an evil usage of the power in the soul called “*Leah*.” The male aspect of the soul uses a kind of imagination which takes already existing information and exaggerates it, while the feminine aspect in the soul is responsible for a different kind of imagination: to come up with new concepts that do not exist.

We will explain this more in greater detail and then, with the help of Hashem, we can speak of the solution to both kinds of evil imagination, which is the goal we are leading to.

### *What Esav Has Inherited To His Descendants*

The non-Jewish nations of the world, who descend from Esav, have inherited the second kind of evil imagination – “*Leah*.” This kind of evil imagination is how to guide their power of imagination.

This non-Torah method is something as follows (this isn’t always the exact scenario, but in every case the line of thinking is always the same): They tell a person, “Imagine that there is a light entering your body and that it is surrounding you. Now imagine that it has entered you. Now imagine that it is purging the evil inside you. Now imagine that the evil has been emptied from you.”

Where does this “light” come from?! It is being entirely imagined. The person is using his imagination to come up with absurd new ideas that do not exist.

There are even many books written about how to use this kind of imagination, but the point of all these books is the same: to get a person to imagine something which doesn’t exist and then “purify” the evil within him by “purging” it.

If they would tell him to look at a candle and imagine that its light is entering him and purifying him, that would be one thing. If that would be the case, then at least a person is taking something that exists and exaggerating it. But that is not what they do. They are telling people to imagine something which does not exist at all and to base their lives on this.

The non-Torah methods have unfortunately entered our society and are extinguishing the light of our holy souls. People know that imagination can be useful and holy, and therefore they justify themselves: “What’s wrong with doing this? Who says it’s against the Torah?”

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<sup>193</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-thoughts-015-guiding-your-imagination>

Even if such a practice would not be forbidden by the Torah (we won't get into the issue or not – that is a discussion for itself), it is detrimental to a Jew's soul, because it brings us down to a lower level. Everything that a Jew is supposed to do has basis to it, while the non-Torah kind of imagination is based on nothing but total imagination. Non-Jewish imagination-based therapy is lacking any solid basis whatsoever; it's all made up from nothing. Even if it's not actual idol worship (which it might indeed be), it still resembles idol worship, because it is creating some new entity that doesn't exist – which is the whole concept of idol worship.

It's clear and it's a given. There is no basis to permit one to use these non-Jewish therapies.

### ***Using The Power Of Imagination To Change Information***

Another kind of evil imagination is when a person exaggerates information. This power can be used for good or evil. How?

Superficially, to distort information in a holy way means to change something from bad to good, and to distort in an evil way is to change from good to bad. That is generally true.

But to be more precise, to change the information is essentially the same as *returning* the information to the way it was to begin with. We will explain how this is so.

If something has to be changed, then it was because something came and changed it from the way it was supposed to be, and it has to be restored to the way it was originally.

That is a Jew's power in using imagination for holiness. A non-Jew only uses imagination to make up new things. Even when a non-Jew is attempting to use imagination and distort the information, he doesn't restore it to the way it used to be, and he makes up something new. But a Jew has the power in his soul to use imagination simply to *restore* the information to the way it is supposed to be, and this is the holy way to “change” information – not to “*change*” it per se, but to restore it to the way it is supposed to be. The change to the information is not making up something new, but it is merely restoring it to what it is supposed to be like.

### ***The Torah Approach To Dealing With Desires And Lusts***

Let's say a person has a problem with lusts, and he goes to a secular therapist to get help. The therapist tells him: “Imagine that there is a light surrounding you; now imagine that it is entering you and purging you of your lust.” There are people who say that they were helped by this and that they succeeded to some extent in weakening their desires. They call this therapy “self-subjugation”. Even if a person claims that it helps him somewhat, it does more harm to him than good. We will explain why.



Every person has some evil desires in himself. How can we fix the problem of desires? The superficial response would be to “get rid” of our desires, through the many different ways that people can do this. But the point of this thinking is, “I have an evil desire, so I have to uproot it.”

The inner solution, however – which is the Torah solution – is to change our attitude about desire. Desire is an emotion in a person which has a root – Hashem Himself. “Hashem desired to dwell on the lower world.” The soul of a person contains desires which are holy, like it is written (*Yeshayahu 26:9*), “*My soul desires You at night.*” Desire in essence is holy, but it can get “stolen” for the wrong reasons.

When a person has an evil desire for something improper, it is just desire being used in the wrong place. The desire in its essence is good, but since the person hasn’t yet revealed its true use, the person only knows how to use the power of desire for evil. The desire is clothed by materialistic pursuits and has been stolen for selfish reasons. The *Yetzer hora*, who resides in a person’s heart, steals one’s desire and uses it for its own reasons. The materialistic pursuits of a person is thus only a garment of the desire, but the desire in essence is holy and G-dly.

How should a person deal with an evil desire that he has? He needs to remove the evil garments that are on top of it and reveal its essence, which is pure.

But the non-Torah approach is: “You have an improper desire? Come for therapy and we will help you get rid of your very power of desire.” The non-Jewish approach is that desire is evil. But this is wrong! To take away the power of desire from a person is like taking the life out of a person! A non-Jew considers desire to be evil, because since he doesn’t have a G-dly part in his soul (the *nefesh Elokus*), he cannot understand how desire can be holy. The only thing a non-Jew knows about desire is how it can be unhealthy, so of course the solution to a non-Jew is to eliminate the power of desire.

But the holy Jewish nation, which have Divine souls from Hashem, have a basic and necessary power to desire something. “*My soul desires You at night.*” By some this is more apparent and by others it is not, but every Jew’s soul has the faculty of desire. It just has to be removed from the evil garments that are covering it. The way to do it is by removing the evil from it, which is by using desire for the right reasons – to desire a closeness with Hashem.

If a therapist wants to take away the power of desire from a person, he might be correct that the person has an evil desire, but by uprooting desire from the person, he is invalidating a basic need in a person.

### ***How To Use The Holy Imagination***

Now we will bring the Torah solution for dealing with the evil that resides in us. There is a way to use our imagination in a holy way and use it to rid ourselves from any evil.

To explain how this works, there is a G-dly light (“*ohr eloki*”) that hovers above a Jew’s head. This light is also present inside a person; the very existence of a person is a *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a portion of Hashem. This G-dly light in a person has the power to remove the evil in a person.

(If a person doesn’t feel a need for this light, he cannot use his imagination for holiness.)

When we use our imagination in this way (to imagine the G-dly light in us), we aren’t making up something new. The G-dly light is something that exists in us, and one can use his imagination to connect to it. Of course, there are other ways to receive this spiritual light - either through learning Torah or through doing the *mitzvos*. But one of the ways we can also have it is through utilizing our imagination.

So far we have mentioned one condition for imagination to be holy: it has to be something which already exists, not something which is being made up. Now we will add on another condition that one needs in order for imagination to be holy: we cannot base our lives on it. Therefore, if someone sits all day and practices holy imagination, he is actually using the evil kind of imagination inherited by Esav.

There are people today who don’t learn any *mussar* and don’t do any of the *Avodas Hashem* of our tradition, and instead they immerse themselves all day in holy imagination. But they are mistaken in this. Imagination can be a part of one’s *Avodas Hashem*, but it cannot be everything, or else it becomes evil.

Unfortunately, in today’s times, there are people who aren’t learned in the Torah, and they have written volumes of imagination-based therapy which are really based on the evil kind of imagination. They even quote Torah sources for some of their ideas, but it is only because they know that Torah Jews want to see the sources for these ideas; they themselves aren’t interested in coming onto the Torah for credibility. They aren’t learned in the Torah and thus they do not know how to really use the imagination. If a person wants to find sources in the Torah, he can find sources for just about anything....he will fool himself and claim that there’s a Torah source for it.

Someone showed me one of these books and I saw that it was written there: “Say a *possuk* before you do this....”

Saying a *possuk* cannot undo the improper use of imagination. It is not the way for a Jew, who has a loftier soul than the other nations of the world. If anyone thinks that this was the way of our ancestors, they are clearly mistaken, and they are contradicted from the very sources they rely on.

### ***Holy Imagination Must Be Used To Reveal Your Soul***

There is a fourth condition in order for imagination to be holy: when we use holy imagination, it should be that we are trying to reveal our *tzelem elokim* (G-dly image) within us.

The power of imagination is rooted in “*kedemuseinu*”, which is one aspect in a person. But the other aspect of a person is “*betzalmeinu*”, that man is created with a *tzelem elokim*. The “*kedemuseinu*” has to be able to reveal the “*betzalmeinu*”; or else we cannot use “*kedemuseinu*”. If a person uses holy imagination but he doesn’t do so with the intention of revealing his *tzelem elokim*, he is just trying to create something new, which is the evil kind of imagination. Our whole intention in using holy imagination is so that we can use it to reveal our soul.

Our soul contains both our good *middos* and our bad *middos*. The good *middos* are located in the higher part of our soul, while the bad *middos* are located in the lower, animalistic part of our soul.

Our happiness, for example, is contained in the innermost part of our soul; “*Splendor and joy in His place.*” When a person is depressed, and he goes to a therapist who doesn’t use Torah-based therapy, what is he told? “Imagine that a light is entering you, and that the light is taking away the sadness from you, and that now you are happy...”

Can a “light” come and take away your sadness? Can it bring you happiness?! The non-Torah approach of imagination might be able to take away a person’s sadness, but it definitely doesn’t bring happiness. Happiness comes from the innermost part of the soul – which is only when one reveals Hashem from within himself.

The only “light” that you can use to bring you happiness is the light of the Creator. When a person uses this light (which we will see later how to use it), the sadness which comes from the animalistic part of the soul is removed, and this reveals the light of the Creator within a person, which brings happiness. But this kind of happiness is the happiness of “*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*” When a person’s imagination comes from the Creator, it is the Creator who is enabling the imagination to be beneficial to him.

### ***Use Torah and Mitzvos To Get Rid Of The Evil Within You***

The whole power of holy imagination accomplishes this one thing: to remove what isn’t part of one’s *tzelem elokim* and in its place to reveal the *tzelem elokim*.

On one hand, a person is a *tzelem elokim*. On the other hand, a person is also “dirt from the ground”. We have in us two forces that contradict each other: our *tzelem elokim*, which is all the good in us, and our dirt which we come from, which is all the evil in us.

When a person uses imagination for holiness, what he is essentially accomplishing is to reveal use his imagination to reveal his *tzelem elokim* from within his “dirt”. We will explain what this means.

In a person, there is his *tzelem elokim*, and then there is his aspect of “dirt”. The imagination is in the point between these two forces, and it can come and shine the *tzelem elokim* onto our “dirt” – in other words, through using our soul, we can affect our own body, and we bring harmony between our *tzelem elokim* and our aspect of “dirt”.

Before, we discussed how the power of thought can drop and become downgraded to the level of either imagination or emotions. We have said that the difference between imagination and emotions is that imagination comes up with something that really does not exist (like when a person wants a car, so he imagines that he has the car), while the emotions don't make up new information but instead exaggerates the information.

A person's imagination can either be used for evil, which is when one leads his life based on emotions – or it can be used in a holy way, which can actually revitalize a person.

Our dirt which we are made from in our body contains all our evil, while all our good is contained in our *tzelem elokim*. **It is essentially Torah and mitzvos which shine the light of the *tzelem elokim* upon the animalistic part of our soul and onto our "dirt" in our body.**

One of the ways to use our *tzelem elokim* is through using holy imagination. It is holy because it's not making up something new, but it is revealing your potential – you are using the *tzelem elokim* that exists within you and shining it onto the animalistic desires of your body.

Holy imagination is essentially to imagine your *tzelem elokim* and to imprint its power onto your imagination. The way to actually do this is for a person to imagine that **this perfection exists in the innermost part of the soul** (either he can imagine it as a G-dly light, or as one of the other terms mentioned in the *sefarim hakedoshim*), **and that it is penetrating the evil within him.**

This is the Torah approach to using the imagination, and anything other than this method is the secular, non-Torah approach which we cannot use.

### ***The Difference Between Holy and Unholy Imagination***

The *sefer Chovos HaTalmidim* speaks at length about the power of holy imagination. Some of the examples brought there are to imagine that one is in the *Beis Hamikdash* doing the Avodah, or that he is singing with the angels in Heaven.

. The angels exist, so that is why one is permitted to imagine them. Why must a person use imagination for this, and why is a person allowed to imagine it? It is because a person has a hard time connecting to this reality. By imagining that it is really happening, like when he imagines that he is in Heaven and singing with angels, he is able to connect himself to this reality. That is the purpose of holy imagination – to help a person connect to reality which, without imagining it, he would have a hard time connecting to it.

People used to always make use of their imagination in a holy and constructive way. If a father had to miss his child's wedding (like if his flight got cancelled), what did he do? This was before they had recent technology. What did he do? He would imagine that he was there and feel like he was dancing with his son. This is a good kind of imagination, because he wasn't inventing anything new; he knew his son is getting married right now, and he would use his imagination to connect himself to a reality taking place that he couldn't see with his own eyes.

If something exists, one can imagine that he is connecting himself to it. That is when imagination is holy.

There is a danger to this, however, and that is if a person imagines himself singing with the angels, he might try to actually come to picture the angels. If he imagines that he is singing with them, this is fine, but to picture the angels is already going too far.

But if let's say you were once by the Kosel and you want to feel like you're there, you can imagine that you are standing there, and there is nothing wrong with this kind of imagination. This is because you are connecting yourself to something that already happened in your experiences, and you are not making up something new.

### *When Should A Person Use Imagination?*

Now we can, with the help of Hashem, speak about **who** may use his power of imagination.

After a person has learned Torah very in-depth, it is then that his mind is purified. Such a person is able to use his imagination in a holy way.

But in today's generation, it is unfortunately very common to have people who have not even learned any Torah, and these people attempt to use their imagination. Who knows what will become of these people? Their minds were already corrupted to begin with even before they began to use imagination techniques. When such people attempt to use their imagination, their imagination only leads them more and more downward. The result of this is that their minds are being led by their imagination within another imagination. In a way this helps such people somewhat, but the damage they cause themselves is much greater than whatever they gain.

We will give an example of this. Let's say a person has to go for anger management. He realizes that certain situations make him lose his temper. What should he really do?

He can imagine that very situation that always gets him angry, and imagine the whole scene unfolding itself again, but this time, he imagines that he is not getting angry.

This is a Torah-approved method that is sound and can work, because he is using the G-dly light within himself to hold back his anger. The G-dly light is something that exists in a person, and he can use his imagination to bring it out from within himself.

But if he goes to a secular psychologist, they will tell him something like: "Imagine the stressful scene, and imagine that you are there, but this time you are not getting angry, **because you don't want** to get angry. If you do this three times, then you will see that by the fourth time it happens, you are less angry."

There are indeed people who have been helped by this therapy, but they harm themselves more than what they have gained. Why? It is because they have used their imagination which comes from

the lowest part in their soul (the *nefesh habehamis*). It is an animalistic way to help someone! Professionals train horses as well not to get angry in the circus and misbehave; people are using the same way they get animals to behave in order to get humans to behave! Even if a person controls his anger in this way, he has harmed his soul in the process, by treating his soul like an animal. He has treated his G-dly soul like a non-Jewish soul, which for sure does more harm than good.

The Torah approach to dealing with anger, however, is that a person must believe that there is a higher power within him that can overcome his tendencies to anger. When a person does this, he is essentially making use of the G-dly light within him. He can imagine the stressful scene unfolding itself again, but instead of getting angry this time, he imagines himself strengthening his *Emunah* and not giving in to anger.

That is the holy usage of imagination.

### ***Practice This Before Your Difficult Situation Comes***

Let's make this very practical now: we will give an exercise to do.

Every time a person has a failure – like if he is sad, or if he is angry, or if he has an evil impulse – he should imagine for himself the very scene which arouses that negative emotion (whether it has already happened, or whether it is imagining a future event), and then he should imagine that the G-dly light within him is holding him back from giving in to the negative reaction.

*Chazal* say that when the Yetzer hora enters the scene, a person forgets all about his Yetzer Tov (Nedarim 32a). When evil is present, a person forgets about all the good within him. So how is a person supposed to fight evil? The answer is by preparing for it beforehand. When a person is calm and he isn't going through the test right this moment, he should now take the opportunity to imagine using the G-dly light within him to overcome his difficulty when it happens. Imagine the stressful situation; now imagine that you are overcoming it, because there is a G-dly light within you that can defeat the negative reaction.

Such imagination is holy, because it utilizes something that already exists within you; it is not making up something new.

The secular approach us that if a person imagines that he is happy even though he knows that he isn't, or that he imagines that he isn't going to get angry when really he does want to get angry. With this mentality, he's making something up new that doesn't exist, which is the evil, false imagination.

The Torah outlook on imagination, by contrast, is that a person should use imagination to reveal his already existing potential. (He can imagine that he's happy, not because he's trying to "make" himself happy, but because he's really happy deep down in his soul, and he just has to bring forth that inner happiness of the soul, using his imagination.)

A person will be able to accomplish a lot with this.

***Only Spend A Little Amount Of Time On This***

However, we must caution that this should be done for only a minimal amount of time. No one should base his entire life on holy imagination; if a person does, then he spends his whole life in his imagination. Such a person is missing the “*b’tzalmeinu*” (being in the image of Hashem) and only focusing on the “*kedemuseinu*” of imagination.

*Betzalmeinu* is when a person aspires to be like a *tzelem Elokim*, in the image of Hashem. *Kedemuseinu* is when a person uses his imagination. The third step of this is the end of the *possuk*, “*And He fashioned man out of the dust of the earth.*” This represents action, hinting to us that our holy imagination has to lead to acting upon it, or else it isn’t holy.

When a person has all these three steps in the process, in their proper usage, and by not overdoing it, then he is living in a way that a Jew is supposed to live.

## 2.16 | *Imagination Used For Holiness*<sup>194</sup>

### *Holy Imagination Is To Reveal What Already Exists*

In the previous chapter, we explained how imagination can either be detrimental or positive. Generally, when a person imagines something new that doesn't exist, it is detrimental, but when a person expands an already existing concept further, it is a positive kind of imagination. If imagination is being used to make up something new, it cannot be positive. The only one who can make something new is Hashem, the Creator of the world.

Holy imagination is permitted because the person isn't coming up with something new; he is connecting himself to something that already exists. He is simply revealing a new perspective in something. This is in contrast to unholy imagination, which is when a person comes up with something that doesn't exist.

That is the basic idea we have said, and now we will elaborate on this.

### *Connecting To The Unlimited*

This world is limited. A person by nature is limited, but there is a way for a person to connect himself to what is above our limits. One of the ways is to do this is through utilizing the imagination.

The prophets had an ability to picture Hashem (*Beraishis Rabbah* 27:1). Humans are limited, while the Creator is unlimited; the prophets connected to the *Ein Sof* (Endlessness) of Hashem, which is above the limits of a human being.

How can a human, who is limited, connect to the *Ein Sof* of Hashem, Who is unlimited? One of the ways is through utilizing the imagination in a positive way. This was the greatness achieved by the prophets, who used their imagination to connect to what was beyond their limits.

Let us explain this a bit more.

We have in our mind the the faculties of *Chochmah*, the root of our *seichell* intellect, and *Binah*, the root of our imagination.

Our *seichell* intellect connects to Hashem in a different way than we are discussing. With the intellect, a person connects himself to the *Chochmah*, and since *Chochmah* is endless, this gives a person a connection to the *Ein Sof* of Hashem.

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<sup>194</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-thoughts-018-imagination-used-holiness>



But we are currently discussing a different kind of connection to the *Ein Sof* – the connection through our power of *Binah*, the root of our imagination.

*Chochmah* and *Tevunah* (which is lower use of *Binah*) are different in that *Chochmah* gives a person is to conceptualize something without picturing it, while *Tevunah* is to picture an image in order to understand it. *Chochmah* arranges information to a person, but it doesn't give a person a picture of it. *Tevunah* is what gives a person a picture. Now we can understand that imagination [when it used for holiness] is essentially giving a person a picture of what is above the limits of the world.

*Chochmah* uses our intellect. It is able to connect a person to the unlimited as follows. A person is able to comprehend a lofty concept a little, and by holding onto a little of the concept, it is like he is holding onto all of it. Even though the intellect is limited, the intellect is able to understand a little more each time. The whole entire idea of the intellect is that a person uses his intellect to try to understand something which is unlimited and endless.

But with *Binah*, a person is picturing something. A picture by definition is something which is limited. If something is unlimited, it doesn't have a picture. But if it can be pictured, it must be that it is limited. How then can a person picture something which is unlimited?

This is where imagination comes in. Imagination is the force which expands one's limits. How does this work? The imagination isn't really overcoming one's limits, but what it does is give a person a new picture, something more than before. This is the deep definition of holy imagination.

### ***Defining Evil Imagination and Holy Imagination***

The question is, how can a person picture something which doesn't exist? If it does exist, and a person is picturing it, then it's not imagination! So why is it considered using the imagination?

If a person can't see something which is real, so he imagines it instead, it isn't totally imagination. Why? Total imagination is to imagine something which doesn't exist. If a person never saw a chair in his life and he imagines how it must look – and he succeeds in imagining it – can we say that it's all his imagination? There is some use of imagination here, but it's not total, because the chair exists. Total imagination is to imagine something which doesn't exist and tries to picture it.

But this begs another question. If imagination is only considered imagination when it's total, then how can it ever be holy? Isn't a total imagination always a lie?

There are two answers for this.

One reason is as follows. If a person imagines something for holiness, and he is **aware** that he is still within the **bounds** of imagination – then it is holy and proper. There is nothing wrong with this. It is only if the person in his imagination considers what he is imagining to be real – **then** his imagination is evil.

Those are the rules for holy imagination – as long as one is aware that it's not real, the imagination is positive and it is being used for holiness. If a person thinks that what he is imagining is actually happening because he is imagining it, he is acting mentally ill.

Still, it is very hard to understand how imagination can ever be holy. If it's not really happening, then why are we allowed to imagine it?!

### ***Holy Imagination – Connecting Yourself To What Is Beyond***

In all of Creation, there are two kinds of forces: a *koach*, potential force and a *poel*, active force. Reality is a *poel*; imagination is only a *koach*. In actuality, what we imagine for holiness isn't taking place; it is also something that can potentially happen. By contrast, when someone imagines for evil purposes, he is saying that it is actually taking place in reality when it isn't.

To illustrate this idea, we know that there are many different ways to combine the letters of the *Aleph-Beis* (*tzirufei ha'osiyos*). We do not know how to combine them, but in potential, there exists many different ways to combine them; we just aren't aware of them and don't know how to do it. In the future all will be revealed; but a person's imagination can show him all the different potential ways to combine them.

The prophets received their prophecy through the holy kind of imagination. They would take the holy letters that they received and combine them, forming ideas. They weren't inventing anything new – they were simply collecting and combining all of the facts in front of them, forming the conclusions based on already existing ideas. Thus, holy imagination isn't anything new; the only thing new here is the way they would combine their information, but they weren't inventing anything from the imagination. They were expanding a potential concept.

So holy imagination is for a person to connect himself to a place that is beyond where you are. The holy kind of imagination is the power to conjure up images and pictures of something that **already** exists. This is also known as *Tziyur*, the ability to imagine the World-to-Come by thinking about it in a very real sense.

The Sages say that *techeiles* is blue, because when a person sees the blue color, he will be reminded of the sea, which reminds him of the sky, which will remind him of the *kisei hakavod* (Throne of Glory) – and this will bring one to have fear of Heaven. This is clearly the use of imagination; no one has ever seen the *kisei hakavod*. But since every person's soul is rooted in the *kisei hakavod*, a person can connect himself to this unseen reality by using the holy kind of imagination. In such imagination, a person isn't coming up with anything new. He is merely combining all the information in front of him and expanding it, until he arrives at a greater conclusion of what he started out with.

To summarize: If I am connecting myself to a reality that does not exist, it is evil imagination. If I am connecting to myself to a reality that exists, just that it is above my comprehension – that is holy imagination.

### ***Only Emunah Enables The Holy Imagination***

Now that we have understood that, we can come to understand a deeper point.

In our mind, there is *seichel* (intellect) and there is our imagination. Our intellect is based on reality; it proves to us that something exists, even if we don't really comprehend it. If our intellect cannot feel the proof of something, then we cannot connect to the information using our intellect. A person would swear that he saw something, because his intellect has proved it to him and he is willing to swear over it.

Imagination works differently. In the evil kind of imagination, a person imagines something which doesn't exist and attempts to turn it into reality. This is actually the roots of idol worship! By contrast, holy imagination is to imagine something which exists, but it is something which is above one's comprehension, and through the imagination, one can connect himself to that reality.

If something is above one's comprehension, then his intellect cannot prove that it exists. So how does a person know that it does exist? This is the role of *Emunah*. *Emunah* is what is enabling one to connect to facts he doesn't see.

Holy imagination makes use of our *Emunah*; it shows a person that certain fact exists because he believes in it, even though he has no comprehension of it. If a person can't comprehend a certain concept, how can he connect himself to it? Through *Emunah*.

### ***Holy Imagination Requires Emunah***

Having understood that, we can speak about another point which results from this.

*Emunah* is the power we have which can shatter boundaries. It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that "The point where the *seichel* ends is where *Emunah* begins." A person's intellect brings a person up until where he can really understand, and a person's *Emunah* is able to take him and connect him to the point beyond his intellectual comprehension.

On a deeper note, *Emunah* is necessary in order to shatter any limit. Even a person's *Chochmah* requires *Emunah* if a person wants to connect to the *Ein Sof*. When a person understands as much as he possibly could, he has reached the end of his *Chochmah*; he believes that really his *Chochmah* is deeper than what he actually comprehends, so he uses his *Emunah* to connect to what is beyond his comprehension. This is essentially because a person believes that the Torah is vaster than the earth and the sea – he uses his power of *Emunah* to believe that there is more to what he is capable of understanding.

Since holy imagination can only work through *Emunah*, and holy imagination goes beyond our intellectual limitations, it is thus self-evident that holy imagination and *Emunah* work together. *Emunah* is what shatters the limits, and the holy imagination is how a person pictures the information of what is beyond the limits.

It seems that *Emunah* and holy imagination are the same thing, but they are not. Holy imagination is based on one's *Emunah*, step-by-step. The first step is that a person believes that a certain concept exists. When a person is told that a certain animal exists in another country and he has never seen it, he can believe the person, but how does he know how it looks? He imagines how it must look. So a person's power to believe, *Emunah*, is what gives a fact credibility, and then a person's imagination comes and pictures the fact.

This we can see from the statement of *Chazal* that looking at *techeiles* reminds a person of the *kisei hakavod*. No one has ever seen the *kisei hakavod*, so how does this work? It is because we have *Emunah*, and we know that it exists. Then we use our imagination to picture it, by seeing *techeiles*.

The point from all this is to realize that imagination can only be holy if it is coming from our *Emunah*.

### ***How Holy Imagination Can Be Dangerous***

However, even if a person has *Emunah*, imagination can always be dangerous, even when it is being used for holiness.

It is written (Devarim 4:15), "*For you did not see any image on the day Hashem spoke to you at Chorev, amidst a fire.*" Hashem gave a special warning at Har Sinai that we must not make anything in His image; this was because at Har Sinai, the Jewish people were all prophets and were able to picture beyond their understanding. When a person is at this level, he is warned by Hashem not to picture the *Ein Sof* of Hashem.

An ordinary person, who only recognizes what he is familiar with, isn't capable of picturing Hashem; for him there is no such warning. But there is a warning and prohibition from Hashem to a person who is more advanced and has reached *Emunah*: he can imagine what is **until** the *Ein Sof* ("Endlessness") of Hashem, but not the actual *Ein Sof* of Hashem.

On a simple level, this is because such a person (who has indeed reached *Emunah*) is in danger of getting caught up in his imagination. But on a deeper level, we need to be cautious with our imagination, even if we already have *Emunah* and even if we are using it for a holy purpose; a person is not allowed to picture Hashem, even if he has *Emunah*.

If a person does not build his imagination upon his *Emunah*, he is missing a part of the equation. That is one kind of problem. But then there is a more complicating problem, and that is when one already has *Emunah*. Such a person is in danger of picturing the *Ein Sof* of Hashem, and to such a person there is a special warning.

Therefore even when we do have *Emunah*, we must be cautious and not try to picture the *Ein Sof*. Until that point, we can use our imagination – but not beyond that.

### ***Holy Imagination Protects A Person From The Yetzer hora***

It is written (*Tehillim* 104:24), “*All of them You made with wisdom.*” If everything is up to Hashem, how do we have any free will? We will explain this.

The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 2a) says that a person only sins when a *ruach shtus*, “spirit of folly” enters him. On a simple level this means that a *ruach shtus* enters him and removes his wisdom. The Ramchal writes (in *sefer Derech Etz Chaim*) that if people would really know what a sin is, no one would ever sin. How is it then that people could sin? It is only because a *ruach shtus* enters a person and makes a person lose his mind temporarily.

But on a deeper note, it is because a person only sins when he imagines something; if a person wouldn't imagine, he wouldn't come to sin!

Before we spoke about the *Yetzer hora* (the evil inclination); we mentioned that the whole influence of the *Yetzer hora* to convince a person to sin is through the imagination. For example, the *Yetzer hora* caused the people to sin by showing a picture of Moshe Rabbeinu's coffin in the sky, which put them in a state of despair.

The *Yetzer hora* uses imagination to get people to sin; the only way we can really utilize our free will on this world and have a chance against evil is by fighting the *Yetzer hora* with its very strategies. We need to develop our own kind of holy imagination and fight our evil imagination, which the *Yetzer hora* uses to attack us with.

Even if a person has *seichell*/intellect as well as *Emunah*, without developing holy imagination a person doesn't stand a chance against evil temptations.

The *Yetzer hora* bases all its tactics to get us to sin, through getting us to imagine. *Chazal* say (*Nedarim* 32b) that “At the time when the *Yetzer hora* is present, there is no one who can remember his *yetzer tov*.” When evil begins to tempt a person, a person's intellect leaves him and instead a *ruach shtus* enters him.

What should a person do then when he is being confronted with evil passions of the *Yetzer hora*? What remains left in a person when his mind is gone?

The only thing a person can have left in him when he has no intellect is his imagination. If he has developed a holy kind of imagination, he will be able to have protection from the *Yetzer hora* when it comes.

How does this work? We mentioned before that the intellect remains in a person because of our power of memory (*zocheir*). Our imagination, however, is retained through our power of “protection” (*shoimer*). So even when a person loses his memory of what’s right and wrong, his imagination is protected. If he has a holy kind of imagination, his holy imagination remains imprinted in him even when his intellect is gone.

The more a person has worked to develop a holy imagination, the bigger mark he leaves on his mind, and the more *Yiras Shomayim* (fear of Heaven) he will have to fight the *Yetzer hora*.

In a time of *mochin d’gadlus*, a person has more *Yiras Shomayim*, because a person’s intellect is working. But when a person is in a weak state of mind (*mochin d’katnus*) – how can a person fight his *Yetzer hora*’s evil thoughts? The *Yetzer hora* is attacking and waging a full-fledged war with the person; how can a person fight with no mind?!

The way is to fight is by using one’s imagination. This is an inner fight between the two kinds of imagination inside you. Your holy imagination will be fighting the evil imagination – it will be a war with the two kinds of imagination. So you have to develop your weapons before the enemy attacks...

This is the real meaning of *Yiras Shomayim*; it is the imprint left on a person even when his thinking mind isn’t functioning right now. If a person only develops his intellect but he hasn’t developed the imagination, then he will only win over the *Yetzer hora* when his intellect is working. In a time of *mochin d’katnus*, though, his intellect is gone, and he has no ammunition with which to be protected from the *Yetzer hora*.

The Sages<sup>195</sup> say that “the wicked are ruled by their Evil Inclination”. What does this mean? The depth of it is that wicked people are the ones who fall into their imagination; they will thus always lose to the Evil Inclination. But the righteous prevail over the *Yetzer hora* – how? Because they have *Emunah* together with their imagination. This leaves an **imprint** on them even when they lose their intellect, and that imprint is known as *Yiras Shomayim*.

The power of *Yiras Shomayim* is accessed by the righteous – and for all who have *Emunah*, together with holy imagination – and this can fight the *Yetzer hora*, even when one’s intellect has left him.

The *Yetzer hora*’s entire strength is the power of imagination that it uses on a person. When a person doesn’t have *Emunah*, his imagination isn’t strong enough to overpower the evil imagination of the *Yetzer hora*, and he falls to the *Yetzer hora* in a weak state of mind, like when he is in a time of *mochin d’katnus*.

This is the function that our lower kind of holy imagination serves.

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195 *Berachos 61b*

### ***The Higher and Lower Kinds Of Holy Imagination***

In the previous chapters, we have addressed one kind of holy imagination, which was a higher kind of imagination. But now we are discussing the lower use of our holy imagination, which is to use our imagination to fight the *Yetzer hora*.

In the first kind of holy imagination we have been discussing, a person is able to transcend his limits. The second kind of imagination doesn't take a person beyond his limits, but it serves a different purpose: to protect one's mind. This is necessary for a person to protect himself from evil desires (the *Yetzer hora*).

If a person doesn't learn how to use his imagination to protect himself from the *Yetzer hora*, then he has "successes and failures." When he is in a time of *mochin d'gadlus* – when he is in a higher state of mind – he will overcome evil desires, but when he is in a time of *mochin d'katnus*, the lower state of mind, he will fall....

The only thing that can protect a person from the *Yetzer hora* is to develop the holy kind of imagination.

### ***How Hashem helps a person overcome the Yetzer hora***

The *Gemara (Sukkah 52a)* says, "The Evil Inclination of a person gets stronger every moment, and if not for Hashem helping him, it would be impossible to overcome it." Why is it impossible to overpower the *Yetzer hora* without the help of Hashem?

On a simple level it is because the *Yetzer hora* is an angel, while we are only human beings, and we cannot fight an angel, who is much stronger than us. That is true, but now it is clearer to us: the *Yetzer hora* succeeds in taking away a person's intellect, and the person is left only with his imagination. Since he has no intellect, it's as if he's not a person; he has no *Chochmah* left in him right now, and his imagination by itself cannot help him.

It is written, "*A tzaddik falls seven times and gets up.*" If a person is always in control of his mind, he will be able to win against the *Yetzer hora* – he can fall, but he also "gets up." But the average person isn't always in control of his mind, and when the *Yetzer hora* comes, he always falls. He loses his free will, and what does the *Yetzer hora* do? It takes away his mind and makes him imagine. This is the problem; what can we do about this, and how indeed can we deserve Hashem's help?

On a simple level, the way to understand this is that a person receives *Siyata D'Shmaya*, direct assistance from Hashem to fight the *Yetzer hora*. This is true, but there is more depth to this.

The deeper understanding of how Hashem helps a person fight the *Yetzer hora* is as follows. When Hashem helps the person, He gives him new abilities to fight. These abilities are beyond the

normal limits known to a person. With these new God-given abilities a person is able to fight the *Yetzer hora*. The question is: how does a person enable himself to receive the help from Hashem?

This is when we try our best to fight it. When Hashem sees we are trying, He helps us. How do we try?

There is a statement in *Chazal*, “Open for Me an opening the size of a needle, and I will open for you an opening the size of an entranceway.” There is also a statement in *Chazal*, “It is not upon you to finish the task, but you are not exempt from being idle from it.” All of this is true, but we must understand how it works.

By developing a holy imagination, a person receives help from Hashem and acquires the ability to go beyond the normal human limits of the mind. The entire issue during the fight with the *Yetzer hora* is if a person will try to develop a holy imagination **before** the *Yetzer hora* attacks, when his intellect is working properly – when he is in a state of *mochin d’gadlus*. If a person developed his holy imagination, Hashem helps him when he is in a time of *mochin d’katnus*, when the *Yetzer hora* attacks; the person will then be able to go above his limits and overpower the *Yetzer hora*’s evil kind of imagination.

### ***The Only Way To Fight The Yetzer hora***

There are two ways that people have to fight the *Yetzer hora*. One way is unsuccessful, and the other way is the one that works.

The unsuccessful way is when a person simply tries to “avoid” the *Yetzer hora* and makes “boundaries” for himself so that he won’t encounter the *Yetzer hora*. For example, a person will daven a lot to Hashem to be saved from the *Yetzer hora*; this can definitely help him avoid the *Yetzer hora*, but what will he do when the *Yetzer hora* comes to him? A person’s boundaries that he has set up for himself cannot be enough to protect him from the *Yetzer hora*, who is unlimited in its power. The *yetzer hora* is a mighty angel whom it is impossible to defeat with even the strongest human perseverance.

If someone with unlimited strength is fighting you, how do you fight such an enemy??

The successful way is to fight the *Yetzer hora* with the same kind of tactics it is using! If the *Yetzer hora* is using forces against you that are unlimited, you can only fight it with an equally opposing force that is unlimited.

When a person is being tested with a difficult temptation, the only way he can overcome it is only if he has developed a holy imagination before the situation comes. Without holy imagination, a person will definitely fall to the *Yetzer hora*.

When a person is facing an evil temptation, he loses his very free will. If so, what is our free will on this world? Our whole free will is to *choose to prepare for battle*, **before** evil strikes.



You can't come to a war without any weapons. You can *daven* to be saved, but there isn't much you can do if you didn't prepare. When you go to war, you need to prepare for it; you can't come into a war without any previous training. You need a lot of preparation before the enemy strikes if you want to defeat it. This is a full-blown war, and it needs training before the enemy attacks. The way you train for this war is through developing a holy imagination beforehand.

This is our entire choice on this world whenever we speak of how to avoid the *Yetzer hora*. If we try to develop a holy imagination beforehand, we will have help from Hashem when our mind is weak and the *Yetzer hora* attacks. We need to develop our holy imagination, in addition to our *seichel* and our *Emunah*, which we spoke about earlier.

This is the way that people with *Yiras Shomayim* used to fight the *Yetzer hora*; they worked very hard on developing their holy kind of imagination.

We are **not** giving advice here on how to win over the *Yetzer hora*. We cannot tell a person **exactly** how to fight the *Yetzer hora*. When the *Yetzer hora* attacks a person with evil imaginative thoughts, it is an internal war; it is a war going on in one's very imagination, and it is a fight between good and evil imagination. But what we can tell a person is to learn how to **prepare** for war – by **trying to develop** a holy kind of imagination, a person can have a chance against the *Yetzer hora* when it attacks.

### ***Our Goal Is To Develop A Constant Reality Of Holy Imagination***

How does a person develop the holy kind of imagination?

There are people who develop their holy imagination, but only because they want to be able to fight their *Yetzer hora*. We cannot say this is incorrect to do, but that shouldn't be our entire purpose here. Holy imagination isn't only necessary as a tool to fight the *Yetzer hora*.

It is true that we need to fight the *Yetzer hora*, but we need to build up our holy kind of imagination for other purposes as well. We are trying to achieve a **constant** state of holy imagination – to **live** it.

How can a person do this?

Most people have a disconnection between their intellect and their imagination. They are either using only their intellect or only their imagination, and do not see a connection between the two. But the true way to live is by “clothing” our intellect with our imagination.

We will give a simple example of this. When a person is learning in *Gemara* about a case in which an ox gores a cow, he should picture the cow and the ox and how they are goring each other. Anyone can picture this, because everyone knows what an ox and a cow is, so they can also picture a scene of goring (even though most people haven't seen this happen).

A person should get used to picturing something, both with his mind and with his imagination. This is a very basic kind of imagination. If you know how something looks, get used to picturing it with your mind more. This will get you used to imagining something. (We must warn that sometimes a person can get carried away with his imagination and imagine things that are improper, so a person should be careful.) As you get used to doing this more, you will be able to acquire an ability to give a mental picture to everything. The more and more a person does this, the more he develops his imagination.

It is impossible to give specific instructions how to do this, but there is one thing which applies to all people: whenever you encounter information, picture it also. This is called *temunas haseichel* – “picture of the mind.”

We must mention again a warning: these matters are very subtle, and if a person overdoes it he will end up picturing something which really he shouldn't be picturing. For example, he will want to picture how the angels look, which is dangerous to do and causes one to live in his imagination.

### ***In Conclusion***

Let us summarize what we have learned about the holy kind of imagination.

Imagination is holy when a person isn't making up new facts. It is to connect oneself to something which exists, and what it essentially accomplishes is that it reveals a fact to a person. It is not actually taking place, but it shows a person the idea behind it.

In order to reveal potential concepts, we need to get used to picturing facts, both with our mind and with our imagination. As we get used to this, we are able to train our mind to actually picture the facts. This will get our mind to work together with the imagination. This refines our imagination more and more. The more we use our minds to picture a fact, the more refined our imagination will become, and it will be able to be a tool for our mind.

We have been brief about this last detail (*temunas haseichel*) because it is usually meant for certain individuals who are at the level of doing it. We have thus only given the general outline of the concept without getting into too many of the details.

May Hashem merit all of us to reach the most perfect kind of Chochmah, Binah, Tevunah - and to the holy kind of imagination.

## 2.17 | *Weakening Your Imagination By Self-Awareness*<sup>196</sup>

### *Imagination Takes Over When We Sleep*

One of the 48 qualities we need for the Torah is “little sleep.” What does it mean to get little sleep? Simply speaking, a person has to lose sleep over the Torah. But there is a deeper meaning to this.

A person has the power of thought as well as the power of imagination. By day, we use our thought; by night, the imagination takes over when we sleep. *Chazal* are saying that we need to lessen our sleep at night in order to learn Torah – this means that we have to lessen what we do when we sleep, which is our imagination. We need to weaken our imagination.

The depth behind why we have to weaken our sleep in order to acquire the Torah is that we need to weaken our negative kind of imagination, which is a kind of sleepiness.

### *Imagination Throughout The Day*

When the Torah was given, we were given the power of the Torah, which is essentially the power of true thought. The power of true thought in a person is able to overcome our imagination.

All of the evil in the world has to do with imagination. When a person wants to sin, it is because his imagination has overcome his thoughts. *Chazal* actually call our imagination the *Yetzer hora*.<sup>197</sup> Our entire desire to do evil comes from the imagination!

Everyone has both thought and imagination. By night, imagination takes over in our dreams, but during the day, we have both. Usually, we are not aware during the day if we are using our thought or imagination. Our thought and imagination keeps switching back and forth, but we aren't aware which is in use.

For example, in the last hour, how many of your passing thoughts were real thoughts, and how much was just your imagination?

We are constantly passing from thought to imagination. When we aren't aware of this, this is like the curse that came from eating from the Tree of Knowledge, which was a mixture of good and evil. We aren't aware which thoughts are real thoughts (which are good), and which thoughts are the evil imagination.

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<sup>196</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-thoughts-017-weakening-your-imagination-self-awareness>

<sup>197</sup> *Sukkah* 52a

Such a kind of life – a lack of awareness – is a sleepy kind of life. If we are aware of our thoughts, then we are kind of asleep, even during the day. In a sense, most people can be compared to a mentally ill person, of whom *Chazal* (Chagigah 4a) say has times in which he is sane and times when he isn't sane. This resembles the state of most people, who are sometimes thinking but sometimes just imagining.

This kind of life greatly damages us. A child often exaggerates – why is this so? It is because children are prone to their imagination, which leads them to distort information. There are even adults who are in their imagination – and most people fool themselves and are convinced that they don't imagine things. But if a person is convinced that he never imagines, it shows how much he lacks an awareness of himself.

When the Torah was given, we left our mixed up state of mind and returned to the state before Adam's sin, in which good and evil were separate. After the sin of the Calf, we became mixed up again with good and evil. Now we must return to the state that we were like at the giving of the Torah, in which there was no evil mixed up into our good – in other words, when our thoughts were free of our imagination.

This is really the depth behind *Teshuvah* – to “return” – to return to our clarity. The way we can become clear is by thinking and paying attention to what's going on in our mind.

### ***Paying Attention To Your Thoughts***

If a person doesn't listen to his thoughts, his life is all mixed up. His life will just be a mixture of thought and imagination.

But if a person wants to become more aware, he should review what he has thought about in the last hour and see which thoughts were about reality, and which were just his daydreaming.

Let's say a person is dreaming about what's going on right now in Tzefas. Is this thought or imagination? Sometimes it can be thought, but usually it's just imagination. If a person is sitting and wondering what's going on in the world, this is imagination! Our thoughts pass so quickly to our imagination that we don't even realize we have entered our imagination. Our imagination takes over very suddenly, and we don't even realize.

Sometimes a person wonders, “How did I get into thinking about this?” It didn't just “fall” into his head. It is because the imagination took over, and the person wasn't aware of it.

Let's say a person is sitting on a bus and lost in thought. This is a typical conversation that goes on all the time:

“What are you thinking about?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“What do you mean, nothing? Your brain is working, so you had to have been thinking about something! What were you thinking?”

“Oh...yeah...”

“Yeah, what? What were you thinking?”

“Something...”

“Why’d you think about it?”

“I don’t know, I just started to think about it...”

Such a person, if he wants to become aware of what’s going on his mind, needs to retrace his thoughts and see how one thought led to another.

Even when a person is learning Torah his imagination can be at work. Let’s take a person sitting and listening to a *shiur*. Does he even listen for a half hour without spacing out? If a person says, “Yes, I do concentrate for more than a half hour,” he is obviously fooling himself and he is not aware of himself.

We must listen deeply to what’s going on in our mind. Take a minute or two and review what you just thought about. It’s hard to do this at first, because there is a lack of awareness. But a person can get used to listening to his thoughts and see how fast his thoughts wander to the imagination.

This is a way for a person to reach the depths of his soul. When a person is in his imagination, he doesn’t have the tools to gain from any of his Avodas Hashem. Imagination doesn’t let you be calm to understand anything, and it also affects the level of how well you grasp something; because if you’re only understanding something through your imagination and not through your real thoughts, then you aren’t really understanding it.

In order to stop your imagination from controlling you, you must get used to checking your thoughts and seeing which of them were real thought and which of them imagination was.

Although so far we have been discussing the problem of imagination in regards to being an impediment to learning Torah, which applies to men, imagination is a problem for all areas of life, because if we don’t do this then we will be disconnected from ourselves. The solution we are giving here is essentially how you can become connected to yourself.

Therefore, both men and women need to weaken their imagination through this solution – to get used to checking your thoughts.

### ***Imagination is the Root Behind Bad Middos***

Imagination is behind all that is evil. *Chazal* tell us that three evil traits remove a person from this world – jealousy, desire and honor.

Really, the imagination in a person is what causes these three evil traits.

Let's take jealousy as an example. Why is a person jealous of another person? It's only because of imagination. Why should Reuven care about what Shimon has? It's only because Reuven imagines that he is supposed to have it. When a person is jealous, he leaves his world – "Jealousy, desire and honor take a person out of the world." It takes a person out of his world into his imagination!

The problem with imagination is a very broad problem that greatly affects *the entire spectrum* of one's soul. It's not a side issue – it is *the root issue of all our issues!*

Of course a person needs to work on his *middos*, but it will be much easier if a person uproots the bad *middos* from their source – by uprooting his imagination. We are used to working on branches of a problem, like each individual bad *middah* we discover in ourselves. But we often don't get to the root of our problem – and that root is imagination, which we must work on getting rid of.

### ***How To Become More Aware***

If a person wants to really enter Avodas Hashem, he should take two minutes a day and see where his thoughts wander to. He should see what led him to think about one thing to another; he should wonder: "How did I get into thinking about B when I was just thinking about A?"

The more a person does this, he will discover something he was never aware of until now: often, our imagination takes something and compares it with another thing, tricking you into thinking that two different things are the same.

What happens when you notice your imagination? Use your *seichel* and see how your imagination has led you to compare things that are different and make them appear the same – and you will see how your comparisons were totally off-base. It was your imagination which led you to make an inaccurate comparison.

### ***Fighting the Yetzer Hora before it attacks***

This is essentially the battle a person has with his Yetzer hora.

The Yetzer hora, during the actual time of difficulty, makes a person forget about his Yetzer Tov. So how does a person fight the Yetzer hora? The battle starts before the difficulty. The battle takes place between one's thoughts and one's imagination. We must fight the Yetzer hora before it attacks – not when it attacks. We need to uproot its power when we are calm and thinking; it is then that we can separate our thoughts from the imagination.

Take some quiet time and review your thoughts: how did you get from A to B, and how are the two thoughts similar? The more you do this, the more you see how your imagination misled you to

think how things are the same, and you will slowly weaken your imagination more and more if you practice this.

The inner way to prepare to accept the Torah is to check our thoughts and wonder: are we weakening our imagination?

### ***Seeking Friendship Is Rooted In Imagination***

*Chazal* say that “Every person was created individually.” Really, we are fine if we are alone and don’t seek friends. But it is a person’s imagination tricks him into thinking that he isn’t good by himself, and that he must seek friends.

The more you rid yourself of imagination, the less social needs you will have. Imagination makes a person want to be dependent on others for companionship. When a person rids himself of imagination, he will enjoy his own existence and actually crave solitude.

Why does a person want lots of friends? It is really because he isn’t connected to himself. His imagination causes him to compare himself to others and think, “Maybe I am like that person or like this person.” He wants something outside of himself and thus loves to always be around those who he feels are similar to him.

But when a person frees himself from the imagination, he is happy being on his own – not because he is lonely, but because he has discovered an inner world within himself. A person who discovers his inner world is not doing so out of a lack of love for other people; it is not because he doesn’t like people, but it is because he doesn’t need them to be happy.

This is not arrogance – it is rather a self-discovery. It is to realize your very worth; the more a person rids himself of imagination, the more he will enjoy being alone with himself, because he will realize his own self-worth.

When a person never seeks time alone for himself and only desires to be friends with others, he overdoes it, and he is around people too much. Although *Chazal* say that we should get along with people (*da’ato me’ureves im ha’beriyos*), that is only true for one who has reached the desired state to be in – to be clean of imagination.

We see that children love to play with friends. This need that children have comes from their imagination, which is very dominant in a child. What is the connection? Children view everyone else as similar to them, which is the work of the imagination; imagination convinces a person that someone or something else is similar. Because children think everyone else is similar, they befriend everyone. As a person gets older and matures, he sees that not everyone is the same, and he is able to pick and be choosy who his friends are.

The more a person cleanses himself from imagination, the less of a need he will feel to connect to others. He might have other reasons why he wants to connect to others, such as the need to love others or the need to bestow goodness upon others, but such needs are healthy, because they do not come from the imagination.

### ***The Only One Who You Can Resemble***

When you get rid of your imagination, you will see how less and less people are similar to you, and you will discover that there is only One who you can truly resemble – Hashem.

Maybe one will ask on this that this is a lack of *Ahavas Yisrael* (love of Jews) if a person doesn't seek to be friends with everybody. But actually, having lots of friends is not the meaning of *Ahavas Yisrael*. It is just a tendency in a person to compare himself to others – which leads him to want to always connect superficially to others.

When a person seeks friends, really it is because he loves himself and he loves to feel his own imagination working, when he has lots of friends. In order to really have *Ahavas Yisrael*, a person needs to discover *himself*.

In order to uncover our true self, we all need time alone to quietly contemplate our thoughts. This will enable our power of thought to overpower our imagination.

Otherwise, a person will just want to seek others' company, since he compares himself to them, due to his imagination that controls him.

The more a person weakens his imagination, a person will find that the less of a need he has for friends. We can see this from a child, who by nature always seeks to make friends; a child is led by his imagination and thus always compares himself to others, and that is the reason why the child likes to be around other friends.

But the stronger our power of thought becomes – the more times of quiet a person spends, in which he can sift out the imagination from the thoughts – the less of a need a person has to seek friends.

There are people who are very popular and are they can always be found surrounded with lots of friends, but this doesn't necessarily mean these popular people have *Ahavas Yisrael*. It is usually because these 'popular' people are being led by their imagination - and therefore they seek to compare themselves to others, always seeking others' company to for this feeling of security.

There are, however, people who don't seek friends, but not because of the mature outlook we are describing, but rather for a different reason: because they are simply being haughty, feeling that they are better than everybody else. But we do not mean to imply this. We are referring to one who wants to live an inner kind of life and enter the inner world of Avodas Hashem, and that the way to do it is through realizing that you don't need others for security, because you have a vast inner world within yourself that contains all your happiness.



This sounds very different from what we would think, but the truth is that only when we discover our true self – and become connected to it - can we really come to love others as we should.

The less and less a person has to do with his imagination, the more he will seek a life of solitude, not needing others, because he is attached instead with closeness with Hashem.

*Chazal say hevay domeh lo*, “You should resemble Hashem.” The only one who you should try to resemble is Hashem. A person must discover how he can best resemble *Hashem* (by perfecting his character), and not to resemble other people. And there is really no one who you can really ever come to resemble other than Hashem.

This is the inner way to prepare for the Torah, and from that, to come to connect to the Creator.

# 3

*Additional  
Teachings on  
Imagination*

### 3.1 | 70 Forces of the Soul: Imagination<sup>198</sup>

#### *Humans Can Choose Between Their Emotions and Thoughts*

We are currently learning about the 70 forces of the soul listed by the Vilna *Gaon*. Ten of these are our feelings (“*margish*” in Hebrew), and included in these are our five thinking abilities: imagination (*medameh*), combining images in the mind (*markiv*), protecting the image (*shoimer*), memory (*zoicher*) and actual thought (*choishev*).

Animals as well have these abilities, but people are different in animals in the following way.

In a human being, we have two distinct abilities – our feelings/emotions, and our thoughts. In every thought, there is a feeling contained in it too; and in every feelings, there is also a thought that lays in it. The question is if a person can feel the thought contained in a feeling, and if he can feel the feeling contained in a thought.

An animal can think and feel, but it does not have free will. It has some degree of free will, because it can definitely control itself a bit, but its free will is incomplete. This is because an animal does not have the ability to take apart its feelings from its thoughts, nor it can extract its thoughts from its feelings.

By contrast, people can choose to either following the emotion in a thought, or the thought in an emotion. It is a person’s nature to follow his emotions, but we also have free will (*bechira*) to choose to follow our thoughts instead. We can choose to let our thoughts overpower our natural emotions.

#### *When Imagination Is Preceding How We Think*

The Vilna *Gaon* lists the power of imagination, before he lists the power of thought. Why doesn’t he first list thought, before he lists imagination? It must be because our thoughts are contained in our imagination, and not that our imagination is contained in our thoughts. In other words, we (initially) think *through* our imagination.

Most people have not yet developed their souls yet, and they are still at the level of *nefesh habehaimis*, the lower, animalistic layer of the soul. Therefore, most people live life through their *nefesh habehaimis*, and their thinking process is left undeveloped, with imagination being the basis of their thinking, (as opposed to actual thinking being the basis to imagination). This results in a kind of life in which people’s very thinking is based upon their imagination, and thus they are experiencing all their thoughts through their imagination.

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<sup>198</sup> <http://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-70-forces-036-imagination>

What is the depth behind the concept of imagination? A person uses his imagination to compare things in his mind.

Man is called *adam*, and this can have two meanings to it. *Adam* comes from the word *adameh*, which means “I will resemble the Creator.” This is the good side to our power of *medameh*/imagination/comparing; when we get ourselves to resemble the Creator. But *adam* can also come from the word *adamah*, “earth” – a reference to the earthiness in a human, which is the pull towards imagination.

The entire power of the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) is to convince a person to do evil, using the power of *medameh*/imagination. Sometimes our imagination can be used for good, but there is a very big difference between good imagination and evil imagination.

When imagination is used for evil (which is the kind of imagination that the *yetzer hora* employs), the imaginative thought in a person is preceding the rational thought of the person, resulting in a thinking that is based upon imagination. This is always the root of sin: when a person’s thoughts are based upon imagination.

By contrast, good imagination, the power of our *yetzer tov*, is when our thoughts are coming before our imagination, resulting in a reliable kind of imagination that we can trust, for it is based on our real power of thought.

### ***Imagination Is To Picture, while Thought Is Conceptualization Without A Picture***

Imagination itself consists of two abilities (which we brought before from the Vilna *Gaon*’s list of the 70 forces): *zoicher*/memory, and *shoimer*/protecting the images of the mind.

Ever since Adam ate from the evil *Eitz HaDaas* (The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), our thinking process has become damaged in that our imagination initially precedes our thoughts.

Imagination and thought are totally different two different kinds of perception. How can we know if we are imagining something, or if we are really thinking of what it is? The way is as follows.

Imagination is a mental picture; a person pictures a certain image of something in his mind, and he thinks about it – that’s imagination. Thought, however, is to think about something on a purely intellectual level, without giving yourself a mental picture in order to be able to think about it. A person’s real thoughts can think about a concept even if there is no picture or image in the mind about it.

Imagination is all about picturing. The *yetzer hora*, who always employs imagination to get a person to sin, is essentially putting a picture in your head, in the hope that this will entice you. Children think always through their imagination and love to go after pictures.

When a person never develops his thoughts, he has to picture everything in order to understand anything. If he goes his whole life like this, he remains at the level of *nefesh habehaimis* – the level of

the *yetzer hora*. His mind never develops, and he remains his whole life at the level of imagination – a childish kind of thinking.

When a person wants to see a picture of something, it's really coming from his imagination. A more mature kind of thinking is for a person to want to understand the intellectual understanding behind a matter; that's all he's interested in seeing. The person who has developed his thoughts has his thoughts preceding imagination, and therefore, he wants to get the intellectual understanding of a matter first, without trying to get some "picture" of it.

The desire in a person for an intellectual understanding of something – as opposed to being able to picture it – is essentially the power of the *yetzer tov*, the true power of thought in a person.

In the works of *mussar*, it is brought that a person should use his imagination to imagine spiritual realities (such as imagining what it's like to suffer in Gehinnom). But this is a kind of imagination which isn't regular imagination; it is a kind of imagination which is preceded by real thought. It's not just to simply fantasize about these things; real thought has to precede the imagination in order for such imagination to be holy.

### ***Fighting the Yetzer Hora/Evil Fantasies***

Our entire struggle with the *yetzer hora* is a war that takes place in our imagination. The *yetzer hora* comes to us with its evil image, and feel a pull towards the image in our head. How do we fight it? We can only fight it using our own imagination; when we imagine what the good and right thing to do is, that imagination can overpower the evil image in our head.

However, the problem is that people usually fall to the evil image which the *yetzer hora* presents, and it is very hard to choose between good and evil when the *yetzer hora* presents a luring image in our head. In order to succeed over the *yetzer hora*'s evil fantasies, we need to make use of the other abilities we mentioned, as we will now explain.

We need to imagine something good that will overpower the evil imagination, when the *yetzer hora* is overtaking us. People usually choose the evil imagination, since their thinking abilities are undeveloped. How can we get our good imagination, then, to overpower the evil imagination?

Our ability of "*shoimer*", protecting images in the mind, is what stores our imagination. Therefore, we need to use *shoimer* to guard and protect our holy images, and then we will be able to summon up those holy images when we are presented with evil images in our head. If we succeed, our power of *shoimer* protects the holy images in our head, and then we overpower the evil fantasies in our mind.

When the *yetzer hora* is challenging us, our thoughts leave us. We are left without our power of *choishev*/thinking, and we can't think straight. How are we able to fight the *yetzer hora*, then? The only way is if we have developed our more subconscious kind of thinking, which is our power of

*shoimer*. Our power of *shoimer* can come and protect our mind so that it doesn't fall to the evil fantasy, and thus be able to choose not to sin.<sup>199</sup>

### ***Doing Teshuvah – Through Repairing Your Mind***

This is, in essence, the power of *teshuvah* (repentance). By maintaining our ability of *shoimer*, we are able to protect our own imagination from falling to the evil kind of imagination, and we then able to use our imagination for good and overpower the evil imagination. This is really the concept of *teshuvah*, because *teshuvah* is when a person connects the past with the present, inspiring himself to change now, because of what happened in his past. In the same way, using our power of *shoimer* helps us choose good in the present, by summoning up the holy images we have developed from the past.

On an even deeper note, using our ability of *shoimer* is like doing *teshuvah*, because just like *teshuvah* “returns” a person, so does developing our mind’s abilities help us “return” our power of imagination/*medameh* to its original source, the power of *choishev*/thought.

*Chazal* (Sukkah 52a) say that in the future, Hashem will slaughter the *yetzer hora*. The depth behind this matter is that since we will do *teshuvah*, our mind will be returned to its original state, and thus all evil fantasies will cease.

This is the secret to all success in life: fighting our evil fantasies, *through being able to protect our holy imagination*.

### ***“Zoicher” Must Precede “Shoimer”***

In order to be able to develop our power of *shoimer*, we must first develop our power of *zoicher*. When our ability of *zoicher* is preceding our ability of *shoimer*, then the *yetzer hora* will fall away. But if our ability of *shoimer* is dominating – in other words, if our imagination is the basis of how we think – this always leads to failure.

This is the secret and inner layer of life: how to overcome evil temptations. We can do it by making sure that our ability of *zoicher* is the basis in how we think; that our ability of *zoicher* is preceding our ability of *shoimer*.<sup>200</sup>

This is a guaranteed way to exit all evil fantasies – it is the way to become *adameh l'elyon*, “I will resemble the Creator.”

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<sup>199</sup> See also *Getting To Know Your Thoughts, Chapter 17: How To Use Imagination For Holiness*.

<sup>200</sup> For a more detailed guidance on how to develop our power of “zoicher” to precede our power of “shoimer”, see *Getting To Know Your Thoughts, Chapter 5: Two Stages of Understanding – Intellect and Picture*. See also *70 Forces of the Soul # 039: Zoicher/Memory*.

## 3.2 | *Imagination – The Root of Negative Emotions*<sup>201</sup>

### *What Causes Negative Emotions?*

We will now conclude the discussion on our emotions.

We left this chapter until now, because it is often useful to learn details before seeing the general “picture”. The general rules about our emotions, can take on greater clarity since we have seen the already studied the details of our emotions,

We have explored the seven main negative emotions. Now, we will try to understand the very core of these negative emotions.

### *Real Feelings Vs. Superficial Feelings*

If we want to truly experience our feelings they must be real. They must be coming from a “feel” on reality, as opposed to just “I have a *feeling*”.<sup>202</sup> Just as we feel the physical sensation of cold and heat as a reality, and not just as a mere feeling, so should we feel our emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, etc. as real since we are actually feeling a certain reality.

Many people don’t view their feelings as reality, and although people can say “This is how I feel”, often the feelings are superficial. These are not feelings that bring them closer to grasping them as a reality that can be sensed.

We need to understand what, exactly, prevents people from experiencing their feelings as reality.

### *Convinced By Imagination*

If our emotions remain as merely “feelings” to us and nothing more, then they are coming from the force in us called imagination.

The Vilna *Gaon*<sup>203</sup>, after listing the five main senses of seeing, hearing, smell, taste and touch continues with listing various senses of thought, including imagination. The Ra’avad writes explicitly that just like there are five senses that we perceive as real, there are also five “imaginary” senses. The

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<sup>201</sup> <http://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-feelings-017-imagination>

<sup>202</sup> In the next chapter, this concept will be explained more fully

<sup>203</sup> Gra to Yeshayahu 11:1

*Mesillas Yesharim*<sup>204</sup> also writes of the phenomenon of imagination, in which one can fool himself in the dark that an object is a person.

Imagination is when a person feels a certain way and even though he knows that it is just a mere feeling, he continues to feel it anyway even if he admits that what he's feeling isn't real.

Sometimes a person imagines that he sees something but really he doesn't see it. This is clearly a product of his imagination. But there are other cases which are also products of imagination, and these situations are not as obvious to the person. For example, a person might claim that he feels love in his life, stating simply "I feel this way", even if he knows good and well that there is no reality of love. He continues to imagine the love, even though he's clearly aware that the love isn't real.

If a person ever has such a claim, his imagination is at work. Only imagination can convince a person that he is feeling something that he knows isn't real. Such a person is unaware that his imagination is behind what he's feeling. If you would ask him if perhaps he is just imagining things, he would respond, "No, I'm not imagining. I am feeling love." He's convinced by his imagination that he can have a feeling for something that isn't present in actual reality.

The root of all negative emotions is the power of imagination. None of the emotions we mentioned are negative at all in their essence; it is the imagination which turns them into negative uses.

### ***Gehinnom Is Fueled By a Life of Living In Imagination***

In the previous chapters, we offered solutions how to remedy the seven main negative emotions. There are two general methods for battling and healing the negative emotions: One way is to work on each emotion separately<sup>205</sup>, and another way is to uproot the negativity from all of the emotions through one single power. What is the one single power that can uproot all negativity from our emotions?

When we perceive our feelings as a way to feel reality, they will all become positive. If we ever have negative emotions, it can only occur when we don't take our feelings seriously, viewing them as simply "feelings" and nothing more.

The angel appointed over *Gehinnom* is called "*Dumah*," which is derived from the word *dimayon* (imagination). This connection implies that the source of all suffering in *Gehinnom* is only in one's imagination. If a person made sure to rid himself of imagination in his lifetime, even when he goes to *Gehinnom*, he will not suffer, because all of the suffering in *Gehinnom* is fueled by imagination. Wicked people, however, who have sinned with their imagination in their lifetime and have never left it, are punished due to their very imagination.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> *Mesillas Yesharim*, Chapter 3

<sup>205</sup> As explained in Chapters Two through Seven.

<sup>206</sup> *Sukkah* 52b



There are times when we have good feelings and times when we have bad feelings. It is not simply our job to fight the bad feelings and turn them to good which is only the superficial outlook. The more truthful perspective is that all good feelings come from feeling reality, and all bad feelings come from our imagination.

If we look at our feelings as a way to feel reality, they will always be positive, and if we look at them as just “feelings” that have nothing to do with reality, they will always be negative. Awareness of this makes it easier to leave the negative emotions behind.

### *Imagined Love*

We will explain further what it means to view our feelings as reality. Let’s take the feeling of love as an example: love can be real, or it can be imagined.

A husband may think that he definitely loves his wife. But if he has a reason for loving her, then his love is imaginary, and it is not based in reality.<sup>207</sup>

Let’s go a little further with this. Let’s say a person thinks he loves Hashem. If you ask him, “Why do you love Hashem?” and he answers, “Because He gives me everything I need,” or “Because Hashem loves me,” this is a sign that he doesn’t even recognize the Creator. His love for Hashem is a product of his imagination, and not his true feelings.

A person loves himself because he knows that he is real, but he doesn’t love others in the same way as he loves himself [unless he works on himself]. Since he only views others through the lens of imagination, other people are dream-like images to him.

It is very hard for some people to accept that a person tends to view *himself* in a real sense, but the only way he knows that others exist is only by seeing them through his imagination – of them. This is an inaccurate way of recognizing others.

The words of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt”l* are well known: A person cannot kill another human being. How, then, could there be murderers? Didn’t Kayin kill Hevel? The answer is: if a person kills another, he never acknowledged that the other person exists.

This is possible because anything that is perceived outside of ourselves can only be filtered through one of the five senses; and even the senses work in tandem with the imagination. Thus, if the others’ existence is only experienced through imagination, his existence is never perceived as reality, and the murderer is thus able to come to kill him.

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<sup>207</sup> *Mishnah in Avos (5:19) which states, “Any love that is dependent on something will not last, while any love is that is not dependent on something will last forever.”*

### ***Emotional People Tend To Imagine More***

In general, emotions are highly prone to imagination. Many times a person imagines that someone else loves him; Reuven thinks that if he loves Shimon then Shimon will automatically love him in return. Reuven bases his feelings on the famous verse in *sefer Mishlei*<sup>208</sup>, “Just as water reflects a face to a face, so does the heart of a person reflect one to another,” and he’s sure that Shimon will reciprocate the love. But when Reuven talks to Shimon, he realizes that his assumption was not true; Shimon doesn’t love him, and he never loved him in the first place. Reuven realizes with disappointment that he was just imagining things...

Stories like this happen every day. Most of the feelings people have throughout the day stem from their imagination; they are not feelings stemming from reality. A person usually cannot grasp something beyond his imagination; if he can’t imagine it, he can’t relate to it.

It is human nature to imagine things; people have been this way since the sin of *Adam*. It can even occasionally happen that a person doesn’t even grasp himself as a reality, and is only aware of himself as a figment of his own imagination.

### ***Imagined Emunah***

Even *emunah* can be imaginary!

It is not that people lack *emunah* in the depth of their souls; we all do, and we are all “believers, the sons of believers.”<sup>209</sup> But the only *emunah* which we find **revealed** by people nowadays is often by way of imagination.

This is why many people can have a nightmare and feel very afraid when they wake up in middle of the night, only to discover that they no longer have *emunah*, shaking and wondering where it has gone. The reason for this is because the *emunah* was never real. It existed only in the imagination.

This explains why many people discover that when they are faced with a difficult test, they suddenly lose all their *emunah*, and wonder what happened to it. When someone’s *emunah* is only lodged in his imagination, it never became real.

### ***Hatred Is Only Possible Because of Imagination***

A person is apt to do anything he pleases with his imagination. He can distort reality to his heart’s content; anything is possible with imagination.

Hatred is also the work of the imagination! In reality, it is not possible to really hate another Jew, because the Jewish people are one unit. If we ever feel separate from another Jew, this isn’t a feeling

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<sup>208</sup> *Mishlei* 17:29

<sup>209</sup> *Shabbos* 97a

that's coming from reality. The separation is only taking place in one's imagination! When a person doesn't feel the reality that we are all one, he comes to hate another Jew, because he has lost touch with the true reality. Any hatred for another Jew can only be coming from imagination.

### *Imagined Middos*

In the future, we will express, "*We were like dreamers.*"<sup>210</sup> The depth of this is that we will discover how much we imagined during this exile. Our bad *middos* will be removed, to our delight, because they were all being fueled by our evil imagination. But to our dismay, we will also find that many of our good *middos* have been eliminated, because we only imagined them.

Absorbing these ideas can be chilling! We are not trying to depress the reader – our intention is to arouse some soul-searching.

### *The Danger Of Studying The Emotions*

It is human nature that more emotional people are prone to imagination. Some special individuals are blessed with a sharp intellect along with their heavy ability of emotion, and can easily deal with their strong emotions. Most emotional people, however, are not very drawn after the intellect, but only after their emotions.

When a person begins to enter deeply into his emotions (especially if he is young), he is in danger of falling prey to his imagination. If, for example, someone was learning Torah all day, but was cold emotionally, and then suddenly his emotions opened up one day – he is in danger of entering into his imagination.

The same goes for someone who, for example, never once felt a good *davening* in his life, and suddenly one day he begins to get a feel for his *davening*. Another scenario is someone who never experienced the holiness of Shabbos before, and now he does. Although he has opened up his feelings, he has also opened up the door toward imagination, which puts him in danger.

This is problematic, because if we don't ever have feelings for our *avodas* Hashem, we are clearly lacking. Yet, as soon as we begin to have those feelings, we are in danger of imagining the feelings.

The simple antidote for this is to balance one's intellect with his emotions, so that the intellect will be in control of the heavy amount of emotion. The deeper solution, however, is to learn how to have **emotions that are based upon reality**. This will bring clarity to a person and enable him to differentiate between a real feeling and a figment of the imagination.

### ***Feelings Are Within, But We Need To Reveal Them***

How indeed can we determine if our feelings are coming from reality or not?

If person feels that he has to acquire his emotions, this indicates that he thinks he is getting his feelings from outside of himself – such a person’s feelings are only coming from his imagination. To “acquire” means “*kinyan*” in Hebrew, which has the same root letters as the word Kayin. In other words, when a person views his feelings as something that comes from outside of himself which he must acquire, he has the viewpoint of “*Kayin*” *who was only able to kill Hevel* because he viewed *Hevel* as some outer entity, not as a reality.

But if the feeling is real, it will come from a person’s very essence, and this in turn shows that the feeling is coming from the reality.

This doesn’t mean that one can only experience feelings from within himself and never from an external source. There is definitely a purpose to feelings that come from the outside, because they can **awaken** one’s inner feelings that come from his essence.

The mistake that people make in regard to their emotions is that all of feelings of love, fear, happiness, etc. are by their nature “acquired” from outside of oneself. When a feeling has to be “acquired” from outside of oneself, it can only be in one’s imagination, and therefore not a real feeling.

[The story of Kayin and Hevel in the Torah reveals to us an important truth.] Kayin was called *ish adamah*, “man of the earth.” The word *adamah* comes from the word *dimayon*, imagination. And as we said above, Kayin also means *kinyan*, acquired. When we put these two facts together, it alludes to how our imagination can convince us that we have actually acquired a feeling.

We don’t get our feelings outside of ourselves; all we need to do is **reveal** them from within ourselves! We need to bring them out from our innermost self into the outer layers of our souls. Any feelings that we do get from the outside are there in order to stir up our inner feelings, which are already present deep within us.

### ***Reading Gedolim Biographies – Good Or Bad?***

Let us consider the following. When a person reads a story about a *Gadol* – a great Torah sage – there are pros and cons. The pros are clear: that a person will gain a fiery drive to reach higher levels in his *avodas* Hashem. But the cons are that the reader is not that *Gadol*; the reader will attempt to draw from within himself the same strength that a *Gadol* had, and perhaps be able to identify with him, but the truth is that he doesn’t even compare to the *Gadol*. No one is like anyone else, and comparisons should never be drawn between any two people. A person who reads *Gedolim* books and compares himself to the *Gadol* is setting himself up for failure.

It is clear that the root cause for all problems in Creation stem from the power of imagination. Our feelings are filtered through the imagination, leading to all the confusion.

### *How To Recognize Yourself*

The ability to recognize that we exist<sup>211</sup> is one force in the soul that doesn't pass through our imagination, however. A person accepts his existence as a fact, and not a product of his imagination. A person may imagine that he has this or that *middah*, that he is talented or lacking in this or that area, or that he recognizes the various forces in his soul, but there is one thing that no one is imagining: one's very existence.

There are, of course, individuals who are so confused with who they are that the recognition of their existence is based on superficial causes. This can only be a result from a person's tremendous lack of *yishuv ha'da'as* (settled mind). Most people know for a fact that they exist, and they will not be so stubborn to deny this fact.

Every person has this ability, and it is not hard to express. Anyone with a little peace of mind is fully aware, with utter certainty, that he exists.

This is the meaning of the verse in *Iyov* <sup>212</sup>: “*From my flesh I see G-d.*” One can acknowledge Hashem's existence through recognition of his own. Loving Hashem, the Torah and all Jews is, at its essence, love for the intrinsic existence of Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people. When a person realizes that Hashem exists, love for Hashem will result. When a person realizes what the reality of Torah is, he will love the Torah. When a person realizes that others exist, he will also love them.

No one has to “acquire” a feeling of love for others. All you have to do is recognize that the other exists! Once you see someone else exists, you will automatically love him.

Hating another person is only possible when a person imagines the other's existence, and he doesn't fully grasp the simple truth of the other person's existence. When a person doesn't realize the other person's existence, even if he would work on himself to love the other, it would only be an imaginary love.

The truth is that everyone person knows deep down that he is an existing reality, but in our daily life, people often live through the lens of their imagination. For this reason, most people compare themselves with others; “If he does it, I'll do it too” or “If he was successful at this, I will also be successful at it.” Why are people comparing themselves all the time with others? It is because often, people aren't experiencing their true existence, and they are instead living through the prism of imagination.

It's unbelievable when you think about this.

Of course, every person is a little in touch with himself, but sometimes a person entirely loses touch with his true self and pushes away his true self-recognition, living instead through

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<sup>211</sup> This is the soul faculty known as “*havayah*” (the sensing of our existence), discussed in *עץ את נפשך* “*Getting To Know Your Soul.*”

<sup>212</sup> *Iyov* 19:26

imagination. This is what causes people to compare themselves with others.<sup>213</sup> As an example, a person gets up in the morning and immediately turns to see if his roommate has gotten up yet: “Did he get up yet? If he got up, then I’ll get up....”

When a person lives all the time through his imagination, not only is he denying himself the use of his soul abilities, but he will essentially go his whole life in denial of his true self.

### ***Accessing True Self-Awareness By Realizing Our Existence***

When *Adam Harishon* was first created he recognized the Creator as utter reality in his pure state before the sin. He had no doubts! It wasn’t because he was able to prove logically that there is a Creator. He was aware of Hashem without all this. On the other hand, Avraham *Avinu* needed proof that there is a Creator because he lived after the first sin.

Until Adam sinned by eating from the *Eitz HaDaas (Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil)* there was perfect awareness of Hashem’s existence. After the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*, all of our knowledge has become dependent on how much we utilize the power of our *da’as*. Therefore, we are able to have questions and doubts about reality. Avraham *Avinu* searched to discover the existence of the Creator, and indeed he succeeded, when he was just three years old. But the whole need to search for the Creator’s existence was something that came about due to the first sin. Had there been no sin, there would never have been any doubts in the first place.

After the sin, awareness of the reality of a Creator is hidden from us. However, even after the sin, we still remained with the ability to be aware of our true self. Of course, it’s possible to forget who we really are, as people often do. But the ability to have true self-recognition is still there, ready for us to access. From true self-recognition, we are able to come to recognize other realities.

Before the sin, awareness of reality was evident without having to figure it out from within oneself. It was an inherent awareness, and it didn’t have to be proved. Now that we are after the sin, anything we recognize can only come to us when we understand it from within ourselves. If we try to recognize something that isn’t coming from our own self-recognition, then it is only imagination.

Most of the time, our true self-recognition isn’t revealed, and therefore, people view most of their life only through the prism of imagination. Whatever we experience in life is therefore only being experienced through our imagination [unless we work to improve, as we will soon explain].

The beginning of the remedy is that we need to concentrate on our own, existing reality. We do not mean to become self-absorbed and egotistical; we mean to get in touch with the reality of who we are.

Once a person recognizes his existence, he now comes to the following point: he has to be able to differentiate between reality and imagination. This is a very subtle power of the soul.

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*213 Editor’s Note: The Hebrew word “medameh” can either mean “imagination”, or it can mean “compare”, because the tendency in people to compare themselves to others is essentially linked with the power of imagination.*

As much as we will try to explain what this is, it can never be explained fully. We will try to explain this matter clearly, though, as much as Hashem allows us to.

### ***Two Forms of Recognition: Within The Self, and Beyond The Self***

Becoming aware of reality is a two-step process.

In the initial stage, a person must at least recognize his and another's existence in equal terms, realizing another's existence no less than he realizes his own. After beginning to get used to this awareness, at first a person will start out being more aware of his own existence than the other, but he will still be acknowledging that another person exists.

The more a person focuses on the fact he exists, the more he will realize that the truth is that he doesn't perceive the existence of others through the same lens that he views himself.

We can compare this to the following scenario. Someone is shown a white color and is asked what color it is. He of course responds, "It's white." Then we show him two shades of white – a lighter shade, and a slightly darker shade. Now he says, "Ah. What I first thought was white isn't as white as this one. The first color I saw was darker; the one I'm seeing now is a truly white color."

The lesson from this is that initially, we think that all our forms of recognition are on the same level. We start out thinking that our awareness of Hashem, ourselves, and other people are all equal levels of awareness. But once we become more aware of our own existence, we will slowly begin to become aware that there are forms of recognition which aren't coming from our "I." We then uncover a whole new depth to reality.

After arriving at this perception, it should then become clearer to a person that there are two different forces in the soul: an ability of self-recognition, which is coming from within our self – and an ability of recognition which isn't coming from our inner self, but somewhere from outside the self.

When we become clear that that we have these different two forces interacting at once – and that they are as different from each other as night and day – our soul experiences its personal redemption from itself. This is what is written, "*My soul is close to her redemption.*"<sup>214</sup>

When a person becomes aware that he has these two different abilities, he will attain a certain inner calmness, and from that calmness, his true self-awareness will become revealed to him. He will get in touch with his true self, and from then on, whatever information he comes across will be protected in his subconscious in a way that will allow his soul to develop more from the information.<sup>215</sup> He will be able to develop feelings that are come from his true, inner self.

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214 *Tehillim* 69:19

215 *Editor's Note: This is either due to the power of "shoimer" in the soul, which is the ability in a person to "protect" information in his mind; or it can be coming from the power of "zoicher" in the soul, which is the ability to "remember" a thought. This is explained more in-depth in the series דע אמת מן השבועות "Getting To Know Your Thoughts" (Chapter Five)*

This inner place of the soul is essentially the point which all *tzaddikim* accessed to receive their highest comprehensions. *Tzaddikim* didn't attain their high levels because of anything they read, and not even because of any Torah that they learned. Of course, they read and learned a lot of Torah, but all of their learning served to awaken the innermost point of the soul we are describing. Once the *tzaddikim* reached their innermost point in their souls, all of their Torah learning and all they had comprehended after that was a whole new kind of Torah learning than before. After reaching their true essence, their Torah learning came from within themselves; as *Chazal* state, "Avraham Avinu learned Torah from himself."<sup>216</sup>

Even when a *rebbe* teaches a student, the knowledge that the student accumulates from his *rebbe* is coming from whatever the *rebbe* has revealed from within himself. But if the student succeeds in internalizing his teacher's lessons, the knowledge will eventually emerge from the student's own inner essence.

### ***The Purpose Of Studying Our Emotions***

Therefore, let us be clear that the purpose of studying our emotions is **not** to learn how to become more emotional. Rather, it is to become aware of reality, and once we realize that, our emotions will reflect reality, and they will then be totally different kinds of emotions from what are used to.

A person who lives through his actual essence, and not through his imagination, is living reality. All of his thoughts and emotions will then be coming from the reality, not from the lens of imagination. He will experience his thoughts and feelings in the same way he experiences himself, and he will know the difference between what is reality and what is imagination. Understandably, he will come to a pure perception of reality, because his viewpoint on life has become cleansed and purified.

When we look at the world today, we see that this is not the reality in front of us. We are living in a world after the sin of Adam, in which everything has become a mixture of good and evil, a result of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas* (*Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*). If we are basically aware of what life is truly supposed to look like – that there is a purified state of life that exists, in which our feelings come from reality – then we will be able to achieve the greatest perfection that our soul can currently attain. From that perception, we will truly be able to come to the clearest recognition of reality – that there is a Creator, who can be plainly sensed.

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*already published in Hebrew. The abilities of "shoimer" and "zoicher" are also explained in the author's series Da Es Kochosecha, which explains the seventy forces of the soul. These shiurim are available at [www.bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.koach](http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.koach) and also on Kol haLashon's telephone service in the USA 718.395.2440 and Israel 073.295.1245*  
216 Midrash Tanchuma, parshas Vayigash



### 3.3 | *Overcoming Imagination and Using It For Good*<sup>217</sup>

#### *The Yetzer Hora “Appears” To Look So Big*

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

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

#### *The Essence of the Yetzer Hora*

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

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

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

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

#### *How the Yetzer Hora Works*

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

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<sup>217</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-5-220-overcoming-imagination-holiness>

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

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

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

### ***The Way To Fight the Yetzer Hora***

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

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

In order to succeed at this, a person has to possess strong mental abilities.<sup>218</sup>

### ***Using Imagination As A Powerful Tool For Holiness***

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

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

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<sup>218</sup> For a more detail discussion on how to overcome the *yetzer hora*, see *Getting To Know Your Thoughts, Chapter 17: Using Imagination For Holiness*.

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

### ***The Root of Imagination: The Realm of the Unlimited***

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

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

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

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

### ***Using Imagination Needs Guidance***

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

The *yetzer hora*’s tactic is that it fools a person to believe that he’s actually sensing what he imagines. It’s a lie, because a person cannot ever sense what he’s imagining. But when a person erroneously believes that he can, he falls into the *yetzer hora*’s trap. The correct attitude is rather for a person to believe that although his imagining something real, he cannot sense what he’s imagining. Imagination can be a very positive we use to serve Hashem (and soon we will explain how to use it), but this can only be if a person realizes that he cannot use his limited senses to feel what he’s

imagining. We cannot mix our limited perception with the realm of the unlimited, and trying to do only causes a person to make grave errors.

### ***Using Imagination For Holiness***

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

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

### ***Imagination: A Tool To Reach Our Aspirations***

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

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

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

### 3.4 | *Rectifying Evil Imagination*<sup>219</sup>

#### ***Good Daas Is True Reality, and Evil Daas Is Imagination***

Previously, we spoke about how *daas* “turns over” information. We will continue to discuss this, *daas hamis-hapeches*.

As we explained, there is “*daas tov*” – the good kind of *daas*, which was the *daas* of the *Eitz HaChaim* (Tree of Life), to know reality. “*Daas ra*”, the evil kind of *daas*, was the *daas* that entered us after Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas* (Tree of Knowledge), and it is essentially the imagination.

Both *daas tov* and *daas ra* have the common power to “turn over” something. – *daas tov* can do this for a good cause, and *daas ra* does this for an evil outcome.

These two opposing kinds of *daas* are complete opposites, and they represent how everything in Creation consists of two parts – the concept of each thing, as well as the opposite of that very concept. The opposing perspectives of *daas tov* and *daas ra* are the root of the concept of how everything is made up of both itself and its opposite.

So *daas tov* is *havayah*/reality, and *daas ra* is *medameh*/imagination. This is the root of all opposing concepts.

*Medameh*/imagination, is called “*daas ra*”, evil *daas*. When a person imagines something that isn’t true, what is he really doing? He’s using his *daas* to turn over reality and come up with the opposite of reality.

This is called *sod hafachim*, the “secret of opposites”, that on one hand, we have our *daas tov*, which is reality as it is, and on the other hand, we have a falsified reality that gets created through our *daas ra*.

#### ***“Oid” (More) vs. “Ad” (Until)***

Now that we have explained the outline of the concept, we can reflect into the following.

The word *daas* contains the letters *daled* and *ayin*, which can either form the word *da*, to “know,” and it can also mean *ad*, “until.” The letters *daled* and *ayin* can also form the opposite of *ad*, which reads *oid*, “more.” In other words, the opposite of good *daas* is when a person wants “more”. We will explain this.

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<sup>219</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/utilizing-your-daas-08-rectifying-evil-imagination>

*Ad* (“until”) says: there are limits. *Oid* (“more”) says: there is always more. They are both rooted on the same concept, however, as we will see.

The entire concept of *medameh* (imagination) is based on *oid*, “more.” The imagination says that “more” can be added on to reality - that if something is not here in reality, we can add it on to reality.

*Medameh* (imagination) is associated with Yosef Hatzaddik, of whom it is written “*Oid Yosef chai*”, “Yosef is still alive.” The word “*oid*”, “more”, is alluding to the imagination, because the imagination is “more” onto reality. Yosef had dreams, and he could interpret dreams, and dreams are a form of *medameh*. *Medameh* is therefore also called *hosafah*, adding, from the word *Yosef*. There are good and evil kinds of “adding”, and the evil kind of *hosafah*/adding is *medameh*.

Thus, *medameh* is all based on wanting to add – with imagination, a person seeks to add onto things that don’t exist. Yosef, who represents the power of *medameh*/ *hosafah*, is also called *tzaddik yesod olam*, (the righteous foundation of the world), which refers to *holadah* (procreation), for he was faced with a test to his *kedushah* (holiness) with being tempted by Potiphar’s wife. In the body, *hosafah*/*holadah* is with the mitzvah of child-bearing. This is the trait of Yosef, who represents *yesod*, the foundation, the power to guard one’s personal holiness and thus sanctify the ability of procreation.

The power to add is used for holiness when it is used for the mitzvah of childbearing, which does not merely add onto reality, but it continues reality, for it is a continuation. However, the evil side to this power is *medameh*, imagination, which is a deeply rooted evil desire to become like Hashem and know of good and evil, to be “a Creator of worlds”, a power to add. The Snake convinced Adam and Chavah through the power of *medameh*, but it was all based on *hosafah*/*oid*, telling them that there is “more”.

When is *hosafah* good, and when it is evil? It is good when it is used for childrearing, which starts from a droplet in the brain, and it is evil when it creates a new reality. So *medameh* is nursed from the power of *hosafah* in the soul, and this shows us how to rectify it, which we began to mention earlier.

“*Ad*” and “*oid*”, while being opposite concepts, have the same root. *Medameh* is based on *oid*/*hosafah*, thus, the way to repair *medameh* is by revealing “*ad*” within “*oid*”, which limits the power of “*oid*” in the soul from expanding. With *medameh*, a person is involved with the mode of *oid* in his soul. He has to come out of the mode of “*oid*” and enter into the mode of “*ad*”.

(We find that when a person is imagining, and suddenly he gets scared of something, his imagination stops. Why? It’s not because he has taken his mind off his fantasies. It is because he has entered into the mode of “*ad*” in the soul, by getting in touch with reality, which is essentially the concept of *yirah*/awe, to realize the limits of reality.)

*Medameh* causes a person to desire to break boundaries. The way to rectify this evil is through entering the mode of “*ad*” in the soul - to place limits. *Medameh* can only be active if you’re in the

mode of *oid* in the soul, thus, the solution is to leave the viewpoint from *oid* and enter into the viewpoint of *ad*.

### ***A Deeper Awareness***

To say this in deeper terms: if you have become more clear about your soul, you are familiar with expanding and contracting the soul, and you can realize that imagination essentially makes you contract into yourself, thus, if you catch yourself imagining/ contracting, the imagination ceases.

However, this can only help someone who has clarified his soul abilities and he is consciously aware of his expansions and contractions of the soul. If he's not yet this clear, he should just use the first, simpler solution, which is to focus on the limits of a reality. When he catches himself imagining, he should think about his surroundings, realize he is limited to reality, and this will silence his imagination, because it gives focus to the soul. Therefore, if someone has a tendency to imagine, when he catches himself imagining he should think about limits, and that will weaken his imagination.

Thus, *medameh* is based on the viewpoint of *oid* ("more") in the soul and the way to leave it is to enter into the viewpoint of *ad* in the soul, which places limits on you and thereby helps restrict you.

What kind of *ad* should you enter into? There are many kinds of *ad*, because there are many ways how you can see limits. But the point is to **be focused in your thoughts and your vision on something that is *ad*, to think about the limits of something.** Everything had *ad* in it, because Hashem is in everything, and He has placed His limits in each thing He created.

To work on this concept, **don't look at something endless like the sky or the ocean, because that will only increase the imagination more. Only look at things that are limited and keep yourself focused on its boundaries and how it is limited.**

This is how you rectify the *oid/medameh* in the soul: when you enter into *ad*. Soon we will explain how we leave evil *oid* and enter into a holy kind of *oid*, a concept that we mentioned earlier a little.

### ***A Second Way To Rectify Imagination: Using The Holy Kind of "Oid"***

As we have explained here, *oid/medameh* says that there is "more", and that is why the mind desires to imagine. *Medameh*, as we explained earlier (in Chapter One), causes *dilug* (jumpiness) in the mind.

However, there is a holy way to use the power of *oid*: when the imagination is done with *seder*, orderliness. Unholy *oid* is when the *medameh* is happening through *dilug*, jumpiness, while holy *oid* is when the thought patterns of the imagination are taking place in an orderly fashion. For example, in a dream, there is no *seder* (orderliness), just *dilug*.

*Medameh* causes *oid*, a “new reality” created by the mind, and even more so, it has patterns of *dilug*, with no *seder* to it.

We don't imagine something that doesn't exist – we put together images in the mind, one image on top of the other, with no *seder* to it. *Medameh* takes images in the mind and combines them randomly. It is *dilug*. It is not *yeish m'ayin*, to create something from new; it is rather *yeish m'yeish*, to create something from something already existing.

Thus, another way to leave evil *medameh* is to enter the holy kind of *medameh*, which is to leave *oid* and enter *ad*, as we mentioned. (There are also higher ways to access holy imagination, and here we have only addressed the lowest use of it).

In this way, a person leaves the evil expansion mode and enters into a good kind of expansion, otherwise known as *oid d'kedushah* - to have *seder* (orderliness) in his imagination. Therefore, when a person catches himself imagining, he should get involved with *seder*, and that will sanctify his imagination.

To work on this practically, when you catch yourself imagining, try counting 1, 2, 3, 4, and so forth, and this trains you to get used to *seder* within your *medameh*. You can take a paper and write down numbers in order, or you can count the *sefarim* on the shelf. This weakens the evil imagination, because evil imagination thrives on *dilug*, as we explained.

When you enter into *seder*, you weaken *dilug* of the mind. To give a simple example of this concept, we can see that a person with *seder* in his life has much less *medameh* going on. His mind is less jumpy, because he is used to more orderliness in his life, so there isn't much room for the imagination to take hold on him.

So far, we have explained two ways of how to leave evil *medameh*: through entering into the viewpoint of *ad* in the soul (accessed by focusing on the limits of something), and through *oid d'kedushah*, by giving order to your thoughts, via the act of counting in an orderly manner.

### ***A Third Method of Rectifying Imagination: Using The Power of 'Hosafah'***

A third way to leave evil *medameh* is, through the power of *hosafah* that we mentioned. There are good and evil ways of how to use this power. *Hosafah* is evil when it is used for evil imagination, and it is a holy as follows.

Reality, which is called *havayah*, is really endless. What is the difference between *havayah*, which is endless (also called the *Ein Sof* Endlessness) and *medameh* imagination, which is also endless? The *Ein Sof* is “to hold onto a little of *achdus* and then you have everything,” as the Baal Shem Tov said. In other words, the entire *Ein Sof* is all contained in one point. But *oid*, or *medameh* imagination, says that reality keeps expanding - not that everything is here in this point. So the *Ein Sof* is one *havayah* that contains everything.



To illustrate, a chair is not a table, whereas the *havayah* of the *Ein Sof* is one point that contains everything in it. But *medameh* is another kind of *havayah*, a *havayah* that keeps expanding – *oid, oid, oid*, more, more and more.

The root of *medameh*, as we explained, is rooted in the idea of *oid*. But there is a more inner root of *medameh*: that it creates “*hipuch*” - it turns over realities. *Hipuch* doesn’t mean you turn something into a new thing; it means to give a new face (*panim chadashos*) to something.

Everything in Creation has all the “faces” of reality in it, because there is only one *havayah* in Creation, and it is just that *havayah* has many facets to it. We see a “world of disparity” in front of us (*alma d’piruda*), in that we see many faces of reality, but there is still only one *havayah*/reality.

This is the depth behind the concept of *daas hamis-hapeches* (which we began to discuss in the previous chapter), which is the power of imagination: it turns over *havayah* and gives it other “faces”.

If someone understands this well, he knows the secret of all creations – that there is only one *havayah* (Hashem), and there are just many faces to the same *havayah*.

Thus, imagination thinks of new realities, because it’s really all ‘faces’ of the same reality. If we look at imagination in this way, we can use imagination for holiness and thus rectify the evil of the imagination.

These are subtle matters.

The depth of *medameh* is that there is only one *havayah* and that it can have many faces to it, therefore, I can be *medameh* (fantasize) it. The secret of all of creation is that it is all one *havayah*. The word *oid* simply means *oid*, more, but it can also mean *gam*, “also” – another side to the same reality.

So the root of *medameh* is not just coming from the mode of *oid* in the soul; that’s already the second step. The first root of *medameh* is from the one *havayah* that binds everything together, which enables *medameh*.

When this concept is used for holiness, it is *adameh l’elyon*, to resemble the Creator. When it is used for evil, it is to create new realities – *panim chadashos*, “new faces”, which is the power of evil *medameh*/imagination.

This is also the root behind the concept of *kefirah* (heresy). Heresy is to deny *havayah*. So holy *medameh* is to realize that *havayah* includes everything, and evil *medameh* is to come up with new realities. *Medameh* denies the first *havayah* and comes up with a new *havayah*.

Therefore, “good” *medameh* doesn’t come up with something new. It is not simply to channel the evil kind of imagination for holiness. It is a whole different kind of imagination; it means to imagine that Hashem exists, to imagine that there is a *Beis HaMikdash* – to imagine something that already exists. We don’t see a *Beis HaMikdash* revealed, but we can connect to it in our imagination, because the *Beis HaMikdash* still exists in the inner realms that we don’t see.

Based on this understanding, evil *medameh* is to imagine something that does not exist. If someone merely channels the evil kind of imagination towards a holy purpose, this is not the true meaning of holy imagination, because as we have explained, evil and holy imagination are two totally different concepts of imagination.

Thus, to leave evil *medameh*, one can imagine the reality itself, and that destroys his imagined reality. For example, when Yosef was tempted, he imagined the image of his father. He didn't just create a new image. When he saw his father's image, his entire imagination fell.

This is a subtle matter. The idea is to **compare the first imaginative thought with the second imaginative thought, realizing what the reality is, and this realization will cause the first imaginative thought to cease.**

Thus, the power of *daas hamis-hapeches* turns *havayah* into *medameh*.

How do we leave *medameh*? The three ways we mentioned were through *ad*, through *oid d'kedushah*, and through *havayah*.

The third solution is to recognize how to use holy *medameh*, to understand that even *medameh* is really part of *havayah*. Holy *medameh* is the *pnim* (essence) of the *havayah*. *Medameh* is to give new *panim*/face to something, and *havayah* is the *pnim* of reality.

So it's not merely that *daas tov* is *havayah* and that *daas ra* is *medameh*. It's about one kind of *tov* and another kind of *tov*. According to this approach, *havayah* and *medameh* are not opposite viewpoints; rather, *medameh* is part of *havayah*.

If we understand this, we can proceed to the next point.

All opposites have one root, as the Maharal writes, that *geulah* (redemption) and *galus* (exile) bear the same root, *gal*, to reveal – because both the redemption and the exile are forms of revelation. They are just different forms of revelation.

Why indeed do opposites share the same root?

With *medameh*, I can imagine something that does not exist. But to say it deeper, all *havayah* contains everything, because *medameh* is also part of *havayah*. It seems that *medameh* begins where *havayah* ends. But the root of *medameh* is that it is part of the *havayah*.

For example, there is Yaakov and Esav. They were opposites, but at first they looked the same; they got older and the differences were then apparent, but at first, they were the same – they were one *havayah*. Therefore, at their root, Yaakov and Esav are “brothers” (and this perspective will be fully revealed in the future). So all *havayah* includes its *hepech*/opposite - its *medameh*.

Evil *medameh* is also called *achor* (the view from the back), and holy *medameh* is to reveal that *achor* is only a *pnim* (inside). The view of *achor* is related to the word *acher*, other, because when one has a view only from the back, he sees another person as “another”. The view from *panim* (the front) says that the person you see is Reuven, while seeing the back of Reuven's head tells you that it's just someone else, because you can't recognize him from the back.

But if we use the view of *achor* to reveal *panim*, then one can reveal the *panim* of Reuven even when I see his back. This is called the *sod h'achdus*, the secret of oneness, that can be reached through *medameh*.

Thus, the root of all opposites is one. All *havayah*, including *medameh*, is part of the root. Therefore, all opposites have one root. Everything has something it looks like – a table looks like another table, and that is partial *medameh*. The general *medameh* is that there is either *adam* (ideal state of man) or *edom* (evil state of man, in which man follows his fantasies). But they are rooted in one *havayah*.

In the future this will be revealed to all, so we cannot use this point practically in our times. But this concept, that *havayah* includes everything, is the deepest advice to overcome evil *medameh*.

### ***A Fourth Way To Rectify Imagination***

To practically access this deep power, look at everything as being rooted in one *havayah*. In everything you see, think about its opposite, and then think how it is rooted in one *havayah*, and this will uproot your evil *medameh*.

When the view from *achor* is turned into *panim*, when you see everything as being two sides of the same coin, this uproots *medameh*, because *medameh* is all about another reality, but when you view *medameh* as part of the *havayah*, the problem is solved at its root.

So the entire power of *medameh* gets its strength from *dovor v'hipucho*, seeing something and its opposite - and not being aware that the opposites are really rooted in one root. When you see the connection between the two opposite concepts in *dovor v'hipucho*, there is no place for *medameh*. In other terms, it is when you see the *panim* and *achor* of something as being two sides of the same coin.

In the future, we will realize that “we were like dreamers” – the deeper meaning of this, we will realize that “*achor*” is really just another “*panim*” (face) of the “*pnim*” (inside) of “*havayah*” (reality). This will completely remove *medameh*.

To practically work on this, look at each thing and see what its opposite is, and then remind yourself that they are rooted in one root, for the two opposites are always two sides of the same coin.

This concept, seeing how *dovor v'hipucho* connect with each other, is the deepest way to fix evil *medameh*.

### 3.5 | *Tamuz – Holy Imagination*<sup>220</sup>

#### *The Month of Tamuz: The Power of “Sight”*

The month of Tamuz contains the especial power of *re'iyah* (sight). A hint to this is because each of 12 months is parallel to one of the 12 tribes, and the tribe represented by the month of Tamuz is Reuven, whose name comes from the words, “*Reu, ben*” (“See, that I have a son”). So the month of Tamuz is connected with *re'iyah*, with “seeing”.

Let’s try to understand how this is a power of the soul as well, and what we do with this power.

#### *Inner Sight: The Heart’s Power To See*

The *Gemara* says, “A *dayan* (judge) only sees what his eyes see.”<sup>221</sup> A *dayan* determines a case according to how he “sees” it – meaning, according to what he feels and discerns the information. So seeing doesn’t just mean to see in the plain and simple sense. It means to discern, and it involves the heart’s feelings.

Our eyes can see the physical, whereas our heart can see a deeper dimension into the physical. Shlomo HaMelech said, “*My heart has seen much wisdom.*” The heart “sees” – it can discern things. *Chazal* say that “the eye sees, the heart desires, and the actions complete”. It seems from this statement that sight is only with the eyes, and not with the heart. But the real understanding is that *the heart sees* from the eyes. Thus, when the heart desires that which the eyes see, it is really seeing that which the eyes see.

The Sages state, “The evil inclination rules only where the eyes see.” When the eyes see something, the heart desires it and thus “sees” what the eyes are seeing. Chavah desired the *Eitz HaDaas* as soon as she saw it; the possuk says, “*And the woman saw that the tree was good for consumption.*” How did she ‘see’ that the tree tasted good, before she even ate it? It was because her *heart* saw the tree and thereby desired that which her eyes laid sight on.

Thus, there are two places from which we “see” in ourselves. One place is the eyes, and the other place is the heart. What does it mean that the heart can “see”? Firstly, we need to know what the nature of the heart is.

The heart is the seat of emotion in us. It is the source of both positive and negative feelings we experience: hatred, joy, sadness, etc. It is also the source of our various desires, motivations, and yearnings. But besides for this, there is another dimension to our heart: its power to “see”.

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<sup>220</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/essence-month-004-tamuz-holy-imagination>

<sup>221</sup> *Sanhedrin* 6a

What does the heart see? When a *navi* (prophet) is young, he is called a *chozeh* (seer), before he actually sees prophecies. A prophecy is an interpretation of Hashem's word, but it is a kind of vision. The prophet would see things from his heart. A prophet was at a purified internal state, where his heart could see a clear vision. The prophets reached the total level of this kind of vision (the heart's sense of sight), but each person as well can also reach it on his own level.

It is written, "*In the hands of the prophets, I appear.*" The visions of the prophets were seen through the lens of a purified kind of imagination (*dimayon*). When most people hear of this concept, they react skeptically: "Prophecy involved imagination?!" But this reaction is only possible when a person is not aware of the concept of a holy kind of imagination. The prophets saw a holy and purified kind of imagination. Since most people have not reached a level of a purified kind of imagination, most people identify imagination as nothing but fantasy. But when imagination is pure, it is the level of prophecy.

Currently, we do not possess the level of prophecy. But we are still capable of traversing the very way that the prophets took to see their prophetic visions: the power of holy imagination.

We aren't referring to the kind of imagination techniques which the secular world presents. We are speaking here about the way of our forefathers; we are trying to return to their footsteps.

### ***The Heart Needs To Picture Information***

What exactly is the power of imagination which the heart is capable of?

Our intellect can think, scrutinize, build, take apart, decide, etc. Our heart, however, cannot relate to abstract information. It must be able to receive some kind of image, and then it can work with the image to understand it. If something cannot be imagined, it can be perceived rationally, by the intellect; but it cannot pass into the heart. The heart will not register any information that has no mental picture to it. If something can be pictured, it is perceived by the heart.

Our rational intellect is aware that two plus two is four. The heart, though, can only understand this if there is a picture of this. For example, if two books are placed next to two books, the heart can perceive that there are four books. There is now a picture here being given to the "two plus two", it can be imagined and thus the heart can register it. Thus, our intellect works with the abstract, whereas the heart needs some kind of picture of the information.

### ***Mashal V'Nimshal – A Parable and Its Lesson***

Shlomo HaMelech said, "*My heart has seen much wisdom.*" Of Shlomo HaMelech, it was also said that he "established many parables." The concept of a *mashal* (parable) speaks to the heart, for it is a way to envision the information.

Shlomo HaMelech spoke in the form of parables. Why was this necessary? What is the idea of speaking in parables? It is because when our intellect is not capable of understanding things, we need to give it some kind of wrapping, like a parable, that will help us perceive it. Our heart will visualize the information being conveyed through the parable, and then the heart can understand.

Shlomo HaMelech spoke in parables, so that the wisdom he is imparting will be perceived by our heart.

### ***The Difference Between Hirhur (Visualization) and Re'iyah (Inner Sight)***

Generally speaking, there are two ways how the heart visualizes things.

One way is through envisioning it in letters of the *Aleph Beis*. This is also called *hirhur* (visualization), which is an ability of the heart, for we find that a person can fulfill *Kerias Shema* through '*hirhur b'libo*', through thinking of the words in his heart. This is the idea behind the month of *Iyar*, which we explained in the past.<sup>222</sup>

The month of *Tamuz*, however, is about *re'iyah*, "sight". It is the idea of perceiving things in terms of parables; to draw lessons from what we observe on this world and to understand the *nimshal* (lesson) that the *mashal* is teaching. The heart fantasizes the information, which makes use of the imagination, and in that way, it can use *mashal* to reach the *nimshal*.

### ***Imagination: A Tool***

The heart imagines something, and this forms a *kli*, a spiritual 'container', to hold the information. What will enter this 'container'? A true and tangible vision (*tziyur*) can enter it and be contained in it. That is the purpose of using imagination: it is a tool that allows us to receive a great vision that will become contained in us.

Thus, if one simply remains with the fantasies alone, he lives in his imagination. The 'guided-imagery' techniques of today therefore are not using the higher purpose of imagination, and they are causing people to become immersed in fantasy. It is a way meant for people who are very ill in their souls. The true way to use the power of imagination is to always see the *nimshal* (lesson) of the *mashal* (parable) that we are processing. Guided imagination, which has been devised by gentiles, is placing too much emphasis on the 'container' (the imagination). Imagination is but a tool we can use to receive something greater. It is a tool to receive a true vision.

The prophets reached the highest level of this, for they were essentially receiving the spiritual light of the *nimshal* contained in the *mashal* they were seeing. In the broader sense of things, man is an entirely a *mashal* (parable) of how to receive a *tzelem elokim* (image of G-d) and have it shined upon him – which is the *nimshal*.

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<sup>222</sup> See *Essence of Rosh Chodesh #02 \_Iyar\_ Thought and Visualization*

### ***Tziyur (Visualization) and Dimayon (Fantasy)***

There are two powers related to the imagination. One is called *tziyur* (visualization) and the other is called *dimayon* (fantasy).

*Dimayon* is for a person to imagine something which a person cannot understand rationally. It is used a *kli* (tool) to contain the vision which we want to put into it. *Tziyur*, though, is to imagine something which the person already knows of.

### ***Feeling Hashem: Through Holy Imagination***

We must use our imagination for holiness, so that it will become a container for the *tzelem elokim* (image of G-d) or the *tzurah elyonah* (heavenly image) that we want to put into it: a spiritual vision of a reality that is palpable.

It is written, “*And I will dwell amongst them*”, and the Sages explain, “In the hearts of each and every one of them.” Hashem dwells in every person’s heart. How can a person grasp such a thing? How are we to relate to such a thing? One of the ways that can help us understand this is through using the power of holy imagination. Through using the power of imagination for holiness (to envision spiritual realities), we build in ourselves a container that can hold onto the spiritual. That is what allows us to experience G-dliness in ourselves.

### ***Holy Imagination Vs. Unholy Imagination***

However, there is a fine line that differentiates between holy imagination and unholy imagination. When a person uses imagination as a purpose unto itself, with no greater goal in mind, than imagination is unholy. By contrast, when imagination is used as a tool to reach a greater purpose, it is holy.

### ***How Do We Internalize?***

It is written, “*For the inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth.*” How, indeed, does a person change and purify his *yetzer hora* (evil inclination)? The tool we can use this is the power of holy imagination, which our heart is capable of.

Our intellect is not capable of this; our intellect cannot tell our heart what to do and rationalize with it. Even if a person could live for 1000 years, his intellect would not be able to change his heart. This is because the intellect and the heart are polar opposites. The intellect rationalizes and brings proof, while the heart needs some kind of picture or vision of the information in order to be affected. The heart speaks a different language than our intellect.

For this reason, although many people know in their heads what the right thing is, their hearts remain unaffected by this knowledge. The *Ramchal* writes that if a person would know what a sin is, he would never sin. We all know what a sin is; our minds are aware of right and wrong. So why is sin so common? The *Ramchal* says that it's because the knowledge in the mind isn't in the heart.

How, indeed, can we internalize our mind's knowledge into our heart? One of the ways is through the power of *hirbur* (to visualize the letters of the *Aleph Beis* of things), which we explained about in the month of *Iyar*. But another way is through *dimayon d'kedushah*, holy imagination – in which we can use our imagination as a tool to receive the spiritual.

The power of holy imagination was a power that many of the leaders of the past used. It is the heart's power to “see”: the heart in us can see holiness. The tool and container we use for this is the vision of holiness, and the spiritual light that can enter that container is the actual spiritual vision.

### ***The Powers of Ahavah and Yirah***

There are two parts to seeing the spiritual. These are really well-known matters, and here we will attempt to understand these concepts.

The heart can “see”. What can it see? What does it envision?

As the Sages tell us, there are two *chalalim* (spaces) in the heart: the *chalal hayemini* (the right side of the heart) and the *chalal hesemali* (the left side of the heart). It is written, “*The heart of the wise is to his right, and the heart of a fool is to his left.*” A heart that is “to the right” is referring to the “right side of the heart”, and a heart that is “to the left” is referring to the “left side of the heart”.

Our *avodah* (task) on this world, simply speaking, is to bring our *yetzer tov* (good inclination) into our heart, and drive away the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) from the heart. This is true, but there is more depth to the matter.

Everything in Creation is two-sided; there are always two opposite aspects which we need to utilize in order to reach our desired purposes. There are two abilities which we can use in order to work with our heart. The Sages call them the “right side of the heart” and the “left side of the heart”; and the *yetzer tov* and *yetzer hora* are found in them. But let's speak here about the actual different *spaces* of the heart, rather than the forces present inside them.

They are really two different abilities of the heart – the “right” aspect of the heart, which is otherwise known as *ahavah* (love), and the “left” aspect of the heart, which is otherwise known as *yirah* (awe).

We have a *mitzvah* to love Hashem as well as a *mitzvah* to fear Hashem. Our heart can “see”, and we can “see” from the place of *ahavah* that is in our heart. But we can also “see” from the place of *yirah*; the word *yirah* is related to the word *re'iyah* (seeing).



What are the abilities of *ahavah* and *yirah*? It seems the *ahavah* and *yirah* is simply a *middah* (character trait), and this is true, but from the fact that the heart can “see” we learn that there is a way to “see” from the place of *ahavah* in our heart, and there is a way to “see” from the place of *yirah* in our heart. What does it mean to “see” from *ahavah*, and what does it mean to “see” from *yirah*?

Reb Yisrael Salanter would mainly use the power of *yirah*, and there was a lot less emphasis on *ahavah*. He would mainly practice envisioning thoughts that inspired *yirah*, such as imagining the fire of *Gehinnom*. This was the way of the great leaders of the *Mussar* movement. However, this is not yet the stage of purifying the heart. It is the tool to get there, but it is not yet the goal.

Thus, the method which Reb Yisrael Salanter and the *mussar* movement used was the power of *tziyur* (visualization) present in the “left side of the heart.” This was the path of *yirah*, and it is one side to the power of *tziyur* which the heart is capable of.

There are many ways to use the heart’s power of *tziyur*. If someone has a hard time imagining what *Gehinnom* is like, one of the methods written about in the *mussar sefarim* is for a person to place his hand in a physical fire, so that he can get some kind of *mashal* (parable) of what *Gehinnom* is like. In any case, the heart’s power of *tziyur* uses the “left side of the heart”.

The other power of *tziyur* in the heart, the “right side of the heart”, is totally different. It is to imagine something that is loving and embracing. One example of it is to try to imagine the reward in the World To Come. In *Michtav M’Eliyahu*<sup>223</sup>, it is explained how a person can vividly see this world as a *mashal* to the reward of the World To Come, such as by trying to imagine how many drops in the ocean there are and how this mimics the magnitude of the reward that awaits a person in the World To Come. This is a loving kind of vision, not a fearful one, and it is experienced through the “right side of the heart” (also called “*kav hayamin*”, the “right line”).

In summary, we have explained the two general kinds of *tziyur* in the heart: to imagine a vision that conveys *yirah*, and to imagine a vision that conveys *ahavah*.

In recent generations, our *Gedolim* realized that people today are weaker when it comes to *yirah*; for example, most people have a hard time when trying to imagine *Gehinnom*. Therefore, the *Gedolim* wrote that we mainly have to make use of thoughts of *ahavah*, and deal less with thoughts of *yirah*. However, they never meant that *yirah* should be abandoned completely. We need both *ahavah* and *yirah*. The only question in our *avodah* is where to begin: Should we begin with *ahavah* or should we begin with *yirah*? But it is impossible to have one without the other.

### ***Seeing Everything In Terms of Parable and Lesson***

When we use the heart’s power of *tziyur*, this surely has a positive effect on our heart, and it purifies the heart to a certain extent. Yet it is not enough to connect a person to the reality of the

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223 *Michtav M’Eliyahu Vol. I, 1*

spiritual. With the power of *tziyur* alone, a person will only live in the *mashal* of life, but he will never get to the *nimshal*. He will still remain connected to the materialism of This World.

What a person needs to do is to try to get to the *nimshal* (lesson) of the *mashal* (parable), and then he will leave the ideal kind of life, in which he will be truly connected with the spiritual. When a child hears a story, he is only hearing of a *mashal*; he does not hear the *nimshal*. In every story we hear as well, it's possible that we are just hearing the *mashal* alone, without ever grasping the *nimshal*.

The Chofetz Chaim would hear an inspiring message in every event. He saw and heard events as entirely being a *mashal*, a parable, to something greater; he saw the *nimshal* of each *mashal*. He saw all of reality as a *mashal* against the backdrop of a greater reality. He realized that everything on this world can be seen as a *mashal* that leads to a *nimshal*.

The idea of this is not simply to see everything as parables and to remain there. Seeing everything as a parable is but the first step, but the second step, which is the goal, is to see the lesson behind the parable. For example, when a person sees snow, he can see it as being an example of Hashem's power. He sees the snow as a *mashal* of Hashem's power. But he has not yet reached the *nimshal* of this *mashal*. When one sees the *nimshal* behind each *mashal*, he reaches purity of heart.

But one cannot jump to the *nimshal* unless he has first seen the *mashal*; the *mashal* is needed in order to relate to the *nimshal*. *Sefer Shir HaShirim*<sup>224</sup> is entirely a *mashal* of a loving relationship between husband and wife, and the *nimshal* of this is the relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem. Yet many people have heard and read *Shir HaShirim*, but they never see it as a *mashal* to the *nimshal*. They are aware of the *nimshal*, but they skip over the *mashal* stage.

Everything you see on this world is all a *mashal*. If you get used to seeing the world like this, you have a tool to get the *nimshal* of each *mashal* you come across. Your eyes will see something, and your heart will see the *mashal* that is behind what you are seeing, and then your heart will search to understand what the *nimshal* is.

Hashem did not place in Gan Eden. He placed on this world. What do we do with everything that we see on this world? If we do not think into the reality we see before us, we never see the *mashal* of life. All we will see is the *nimshal*, and if we remain at this thoughtless stage, the *nimshal* we will see is nothing but the materialism of this world. But if we get used to seeing everything as a *mashal*, then everything we see can become a tool that we can use to connect to the spiritual.

### ***The Heart Sees Reality***

Thus, the abilities of *tziyur* and *dimayon* which are in our heart are both representing one *avodah* we have on this world. Our heart's ability of *tziyur* (or *dimayon*) can conjure realities we have never seen, and we have explained that there are two kinds of holy imagination which accomplish this:

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<sup>224</sup> *Song of Songs*

thoughts of *yirah* [i.e. imagining *Gehinnom*], and thoughts of *ahavah* [i.e. imagining the reward in the World To Come].

This is the inner essence that is behind the heart's power to "see". The depth of it is because our heart is capable of grasping reality. Our eyes see things objectively, but our heart sees the reality behind what we see; it sees into the inner dimension of what we are physically seeing.

### ***A Life Ruled By Fantasies***

Everyone has the power to imagine. Most people only know of it from the fantasies of dreams, and many people fantasize during the day as well; in fact, many people are immersed in imaginative thoughts during the day, ruled completely by their imagination; some more and some less. The problem with this is not the fact that people are immersed in fantasy. The problem is that it negatively affects the heart.

When imagination dominates a person, the heart will imagine various fantasies, and it will not imagine spiritual realities. It will be the kind of heart of which it is said, "The eyes see, and the heart desires" – the heart will fantasize about unholy and evil thoughts. As the Sages say, "If a person wants one hundred, he will want two hundred." Everything physical that we see will then turn on the imagination, and then our heart will do nothing else except fantasize of various, worthless desires.

It's even possible that a person's head is immersed in thoughts of Torah, yet his heart is immersed in childish fantasies. Just because a person isn't consciously aware of this doesn't mean that it is not the case. A person can have a highly developed intellect yet his heart still remains at the level of a child. As long as a person has not yet worked to purify his heart, his heart lives in various fantasies.

This is the depth of the contradiction between our intellect and our heart. It is not simply because the heart doesn't feel the knowledge present in the intellect. That is also true. But it is a much deeper contradiction. It is because the heart's role is to grasp reality, whereas the intellect knows rationally what the right thing is, but it doesn't grasp that knowledge as a reality; what results from contradiction [when it is left unresolved]? The heart is left with nothing but fantasies.

Fantasy dominates over any person who has not had enough involvement with a Torah scholar to learn from, even if the person has learned a lot of Torah in his life. When the heart is left unchanged as it is, it will desire what the eyes see, and it will fantasize over worthless pursuits. The *Sforno* says that the desire to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* was essentially the power of imagination.

Not only will the heart desire and fantasize about things that are not good – it will completely immerse a person in a pursuit of fantasy. The person will live a fantasy kind of life, and he will never live reality. Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote of the woes of imagination: "Man roams around freely in his imagination." This is because when the heart remains at its initial and immature state, it fantasizes.

But if a person learns how to see the *mashal* of each thing, and he also searches to understand the *nimshal*, he lives in the reality, and he leaves imagination behind.

### ***In Conclusion***

Thus, the depth of our *avodah* on this world is not simply so that we should “*purify our hearts, to serve You in truth.*” That is what we should aim for, but it does not define our actual *avodah*. Our actual *avodah* is to leave imagination, and enter into reality - namely, the ability to palpably feel Hashem as an existing reality.

Why is it that a person doesn't feel Hashem as a reality in his life? It is not because his heart isn't pure; it is because his heart is living in fantasies. When a person leaves fantasy behind, he can then feel the most simple reality that exists: Hashem's presence. The more a person leaves behind fantasy, the more he will feel Hashem - in his heart.

When a person sees all of life as a *mashal*, and he searches to get to the *nimshal* of the *mashal* – he is the person who will reach the Creator.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> For more on the concept of seeing life as 'mashal v'nimshal' (a parable and its lesson), see *Getting To Know Your Home\_012\_The Lesson of Marriage*.

### 3.6 | Separating The Imagination<sup>226</sup>

#### *The Lesson from the Eitz HaDa'as: The Limits of Our Da'as*

We have so far explained, with Hashem's help, the three main uses of the power of *daas*: differentiation (*havdalah*), deciding (*hachmaah*), and connecting (*chibbur*). Now we will explain the lower uses of our *daas*.

The first time the Torah mentions *daas* is by the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V'Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil). When Chavah was tempted with the fruit of the *Eitz HaDaas*, the Torah writes, “*And the woman saw that the tree was good for consumption, and that was desirable to the eyes, and that the tree was precious to understand.*”

There were three factors involved here: it was “good for consumption”, it was “desirable to the eyes”, and it was “precious to understand”. Each of these three factors is a different facet of *daas*. We will elaborate on each of these three aspects and how they apply to our own *daas*, and the avodah that each of these three aspects implies.

(We are dealing with the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V'Ra* [the *daas* that was a mixture of good and evil] which contains the three kinds of *daas* that we currently possess, and not the *Eitz HaDaas Tov*, which was entirely holy).

The first point the possuk says about the *Eitz HaDaas* was that “*The tree was good for consumption.*” What does this mean? How can you eat *da'as*? Also, Chavah saw that the “tree” was good to eat. What does this mean? Wasn't it the fruit that she wanted to eat?

The matter behind this is as follows. A tree is a root, while its fruit are what branches out from the root. To eat the “fruits” means to just experience the branches of the tree, which are spread out and separate. But to eat the tree itself means to experience the root of the tree – the actual tree. *Chazal* say that before the sin, the bark of a tree tasted like its fruit. The real taste was in the tree, which could not be eaten.

Thus, the essence of *daas* itself cannot be “eaten”; only its “branches” can be tasted of.

The root of something is always hidden; the roots of a tree are underground and cannot be seen. This shows us that the “root” of a matter is supposed to be kept hidden.

*Eitz* is from the word *etzem* (essence), which is from the word *atzimah*, “closed”, hidden. The depth of the sin was that Adam and Chavah attempted to go above their *da'as* – they wanted to taste of something that is supposed to be hidden. They wanted to get to the essence of things.

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<sup>226</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/utilizing-your-daas-04-separating-imagination>

The Snake told them that if they eat the fruit that they will be like Hashem. This was the depth of the temptation, and it was an evil desire. *Da'as*, by definition, is to reach the limits of where you are; when a person desires to go above this limit, such a desire is evil. *Daas* cannot taste the essence of a matter; it can perceive until the essence, but it cannot reach the actual essence of a matter.

So when Chavah saw that the tree was good to eat, and she wanted to become like Hashem, she was attempting to use *daas* to reach the essence, which cannot be done.

### ***Good Da'as Is To Define Limits, Evil Da'as Is To Break Limits***

The lesson we learn from this is that *daas* is good when it helps a person reach until his limits, and it becomes evil when a person is attempting to break his limits. It is written, “*For no man shall see Me and live*” – the deeper meaning of this is that when a person wants to see Hashem through his *daas*, the result is death, and that was the depth behind the curse of death.

*Daas* represents limits. Hashem created the world with certain limits and boundaries. Limits are a force in creation; when a person wants to break the limits of creation, he resembles the sin of eating from the *Eitz haDa'as*, in which Adam and Chavah wanted to break their limits, so that they could go beyond human limits and enter the essence of things.

The Snake is called “One who breaks the fences of the world”; the depth of the power of evil is that it attempts to break the rules that Hashem made. *Daas* is evil when one is trying to break rules and limitations.

To give a deeper description of the concept, in the *Eitz HaDa'as Tov V'Ra*, there was *da'as tov* and *da'as ra* – good *da'as* and evil *da'as*. The *da'as tov* was the kind of *da'as* that allows a person to reach until his limits, while the *da'as ra* is when a person wishes to break the boundaries and go above them. So when Chavah desired to be like Hashem, it was not just a desire to be like Hashem - it was, in essence, a desire to escape the rules.

The real kind of life, had they eaten from the *Eitz HaChaim*, would have been forever, because had they kept to the rules and only eaten from the *Eitz HaChaim*, they would have been fine. They would have merited the real kind of life, which is when the rules are kept. Instead, they desired to break their limits, so they ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, which they were told would break their limits.

They wanted to reach the unlimited, and the problem was, they were at the level of *daas*, and one's *daas* cannot break limits. If a person attempts to reach the unlimited through his *daas*, this is evil. When a person lives within the rules, he is able to live properly.

Earlier, we described the concept of *havayah* (essence of a matter). The very *havayah* (essence) of each thing is really when it is kept to its boundaries. When boundaries are broken, a person cannot live properly. That was the depth of the curse of death; because they didn't want boundaries, death came to the world.

Now we can understand the depth of the ability of *da'as d'havdalah* which we addressed in the first chapter. Through using the power of *daas d'havdalah*, a person is really able to keep to his limits.

What is *daas tov* and *daas ra* in our soul? *Daas tov* is to seek to keep to the rules that are holy. *Daas ra* is the desire to break boundaries. So trying to break boundaries through our *daas* is called *daas ra*, and building boundaries from our *daas* is called *daas tov*.

### ***Defining Limits of Everything***

To be clearer, when a person wants to understand something, or how to get somewhere, or he would like to know something in general, part of the understanding is to know the limits and rules of something. Knowing the rules of something is not just another aspect of knowledge – it is the very definition of something. Everything is defined by its limits.

We see the limits of each thing by using *daas d'havdalah*. All of Creation is a tool to reach something, so everything has rules in how it is used. (The deeper essence of each thing is to see it as a revelation of Hashem. But we are addressing a more basic understanding of everything.)

If a person doesn't want something to have rules, that is called *daas ra*. Thus, the depth of the sin of the *Eitz HaDa'as* wasn't just that they wanted to break their limits. It was that they didn't realize that each thing has limits.

That was how Adam and Chavah desired to be like Hashem. It was because they didn't realize that the need to have rules. It wasn't just that they wanted to *break* the rules – rather, they didn't want to accept that there even *are* rules. We are limited, and beyond the limits is Hashem, and that is why we need to have limits.

In every soul, there are two opposite abilities: The *Ein Sof* (Infinite) of Hashem is in our soul, but there are also limits in us. Our ability of *daas* we have is essentially the tool which can hold all the spiritual light that we put into it. *Daas* is the root of how we build our soul. Without *daas*, there is no container in our soul to hold anything, and the light of the *Ein Sof* will then not be able to be contained in the person.

Thus, a person must be aware that there are limits to each thing, and this builds his *daas*. Through building *daas*, a person is then able to become a container that will be able to hold onto the unlimited, the Endless Light of Hashem.

Without limits, people fight with each other. There must be limits, or else each of the abilities in the soul will be in chaos, and that causes all the clashing with people. Nothing can exist without limits.

To illustrate, if a bottle holds 2 liters of water, and we don't recognize that the bottle can only hold 2 liters, then any more water we put into it will not be able to go in.

### ***Daas – The Key To Good Middos***

The good *middos* are defined by keeping to the limits of each *middah*. For example, anger is not evil – it is only evil when it goes beyond its limits. *Middah* means “measured”, because they are meant to be kept within their limits. *Daas* is what enables them to be kept to their limits. A “*bar daas*”, someone capable of *daas*, essentially means someone who knows how to limit his abilities – when an ability in the soul needs to be used, and when it shouldn’t be used.

### ***Evil Da’as Is The Imagination***

Now we can better know the difference between *daas* and *dimyon*/imagination, which we mentioned earlier.

The purpose of our *daas* is to uproot our *dimyon*/imagination. The Sforno and the Vilna Gaon wrote that *Eitz HaDaas Ra* (the evil in the Eitz HaDaas) was essentially *medameh*, imagination. What is the connection with *medameh*/imagination and *daas ra*/evil *daas*? What do they have to do with each other? The answer is: *daas* is about keeping to limits. *Daas ra* is when *daas* is used to break limits. Evil *daas* is really the essence behind all *medameh*, imagination. The imagination in a person seeks to break limits. Imagination comes to compare and exaggerate, expanding something beyond its boundaries.

The inner essence of all holiness is called *midas hishtavus* (arriving at equilibrium), and this is the holy way to use the desire to expand. This is also called the *ohr Ein Sof*, the Infinite Light of Hashem. But when the desire to expand is used for evil, it is *dimyon*/evil imagination, which seeks to break limits and rules of each thing. The *Eitz HaDaas Ra* was all about *medameh*, to imagine that the rules can be broken. Our *daas tov* exists so that we can uproot *medameh*, and our *daas ra* makes use of *medameh*/imagination and wants to break limits.

All evil in the world stems from the *Eitz HaDaas Ra*, and since this is identified with *medameh*/evil imagination, the evil imagination is the root of all evil in the soul. Imagination is entirely the result of the desire to break limits. A person imagines what he can’t do in reality. For example, a person wants to be in America, so he imagines he’s there.

### ***Imaginary Pleasure***

Now we can understand the following. We mentioned it before and now we can understand it better.

Whenever a person has pleasure from evil, it always stems from imagination. When a person sins and he enjoys it, he doesn’t enjoy the act. He enjoys the imagination. It is written in *Mishlei*, “*Stolen waters are sweet*” – a person enjoys the feeling of the stolen pleasure, and what is stealing about? It is about breaking rules. So the pleasure in a sin is all about breaking rules. The feeling of pleasure in



doing something forbidden feels like stolen pleasure, and that is what the person experiences when he “enjoys” a sin.

When this power is used for holiness, it is the secret of true *oneg Shabbos*, in which a person can enjoy endless pleasure; as *Chazal* say, “Whoever has pleasure in Shabbos, merits a boundless inheritance.” The opposite of *oneg*/pleasure is *nega*/evil pleasure. When a person enjoys evil, his entire enjoyment is derived from the evil force of *nega*. The enjoyment of *nega* is essentially when a person has broken the rules, and that is the evil pleasure present in every act of sin. The breaking of the rules is the real feeling of the pleasure, and it is experienced through the garment of the imagination.

Now we can deeply understand what a person enjoys when he sins. The inner essence of the pleasure is the fact that he’s breaking rules, and it is experienced through the imagination, which is like a garment over the essence of the evil pleasure.

There is good *taanug* and evil *taanug* (good or evil pleasure). Developing our *daas tov* (good *daas*) establishes the boundaries we need to have, and this is what uproots evil *medameh*/imagination.

(We are addressing how we need to uproot evil *medameh*, not to uproot *medameh d’kedushah*/holy imagination. We do not want to uproot the *medameh* itself, for *medameh* can be used for holiness, as we know. We are trying to uproot the evil use of *medameh* – the desire to break holy rules and limits).

What happens when a person connects to the *Eitz HaDaas Ra* in his soul? It is when a person doesn’t want rules, and that is what enables his evil imagination to get started. The *taanug* of *nega* (evil pleasure) is essentially the meaning behind the statement, “The Snake breaks the fences of the world.” The whole *taanug* in evil is when a person breaks rules.

Every person identifies with this: people love to break the rules. There is a certain *taanug* in it. When this power is channeled for holiness, a person desires to connect to the *Ein Sof*, which is endless pleasure.

To illustrate, when a child runs away from school, his pleasure is not just in the fact that he won’t have the pressure of his studies anymore. The pleasure is in the very act of running away from school. He enjoys going free from his boundaries.

### ***Stopping Evil Imagination At Its Root***

Thus, good *daas* is about setting boundaries. In one second, when a person forgets about limits and rules, he falls immediately into imagination! Chavah saw that “*the tree was good for consumption*” – as soon as she saw the tree and she forgot about her rules, she fell into imagination. If a person would be aware of limits, he can’t fall into imagination.

If a person wants to stop his imagination for evil, he might try to take apart his imaginative thoughts and weaken them in the attempt of trying to get rid of them; he tries to kill off each imaginative thought. This is a very difficult task, thus, it is not feasible to use.

We have to get to the root of the problem. One has to get out of his imagination entirely and return to boundaries.

### ***Using Daas D'Havdalab To See The Limits of Each Concept***

In this way, a person is “*machria*” (decisive) in sorting out his imagination. Earlier, we spoke of *daas d'hachraah*, but now we are returning to discuss *daas d'havdalab*, and we will explain how it can lead to *hachraah* with regards to imagination.

The role of *daas d'havdalab* is to separate between the information that one's *chochmah* sees and the information that one's *binah* has compared. We already explained this earlier.

The lowest function of *daas*, as we explained, is *havdalab* - to separate between *binah* (a real comparison) and *tevunah/dimyon* (imagination). One way to do this is by taking apart each *binah*-thought: “Am I making a real comparison now to what I have seen in my *chochmah*, or is it just my imagination that is comparing?” This is what we described earlier. *Havdalab* is to see the similarities and the differences between A and B, and then to decide if they can really be compared.

Now we will take this further: we can use *daas d'havdalab* to leave the vision of imagination entirely.

We can do this by returning to our *etzem* (essence), from the word *atzimas einayim*, the “closing of the eyes”. In other words, our imagination, which is a kind of vision (albeit mental), is what sways us, and if we leave the “vision” of the imagination, we return to the essence. Returning to the essence of something is how we leave imagination.

Thus, the way to use *daas d'havdalab* to fix *medameh* is by realizing the boundaries of each thing, and this is how we return to the *etzem*/essence of each thing, which is defined by its limits. So in each thing, realize what the limits are. The more you get used to seeing how each thing has limits, you escape evil imagination.

This is the depth of using *daas d'havdalab*. Earlier we explained the simpler use of this power, which is to see differences and similarities between two thoughts. Now we are describing the deeper use of *daas d'havdalab*: to realize the limits of each thing.

### ***A Practical Way To Use Havdalab***

It is hard to give a practical solution how to use this concept in defeating the imaginative thoughts of the *yetzer hora* when it comes to tempt you, because *Chazal* say that when the *yetzer hora*

comes to a person and tempts him for evil, there is no *yetzer tov* present. So it will be very hard to summon forth this concept in your mind as you're being tempted.

I can give examples on how you can actualize this concept, but as for when you're actually being tempted, I cannot give an example that you can use to overpower the *yetzer hora*. Instead, you need to develop a kind of self-control already from before the difficulties come. Here is an example of how you can do it (again, don't wait to work on this as you're being tempted, because then it will be pointless. Work on this before the *yetzer hora* comes to you).

We find that whenever the *Gemara* finds a contradiction, the *Gemara* asks, "What are we dealing with?" We see from this that a person should always ask himself what the limits are, when he encounters a contradiction. So we need to realize that our logic is only to be trusted in certain situations, thus, we cannot always trust our thinking. This is how you can begin to see limits.

This is a solution that can help you attack the root of evil imagination. *Daas d'havdalab* can take you out of mental "vision" (*re'iyah*) and enter you into a purely "intellectual" mode (*haskalah*) of your mind, and that is how you leave the view of the imagination.

Earlier, when we spoke of *daas d'havdalab*, we addressed how to separate between two "visionary" kind of thoughts. You separate between what you actually saw and what you compared. But here we are describing the deeper use of *daas d'havdalab*: by realizing the limits of something, you leave the mode of vision and you enter the realm of the intellectual, and this weakens the vision of your imagination.

To illustrate, we all look at the sky. Does it have an end? It seems to be endless. But Hashem created everything with limits, so nothing in Creation is endless. When a person looks at the ocean, does it have an end? It seems to be endless. *Chazal* describe the ocean as "an endless ocean", because when we look at it, it seems endless. But that's all based on our physical vision. It really does have an end, just, we can't see the end.

So our vision makes us see something endless, and that breeds evil imagination, the root of all problems. But when we seek the limitations and rules of each thing, we use our *daas* properly - and that is how we escape evil imagination.

*Daas d'havdalab* essentially serves to take one out of his mental vision (*re'iyah*) and into *hisbonenus*, reflection. This is the depth of *havdalab*: to separate between I **see** and what I **think**.

*Chazal* say, "A judge only sees what he sees"; there is physical vision, and there is mental vision (which comes from the heart). When you see the difference between what you see in front of you and what you think about what you see in front of you, and then you train your soul to differentiate between vision and intellect.

This is the depth of how *daas d'havdalab* can fix your *medameh*. It takes you out of *Eitz HaDaas Ra* - or evil *medameh* - and enters you into *Eitz HaDaas Tov*. When you turn mental vision into intellect - and not intellect into mental vision - this is the root of fixing all problems in the soul. The

root of all problems in the soul is when a person turns intellect/*daas* into a mental vision. The root solution, then, is to turn mental vision into intellect.

Train yourself that in whatever you see, think about what its limits are, and then you will see through the “eyes of the intellect.”

Getting used to this uproots all *taavah* (evil desires) as well. Desire is a pull, and it is rooted in water, which has a nature to pull. Intellect shows you the limits of something, which weakens the pull of imagination. It takes you out of the vision you’re seeing, and in the general sense, it helps you leave imagination entirely.

### ***Defining Everything By Seeing Limits***

This is a concept that affects our whole view on life as well. *Daas tov* is when we see the limits of things, and *daas ra* is when a person wants to break limits, via the imagination. If we want to uproot the root of all inner evil in the soul - the *Eitz HaDaas Ra*, or *medameh*, which seeks to expand past limits – we need to begin to see limits of each concept, and this will weaken the *daas ra*, or our evil imagination, which is trying to get break rules.

The depth of a Torah scholar is not someone who gathers much knowledge about Torah. Rather, a true Torah scholar is always defining the concepts he learns about. Torah scholars are called “builders”, and the depth behind this is that a true Torah scholar knows how to define the limits of each concept he comes across, and in this way, he builds. He knows when and where something applies, when it doesn’t. Anyone used to learning Torah in-depth identifies with the concept. A Torah scholar is someone whose entire life is spent on giving definitions to what he learns, and this is done by seeing the limits of each concept.

Thus, the good way to use *daas* is to always seek to give definitions to something, which is by seeing the limits of each concept.

Again, this advice is not something you can practically use to defeat the imaginative thoughts of the *yetzer hora* when it tempts you. Rather, it is a way to go about life, which gets you used to defining things, and the more you get used to defining concepts and giving them their proper definitions and limits, it will greatly weaken the evil imagination, or, the “*Eitz HaDaas Ra*” of the soul, as a result.

When a person merits to weaken his evil imagination, this is the meaning of “*And death will be swallowed up forever.*”

### 3.7 } *Taking Apart Details*<sup>227</sup>

#### *Binah and Tevunah*

We have said that there are two systems in our mind: a lower mode of thought, and a higher mode of thought. The lower mode of thought is *Chochmah*, *Tevunah*, and *Da'as*. The higher mode of thought is *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*.

At first we spoke about lower *Chochmah* and higher *Chochmah*. Lower *Chochmah* is the knowledge one receives from his teachers. Higher *Chochmah* is when a person really sees the knowledge.

Then, we spoke about lower *Da'as* and higher *Da'as*. Lower *Da'as* is *Da'as d'havdalah* (to separate information) and *Da'as d'hachraah* (to decide between the information). Higher *Da'as* is to connect to the information (*Da'as hamechaberes*).

Now we will discuss the two kinds of *Binah*: the higher kind of *Binah*, and the lower kind of *Binah* (which is called *Tevunah*). We spoke about it before a little, but now we will elaborate on it.

As we mentioned before, the higher *Binah* and the lower *Binah*, *Tevunah*, are different. *Tevunah* is to compare one thing to another. When a person compares, he is able to expand the information. *Binah*, which is in the higher mode of thought, is to reflect into the information and take apart its details.

*Chazal*<sup>228</sup> say that women are blessed with “extra *Binah*”, and for this reason a girl is obligated in *mitzvos* earlier than a boy is. This is because women have a unique understanding – an extra “*Binah*.”

Although *Binah* is the faculty of the mind used more by women, we aren't only referring to women when we discuss *Binah*. In every soul, there is a male aspect and a female aspect. So when we say “women” here, we are really referring to the feminine aspect of every soul.

The female aspect in the soul consists of *Binah* and *Tevunah*. *Binah* is a kind of understanding. Women are blessed with extra *Binah*, in that they can recognize better the spiritual stature of their guests.<sup>229</sup> *Tevunah* is essentially the power of *medameh*, which is to either compare or use the imagination. This we can see clearly by women, who often use their imagination.

This seems to be a contradiction inside a woman (as well as in the female aspect of every soul). If a woman is more prone to imagination, why doesn't her extra *Binah* cancel it out and show her the real understanding?

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<sup>227</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-thoughts-009-taking-apart-details>

<sup>228</sup> *Niddah 45b*

<sup>229</sup> *Berachos 10b*

But the reason for this is because these are two different systems going on in the mind. In the higher mode of thought, we use *Binah*, and in the lower mode of thought, we use *Tevunah*.

*Binah* is only in the higher mode of thought. *Chazal* say that women have extra *Binah*, and this is not coming to say that women have less understanding; the opposite is true. Women have greater understanding in certain areas, and in fact this is why a girl has to start keeping the *mitzvos* earlier than a boy has to. In the department of *Binah*, women have an advantage over men, and they are thus greater in their power of *Binah*.

But the power of *Tevunah*, which is the imagination, is from the lower mode of thought. This is not an advantage over a man – it is a disadvantage.

Of course, the lower mode of thought can still remain in a girl even after she matures and is obligated in *mitzvos*. The point of what we are saying here is that there are two abilities in our mind. There is a higher power, *Binah*, which women excel at more than men. There is a lower power, *Tevunah*, which is the power of imagination, which is also part of the feminine nature.

We will try, with the help of Hashem, to expand this discussion. We will try to see the contrast between *Binah* and *Tevunah* and how they relate, and then we will see the flip side of these matters. We will open up this discussion by discussing *Tevunah*, which is the power of imagination.

### ***The Way Imagination Works***

The lower kind of *Binah* – *Tevunah* -- is when a person compares one piece of information to another piece of information. This is essentially the imagination, and the Vilna *Gaon* lists it as one of the seventy forces in the soul. With imagination, a person expands the information.

When a person uses imagination, he is able to come to compare one thing to another. But the imagination at its root causes one to picture in his mind that he has the general understanding of the information, as opposed to the details.

If a person would really look at the details, he wouldn't make a total comparison between one thing and other. He would notice some similarities, but this would not make him conclude that it's the same. He would see how each detail is unique and can't really be compared to something else. Why do people compare? It is because they see a general view of the situation, without entering into the details. When a person just focuses on the general outlook of a situation, it creates the point of imagination.

The whole idea of a comparison is to take two things that are different from each other and see how they are similar. But really, nothing can really be compared. Something might be similar somewhat to another thing, but it's only a little similar and not more than that. One species of bird might look the same as another bird, but in reality each species is a whole different species of bird, and no two species are the same. They share some similarities and that's it; they are not the same.

Why is it then that we compare? It is because usually, a person focuses just on the similarities, and not on the differences. A person sees one detail that is similar to another thing, and because of this he thinks that the two things are really the same. Comparing makes a person leave the details and instead just focus on the general outlook of something, all because of a particular detail.

Even more so, when imagination is in control, a person doesn't even notice how the details are really very different from each other. Imagination causes one to connect all the information together that in reality has no resemblance. Seeing details is fine, but when a person takes a particular detail and expands it to be "more" over here. The details go from being details to becoming the whole thing.

With imagination, a person doesn't really enter the information – he just pictures it. Imagination takes the details out of the general picture as a whole and blows up the details. This is why when a person imagines something, it seems to him that he has uncovered more information. But really, it is because the details have been blown up, so it appears to look like more information; really, there aren't more details here. If a person would really see the details, he would leave most of the imagination.

When a child imagines something, his imagination shows him how one particular detail forms everything, and from there the imagination continues to expand. If a person would really enter the details, his power of Binah would take him out of the imagination and return him to the way things really are, not the way things seem.

In the lower mode of thought, *Chochmah* is that a person receives knowledge from his teachers. When someone is taught by his teacher, does the teacher tell him all of the Torah he knows? No, he only teaches him some specific details. The student, who is at the lower mode of thought, thinks that the particular details he was taught is the whole picture. In other words, he creates his general outlook of the knowledge from the details he knows about. In the lower mode of thought, *Chochmah* is a specific detail, while *Tevunah* creates the general view.

This is erroneous. Although it is possible for a person to arrive at the general view from the details, that is only if the person is revealing the details within the general view, and he is aware that details are just details that make up a greater picture. But this is not the same attitude as a person using imagination. With imagination, a person takes the details and sees how it's everything.

When a person compares things, he uses the imagination, which is in the lower mode of thought. When people compare, they compare as long as there is some similarity. Although there is only one detail worth comparing, a person is convinced that the two things are totally similar, just because there is one detail that makes them similar. He's not really focused on the details – it is rather because of certain details, he is focused on the general picture.

*Chazal* also had to explain to us that certain matters are not the same, even though they seem similar because of one particular detail. If not for what they said, we would mistakenly conclude that two things are similar because of a certain detail they both share.

This is the mistake which imagination causes. With imagination, a person compares one thing to another because they seem so similar. But upon some reflection, a person can use his *Binah* to see how it's only similar in one particular detail, and not as a whole.

Really, none of these details can be connected. Each detail is full of many differences that contradict the other details, and thus no detail is similar to another. They cannot be connected.

This is the definition of *Tevunah*, which is to compare. *Tevunah* is when a person is viewing his *Chochmah* through the lens of imagination.

It seems simply that imagination is rooted in *Binah*, because with *Binah* a person also compares the information of the *Chochmah*. But that is only in the higher mode of thought. In the lower mode of thought, the very *Chochmah* is being seen through the imagination, which is a false view.

We can see this all the time. People look at something and see how it's like something else, and they think it's the same thing. A person sees one particular detail and thinks it's the whole thing.

That is the depth to imagination. **If a person takes a look at reality, he will find that he has concocted his own reality, and that it is not the real reality.** This is the implication of imagination – we are referring to the lower part of the mind, which uses *Tevunah*.

### ***How Men Think and How Women Think***

This point is essentially the difference between men and women. With the lower mode of thought, a man sees details as just details, while a woman sees the details as the whole view.

Women by nature see the details more, and they also have a nature to see details as the whole picture. A woman doesn't just look at details as details – she looks at the details as everything. This comes from her *Tevunah*, which is the imagination. (Soon, we will see how *Binah*, which is in the higher mode of thought, is the opposite of this).

The deep reason behind this is because a woman was created while man was asleep. When people sleep, imagination takes over. This implies to us that a woman was created from a time in which there was imagination. For this reason, *Chazal*<sup>230</sup> state that one should not teach Torah to his daughter, and if he does, it is as if he taught her foolishness. This is because a woman, using her lower mode of thought, can only perceive *Chochmah* through her imagination, which is an incorrect understanding of the information.

The difference between men and women is very apparent and can be seen clearly. A man thinks about one thought at a time, while a woman often jumps from one subject to another in almost the blink of an eye. There is a deep reason for this. It is really because according to a woman's understanding, one thing appears similar to another thing. This is coming from her imagination. A

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<sup>230</sup> *Sotah 20b*



woman uses her imagination more to connect various different things to each other and make it all into one.

By contrast, a man breaks down the details. As a result, he sees the details as something that makes up a bigger picture; he knows that the details are not all there is to it, but that each detail is a detail to itself that makes up a greater whole. But women, who make use of their imagination more, immediately compare this detail to that detail, and because of this they come to connect all the details. If she would really see what's in the details, she would see how they are all very different, and she wouldn't come to connect them all together.

It's not simply that she just jumps from one detail to another very quickly. It is that she connects them all, using her imagination. As a result, she thinks she's dealing with the same thing. If she would be able to differentiate between the facts, she would go back to the details and see that they cannot really be connected.

So in the lower mode of thought, *Chochmah* focuses on the details as they are, while *Tevunah* sees the details as the whole picture.

### ***The Higher Chochmah and Binah***

Using the higher mode of thought, everything we have just said gets turned around.

Higher *Chochmah* is when one really sees the information. This is to see a general view of the situation, without getting into the details. By contrast, higher *Binah* sees the details, and sees how all the details connect to form a complete picture. This is why it is called *Binah*, from the word *binyan* (to build).

*Binah*, which women are blessed with more than men, is the ability to see details; this is what it means that women are blessed with extra *Binah*, because they know how to get down to the most miniscule details of something. *Chazal* say that a woman can recognize the spiritual level of her guests better than her husband can, because she can notice these details, unlike her husband, who only sees the general view. When you see the details, it's a whole different viewpoint.

In the higher mode of thought, there is *Chochmah* and *Binah*. Here, the *Chochmah* is more than just the knowledge one received from his teacher; it is to really see the knowledge. With lower *Chochmah*, a person receives certain details from his teacher – detail upon detail. The lower *Chochmah* is about details. But the higher *Chochmah* is to “see” it. This is when a person has a general view of the situation that is all-inclusive. It resembles somewhat the level we were on at Har Sinai, when the Torah was given over in its entirety. This ability in a person is to see the general outlook on a situation. It resembles the ability of Adam who was able to see from one end of the world to the other.<sup>231</sup>

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231 *Chagigah* 12a

The more a person accesses his higher mode of thought, the more he can see this general view. The highest level of this was reached by Adam, who was able to see all the way from one side of the world to the other because he saw how all the details were all part of one picture.

This is also the quality possessed by leaders. A leader sees the general view. Although a person needs to see the details also, the power to lead the public comes from the ability to see the general view. That is why Moshe Rabbeinu is praised for having a “good eye”<sup>232</sup>; because he had the general view, he was able to lead.

However, there is a disadvantage to the general outlook. Although there is a benefit of seeing the general picture of what’s going on, it can hamper one’s perception of how he sees details.

With higher *Binah*, a person enters the details. *Chazal* say that there are “Fifty Gates of *Binah*.” These are many details which add up to become a general picture.

To summarize, in the lower mode of thought, the *Chochmah* sees details, while *Tevunah* sees the general outlook. In the higher mode of thought, the *Chochmah* sees the general outlook, while the *Binah* sees the details.

For this reason, a man sometimes misses the details in something, because he is used to seeing only from his general view on a situation. A woman often sees the small details and thus can recognize her guests better.

### ***Higher Binah and Lower Chochmah***

Now we can see a difference between higher *Binah*, which sees details, to lower *Chochmah*, which also sees details. They are two different ways to see details.

If you give a child a penny, he thinks that the penny is everything, since this is what he has in his hand. An adult knows that a penny is part of a much larger whole.

Higher *Binah* sees details as part of a greater whole, while lower *Chochmah* sees details as the whole thing. The *Tevunah* comes and sees the details as the whole thing, but the problem really started before, in the very *Chochmah*. The *Chochmah* saw the detail as everything.

We can see people who have very little knowledge about the Torah, yet they think they know the entire Torah. A person knows a few stories in the Torah, like what happened with Pharoah and what happened with Bilaam, and from this little knowledge a person fools himself that he knows the whole Torah. Why are there people who think this way? It is because they have a problem in which they see details as everything. They are still at the lower mode of thought. Any comparisons they make will be to blow up these details into everything. Even the *Chochmah* they have learned from their teachers, which were just details, are perceived by them to be everything.

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232 *Nedarim 38a*

But with the higher mode of thought, a person sees details, but he knows that the details are part of a greater whole.

### ***Havdalah – The Power To Separate Information***

We will now discuss two different ways how to differentiate between information --- one way is through *Da'as*, and the other way is through *Binah*.

*Chazal* say that if there is no *Da'as*, there cannot be *Havdalah* (separation). Here we see that *Da'as* comes to separate. On the other hand, every day we make a morning blessing, “*He who gives the rooster Binah to differentiate between day and night.*” This implies that we use *Binah* to separate information. Which ability do we use to separate information – *Da'as*, or *Binah*?

A person is called a “*bar Da'as*”, someone capable of *Da'as* – not a “*bar Binah*”. A rooster might be a *bar binah*, but it is not a *bar Da'as*. Although the terms of *Binah* and *Da'as* are frequently used by our Sages in their works when they discuss how to differentiate information, we must determine if it is our *Da'as* which we are using to separate the information, or if it is our *Binah* which we are using for this.

It depends on which mode of thought we are at. In the lower mode of thought, *Da'as* comes to separate between the information and decide. But in the higher mode of thought, *Da'as* is connection to the general outlook seen by the *Chochmah* and the details seen by the *Binah*. This is how *Binah* can be involved with separating information.

There is a huge difference between these two kinds of separation. It is clear and simple according to what we have explained.

Firstly, to give a very general description, the higher mode of thought sees everything as unified, while the lower mode of thought sees everything as separate. A simple example of this is a child, who cannot give birth. A child cannot connect; a child's whole being is to be separate and to himself. The younger a child is, the more he lives for himself, as we can see at the lowest level, when he is a baby and doesn't see anyone else but himself. The more a person lives in the higher mode of thought, the more he lives with unity, and the more a person is at the lower mode of thought, the more he lives a separate kind of existence. That is a clear-cut fact which is very simple.

Now we can understand as follows. In the lower mode of thought, when a person separates information, he is totally separate from the information. In the higher mode of thought, when a person separates information, he is grasping onto both of the two ends together, although they are separate.

The lower mode of thought is the kind of thinking that stems from the evil *etz haDa'as*, which had in it good and evil knowledge. Thus, the work of the lower mode of thought is to differentiate between what is good and what is evil. But the higher mode of thought is the knowledge contained in the *etz hachaim*. Here, the only issue was to choose between one kind of good and another kind

of good. That is what we do in our higher mode of thought – we are differentiating between two kinds of good.

When a person has to differentiate between good and good, he's holding onto both sides at once. *"From this and from this, do not remove your hand."* He doesn't mix them together, but he holds onto both. But when a person has to use his lower mode of thought and differentiate between good and evil, he has to decide what is good and throw away the bad.

In the lower mode of thought, a person uses *Da'as d'hachraah* (to decide) and *Da'as d'havdalah* (to separate the information) in order to come out with one side. Such separation is for the sake of separation. The decision comes to seal this separation, but the separation remains.

But in the higher mode of thought, a person separates information in the same way that a rooster separates between day and night. A rooster knows of both, and holds onto both even though it has to differentiate between them. If day and night would be mixed together, that would be twilight. The rooster is only separating night and day for now – it is holding onto both.

This is a huge difference between the two different kinds of separating. Lower *Da'as* separates and decides like one way, while higher *Binah* separates but continues to hold onto both of the sides.

### ***Clarity Is Only Through The Higher Mode of Thought***

We will describe this in more simple language.

When a person learns something using his lower mode of thought, he decides like one way, because that is the way he understands. But with the higher mode of thought, a person differentiates between all the information in front of him, and he is grasping and understanding all of the details. We will explain this.

When a person is holding onto a piece of information and he is at the lower mode of thought, his *Da'as* is being used simply to invalidate the rest of the information and thus come to understand whatever is remaining. Lower *Chochmah* is the knowledge one received from his teacher, and lower *Tevunah* is to make comparisons in the information. When a person makes the comparison, confusion gets created, and for this a person can use his *Da'as* to clarify and separate the confusion.

*Tevunah* has in it the words *ben* and *bas* – son and daughter. In other words, there is a son and a daughter going on at once in the information. *Tevunah* creates confusion. Why? It is because when we compare, we compare things that really aren't similar at all. They might have one specific similarity they share, but that's not enough of a reason to make a total comparison and say, "These two things are totally similar." When a person thinks that two things are totally similar, he has really caused a lot of confusion to a matter, and everything gets all mixed up.

*Chochmah* looks at details not like details, but as the general idea. That is the first point. The second point is the *Tevunah*, which is aware that the details are the details, and thinks they are connected, so it compares. It leaves its understanding of the details, which was fine, but then it

makes various comparisons which are erroneous. It comes and connects the information when really there is no connection. *Tevunah*, which is in the lower mode of thought, causes confusion and a lack of clarity. Now, a person has to use his *Da'as* and go back to see the details, and after that to decide again. What the lower *Da'as* is essentially doing is to remove the confusion caused by *Tevunah*.

By contrast, the higher mode of thought is clean from this. It is like what one of the Sages said, "I see a clear world." All of the information here is in its place.

In the higher mode of thought, the *Chochmah* sees all the information in its place. The only threat here to the thinking is that a person might diverge from his general outlook on the information and come to make mistakes. For this, the *Binah* comes and shows all the details, and how each detail is in its place. The *Da'as* comes and connects them all together. As we said before, it connects all the information to the general outlook of the information, as well as to notice the differences between the details. It doesn't come to connect all the details to show any one particular detail; it is coming to show how all the details are different. *Da'as* connects it all. It connects the view of the general outlook to the view of the details together.

### ***Arranging Information In Order Vs. Taking Apart Its Details***

Now we can understand better the difference between higher *Binah* and lower *Da'as*, which seem to be the same thing. Higher *Binah* is when one separates the information and takes apart the details, which is like deciding between good and good. Lower *Da'as* is when one separates the information and decides, which is deciding between good and bad. They are two different ways of deciding.

In the higher mode of thought, a person's *Chochmah* has all the information arranged properly, but he only sees the general idea as a whole, and he doesn't see how it connects all the details together. The higher *Binah* comes and arranges all the details as details, so that the person can see how all the details add up to form the general idea. In either of these two abilities, the person sees the details, and the only difference between the two abilities here is how the person sees the details.

But in the lower mode of thought, a person is confused when he sees the information, because it's all mixed up. In the lower mode of thought, *Binah* is *Tevunah*, and *Tevunah* creates confusion by comparing the details to the general view, mixing them up. What happens as a result? When a person uses his *Da'as* to try to differentiate between the information, he doesn't have the properly arranged details, because everything got all mixed up. Here, the work of the person is to use his *Da'as* to go back and see all the details.

### ***Da'as D'Havdalah***

Let us make these words even more clear. In the higher mode of thought, the details are clear as they are. In the lower mode of thought, a person uses *Tevunah*, which is to see a mixture of different facts, and the person doesn't even see what the information consists of.

To give a simple example, a young newlywed decides to buy a house. He thinks, “What’s the big deal to buy a house? You just make a phone call and that’s it.” But when he starts getting down to the details of buying the house, suddenly it becomes very complicating. He sees that there are many factors going on at once to consider. He has to install the right kind of windows. He has to find a new school for his kids. He will have to deal with new taxes. He sees that there are many details which he never fathomed at first. It was only his superficial kind of vision which made him think that it’s so simple to buy a house.

Here, the work of the *Da’as* in a person is different than what he has to do with the higher *Binah*. With higher *Binah*, he saw all the details at once, and all he has to do is arrange all the information and give it order. But with lower *Binah* – *Tevunah* – the information is all mixed up, and it’s more than just an issue of how to make order of the information. Here a person has to use his *Da’as* to take each detail of the information and break it up into even more details, so that he can see what the matter is made up of.

Let’s say a new Rebbi (teacher) walks into his third grade classroom on the first day of school. If he has a superficial outlook, he sees thirty ten-year olds sitting in front of him. But the real way he needs to see them is to see thirty different souls in front of him, and that each of them is vastly different from each other. Each child is a different reality unto himself, and it is the job of the teacher to break down this reality into all its details.

Whatever a person encounters, he first needs to see what his initial outlook is on the matter. When he sees that the general information is really all one specific detail, he then should break it down to all its details, and see what it is made up of. There is no end to how much a person can break down the details of a situation; everything on this world is endless. But we need to keep breaking down the details and discover more factors that affect a situation, and each person can do this according to his abilities as much as he can.

### ***Don’t Skip This Step***

Our discussion here about the power of *Da’as d’havdalah* is a very important matter that is relevant to most people.

Most people skip *Da’as d’havdalah*, and quickly go straight to *Da’as d’hachraah*. What results from this? The person decides between two possibilities, but he doesn’t even know what the difference between the two possibilities are.

If you think about it, most people have never really accessed their true free will. Free will is exercised by our lower *Da’as*. The higher *Da’as* is not our free will; it is a connection to what one knows, and it is the kind of knowledge contained in the *eitz hachaim* (Tree of Life), but it is not our actual decision. The lower *Da’as*, our ability to decide, comes from the *eitz haDa’as* (Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), which was a mixture of good and evil. Before we can arrive at the higher knowledge, which is connection to the knowledge, we need to first go through a preliminary

stage, in which we sift out the bad knowledge from the good knowledge. After we have made this differentiation – by taking apart all the details – can we truly decide between the options.

But usually, people only know of lower *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*. People usually only have a superficial kind of knowledge that comes from how others think, and they make various comparisons between one thing and another that aren't accurate.

For example, a person goes to a store to buy something. The storeowner shows him different items to buy, and the person hears out the pros and cons of each item. That is lower *Chochmah*, because he is getting his knowledge based on other's thinking. Then he starts making certain comparisons: "My neighbor bought something similar to this item and was satisfied with it, so it makes sense for me to buy this." This is a use of *Tevunah*. Upon this thinking, the person goes ahead and decides to buy the item.

This is something which most people do, and it is an immature kind of thinking. Most of the *Chochmah* in a person is information which he heard from others, and the kind of *Tevunah* we use is when we compare two things that in reality bear no resemblance at all.

Most people, when they decide to buy something, do so because they compare the item to something else they know of. It's a very subtle matter about how our minds work, but this is the reality of how people usually are. A person doesn't usually buy something unless he compares it to something else he bought that he was happy with.

But when a person makes such a comparison, it's a distortion of reality. People skip over differentiating between their options and go straight to make a decision, and there is almost nothing to decide about! After all, the person's comparison has already decided for him that it's the same thing anyway, so why should he decide...

A person says to himself, "Yesterday I did such and such, so today I will do the same. I don't need to decide about it again. Why should I think about it again? It has already been decided yesterday." But the truth is that many times a person hasn't really decided – he only compared this fact and that fact and came up with some erroneous conclusion based on that. When *Da'as d'havdalah* is missing, the *Da'as d'hachraah* isn't a true decision.

Most people actually do not know how to really decide, and they have never really come to a true decision in their life! It is because they don't know how to differentiate between their options; they don't know how to make use of their *Da'as d'havdalah*.

With *Da'as d'havdalah*, a person can see the reality of the details. It is the beginning step to have actual clarity. The final step of having clarity is when a person has the connection to his *Chochmah* and *Binah*, but the beginning and initial step to make is to at least notice differences.

Let's say a person is given two closed packages, and he is asked which one to choose. He chooses the package on the right, thinking, "Well, *Chazal* say that when in doubt, always take the right, not the left." Such thinking is superficial, because he doesn't weigh his options. Although *Chazal* say to

always take the right path when in doubt, the person still isn't thinking. He isn't thinking from a true place in himself. His decision in such an example is a very weak one.

It's scary. If a person really examines himself he will discover that he never really came to a true decision in his life!

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The previous eight chapters before this one dealt with analyzing our minds, and most people will not find them practical because these are lofty matters. But this chapter, which has dealt with *Da'as d'havdalah*, differentiating between information and taking apart details – is very practical for everyone. We have explained here that a person must be aware of all the details in whatever he encounters.

The power of *Da'as d'havdalah* applies both to learning a *sugya* as well in our practical, daily life. Many times a person regrets what he did and complains afterwards, "I should've known..." But if a person uses *Da'as d'havdalah*, he is able to check himself and see what his motivations are, and with this he will eventually see success in his life.



### 3.8 | *Visual Desires – Part 2*<sup>233</sup>

#### *Summary of the Previous Chapter*

We will continue, with the help of Hashem, our discussion on the topic of desires, which stem from the element of water [in the soul]. Previously, we began to discuss visual desires, which stem from the **fire**-of-earth-of-water.

One way to fix the problem of visual desires, which we explained in the previous chapter, is to get used to concentrated, visual focus. By focusing on a point in what you are looking at, you train your eyes to become more focused and not to wander around unrestrained.

#### *The Second Solution: Closing The Eyes*

Now we will present a second solution to visual desires.

We have five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Sight is unique from all the senses in that we have eyelids which can cover over our eyes and prevent us from seeing something in the first place. By contrast, the other senses, while of course we are able to stop them from working, do not come naturally equipped with anything to stop them from functioning. If we accidentally heard something, tasted something, touched something, or smelled something, there was nothing we could have done to prevent this.

Of course, we can close our ears, mouth and nose, and we can prevent ourselves from coming into physical contact with something, but by the time we close off any of these senses, we've already sensed it. Our senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch do not come naturally equipped with anything to stop them from functioning. Our eyes are unique in that we can shut them with our eyelids, and in this way we can prevent ourselves initially from seeing something in the first place.

In addition, our eyelids close on their own when we go to sleep. Hashem created our eyes with two simultaneous functions – we can see with them, and in addition, Hashem set our eyes to a kind of default mode in which they close. But the fact that our eyes close is not “another” function of our eyes; it is rather an ability that is already built-in with our eyes.

Sight and non-sight are the two alternating abilities of our eyes, but they are not two separate powers – rather, they are to be understood as two sides of the same ability. In our eyes, we can see, and we can always close them and not see; these are the two alternating abilities of our eyes.

The depth of this is as follows. Sight is really the root of our senses. When a person sees, he is led to one thing after another. Therefore, closing the eyes cannot be defined merely as not seeing; that's

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<sup>233</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-water-008-visual-desires-part-2>

only a superficial understanding. Closing the eyes is the power that a person has to leave his senses and enter more inward into himself.

Of course, when a person closes his eyes, he can still smell and hear and use his other senses, but it still represents the idea of leaving the senses [because since sight is the root of all the senses, detaching from sight will essentially mean a detachment from all the senses].

### *How Closing The Eyes Prevents Visual Desires*

Let's try to understand this better.

Closing the eyes is called *atzimas einayim*; the word *atzimah* comes from the word *etzem*, "essence." In other words, closing the eyes helps a person begin to reach his essence. It can help a person reach his aspect of *etzem m'atzamai*, "bone of my bones", which is referring to one's actual essence.

When a person closes his eyes, he has the key to fixing **all** his evil desires, and in particular, it solves visual desires. Visual desires are fed from the fact that the person is being dragged from one kind of visual sight to another. But when a person connects to his essence, he is going in the opposite direction of getting dragged after sights.

In clearer language: the more a person lives and experiences his actual essence, the less he gets dragged after desires. The more a person is dragged after desires, the more he furthers himself from experiencing his true essence.

Closing the eyes is therefore not just advice that prevents you from seeing improper sights – it essentially helps you stop **all** desires, because it brings you more inward, into your actual essence.

### *Imagination*

What happens when a person closes his eyes? When a person is sleeping, imagination takes over (as the Vilna *Gaon* and others have explained). This is a more inner kind of vision. Imagination can also "drag" a person, and in fact, it can drag a person even more than his physical vision can drag him.

How? When a person is using his physical vision, his vision is limited. But with imagination, a person can go above the limits of regular vision. He can imagine he is in another country; he can imagine that he is not bound at all to any limits of this planet earth, and he can imagine things that do not exist at all.

On a deeper note, *Chazal* say that “The eyes see and the heart desires” – the depth behind this is that the “heart desires” something that the eyes saw, using the power of imagination.<sup>234</sup> The imagination takes the visual experience which the eyes saw and expands the vision, dragging the person to all kinds of places through the mind.

(*Chazal* say that if someone saw a Torah scholar commit a sin at night, he should judge him favorably and assume that the Torah scholar did *teshuvah* already the next day. The depth behind this is that a Torah scholar knows how to stop his imagination from dragging him after the imaginative thoughts, by entering into the true thoughts of the mind, *machshavah*.)

Thus, we will repeat and emphasize: visual desires awaken imagination, as we see from Chavah when she saw the fruit of the *Eitz HaDaas*, that it was “*desirable to the eyes*”. The imagination can “drag” a person when he lays sight on something, and it can drag a person more powerfully than the imagination that settles upon a person when his eyes are closed.

### ***Thought Vs. Imagination***

Thus, when a person closes his eyes, if he has a very strong ability to imagine (by most people, their imagination is stronger when they sleep than when they are awake), closing the eyes will only be detrimental, because since he has a powerful imagination when he closes the eyes, the imagination will only drag him more into his desires.

However, if a person’s imagination is weak when he closes his eyes, then closing his eyes can help him enter better into his real thoughts, his *machshavah*.

**Most** people, then they close their eyes, can enter their real thoughts and avoid imagination. Therefore, **closing the eyes can help most people** leave the allure of visual desires and instead enter into thinking mode.

However, it doesn’t totally save a person from visual desires, because this solution only covers the external part of the problem. But it definitely helps a person **temporarily** to avoid the object of the visual desire that he is faced with. So although this only helps for the external aspect of visual desires, it is definitely helpful. This is the first part of the [second] solution to fixing visual desires being presented here.

But as we mentioned, there are some people who have a powerful imagination, and when they close their eyes, their imagination gets even more dominant. For such people, closing the eyes when being faced with a visual desire will only prove detrimental and cause them to get dragged even more after the visual desire, because their strong imagination drags them into imaginative thoughts about the object of the desire.

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<sup>234</sup> Refer to ארת דמיונות / GETTING TO KNOW YOUR IMAGINATION class #01- The Structure of Imagination and class #05 - Connecting To The Unlimited, which explains how the heart expands the imaginative thoughts of the mind.

Therefore, the solution of closing the eyes [when faced with a visual desire] is a solution that is helpful for most people, and although it doesn't totally solve the problem, it is still helpful enough to save a person **temporarily** from getting dragged after a visual desire [but for those who have a very strong imagination, this solution should not be used].

### *Using The Power of Thought*

Closing the eyes helps a person get involved with thinking – not imagination, but with real thought, *machshavah*, and this takes a person out of the visual sight. When faced with a visual desire, close the eyes, and get busy with various thoughts that occupy your mind.

Even if a person thinks about various *cheshbonos* (calculations) that are on his mind – permissible kinds of thoughts, of course, and not *chas v'shalom* forbidden kinds of thoughts - it is helpful. If a person is at the level of thinking about Torah or about a matter of holiness, that is an even higher kind of thought.

Understandably, *machshavah* is a higher kind of thought than imaginative thoughts, because imaginative thoughts are jumpy and they fly around, whereas *machshavah* is a kind of thought that is more orderly.

### *Practically Working On This*

Now that we have outlined the general idea of the solution, we will explain how to work on this practically.

All of us encounter situations in which forbidden sights are in front of us. Therefore, a person should prepare for himself something he can think about that heavily involves his thoughts, which he can use to think about when he encounters a forbidden sight.

To start out with, either you can prepare for yourself an imaginative thought that will keep your mind busy when you encounter a forbidden sight, or, you can prepare a thought that helps you have deep reflection. The second method is more preferred, because *machshavah*/orderly thought is preferred over *dimayon*/imagination. Make a list of various things to think about that will keep you interested and thinking.

Write down 2 or 3 thoughts that you will use to keep you occupied when you encounter a forbidden sight. It's better to have a few thoughts prepared as opposed to one thought, because it's hard to remain focused on one thought when you're faced with a forbidden sight. So prepare for yourself a list of a few thoughts that you will use to keep yourself occupied. They should be thoughts that are orderly in their nature.

When you encounter a forbidden sight, close your eyes and remind yourself of those thoughts you prepared. The point of this method is that it trains you to enter into orderly thought when you are faced with visual desires, which helps you leave your physical vision and in its place enter inward.

If you have a hard time getting involved with deep thought, you can prepare for yourself imaginative thoughts, such as thinking about various images of beautiful scenery, or a nice picture, etc.; it is even better if it is an image of something holy.<sup>235</sup> But it should be a kind of orderly imagination, and not a bunch of random imaginative thoughts that make your mind fly around. It should be a certain **order** of imaginative thoughts.

If you are able to get involved with deeper thoughts than imagination, prepare for yourself a list of those thoughts that you will enter when you encounter an improper sight.

When you encounter the improper sight, close your eyes, and you will **consciously** enter the thoughts you prepared for yourself. The point of closing the eyes is not to act mechanically and just let your mind wander when you encounter a forbidden sight. It is to enter into a certain order of thoughts/imagination that you have previously prepared.

### ***Before ‘Shemiras Einayim’***

This is a piece of advice that can help anyone on any level, for anyone who wishes to sanctify his eyes and protect them from seeing forbidden sights. Of course, there is much more to sanctifying our eyes, here, we have only addressed the aspect of visual desires of the eyes. Sanctifying our sense of sight is a separate *avodah*, which also needs to be explained, and we did not cover it here. Here, we discussed how to rectify the **desires** of our eyes.

To summarize the solution to avoiding visual desires, there were three steps. Step One is to close the eyes. Step Two is to get busy with imaginative thoughts that you prepare for yourself. Step Three, which is the higher solution, is to get busy with deep thought, *machshavah*.

### ***The Deeper Solution: Identify The Deepest Part of Your Self and Connect To It***

Now we will present another solution, which is deeper.

As it was mentioned earlier, the point of closing the eyes is to help us enter more inward and get closer to our actual essence. Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l once stated, “Woe is to a shoemaker who doesn’t know how to use his tools.” A person cannot utilize his potential if he doesn’t recognize the main tools that he was given to work with. With regards to our discussion, we need to recognize the deepest source of vitality in ourselves. After making this clarification, become aware of it and use it.

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235 Editor’s Note: In the beginning of Mishnah Berurah (1:1), the advice of the Chofetz Chaim to deal with forbidden sights is to imagine the four-letter name of *havayah*, that if one remains focused on the name of *havayah*, he will be protected from any sin. This *avodah* explained at length by the Rav in the audio file of 02\_ *ע את נשמרתך*

First, we need to become aware of our deepest point in ourselves; without making this clarification, a person lives superficially, and he simply thinks that the deepest part of his being is that he is connected to Torah, to *tefillah*, to *chesed*, or to Hashem. It could be true that he is connected to spirituality, but that doesn't mean he is connected to the deepest point.

The deepest point in the person (besides for one's actual essence) is to be aware of the deepest current **source of vitality** that he recognizes in himself. After discovering what it is, he then needs to make use of it, as a way to avoid desires.

Thus, the purpose of closing the eyes is that it helps you return to your deepest point. This might not be your actual essence, but it is definitely brings you closer to your essence. The deepest part in yourself that you currently recognize can be called your "I", to some degree, even though it is not yet the deepest point of the "I."

Most people, understandably, are not in touch with their actual essence. In addition, most people are not even aware of the deepest part of themselves that they are currently at. If you at least become aware of your current deepest point, you are a lot closer to your essence.

When you are in touch with your aspect of individuality, you avoid getting dragged after desires. The closer I am to my individuality, the more I am aware of my unique qualities which no one else has and the more I am in touch with it – the more I am drawn away from pursuing desires.

This is not to be understood as merely "running away" from what I see into this deep place in myself; the understanding of this is not merely that you're running away into an "*ir miklat*" (city of refuge) as a way to escape visual desires. That is also true, but there is a deeper understanding to this. It is to connect myself to my deepest point, where it is almost impossible that some desire can drag me away from it.

### ***The Greatest Solution To Fix Desires***

It is impossible to say that desires cannot affect you at all when you close your eyes and you connect yourself to your deepest point. Because you are not yet reaching the essence of the soul, it is still possible to get dragged after desires. But if you connect to that deepest point, desires have much less control over you. This solves not only visual desires - it also rectifies all desires in general.

We used closing the eyes as an example of how to get in touch with the essence. Closing the eyes is the tool you can use to get to this place, therefore, one must realize that "closing the eyes" is not the goal here in this solution. It is rather because closing the eyes is the tool that helps you get closer to your essence, where desires cannot control you; the more you get in touch with the deeper parts of yourself, even if you haven't yet reached your essence, the less and less desires can control you.

The more you get in touch with the deeper parts of yourself, the more vitality you derive from your inner world, thus, the less you will be pulled after desires in the outside world. Even more so, because you are more connected to your inner world, the *less your own physical eyes will feel a desire to*

look at things, because desires have less control over you when you are more connected with your deeper self, and you can feel how this world is not your place.

Therefore, a person should get used to closing the eyes; not just when you encounter visual desires, but to get used to it even before a test comes, because it connects you the deeper parts of yourself. By getting used to closing the eyes and focusing on the deepest part of your life right now, you will discover that it not only helps you avoid visual desires, but that it helps you avoid all desires altogether.

In fact, the more you get used to closing the eyes and focusing on your deeper points, the more you will be able to focus on those deep thoughts even as you're walking in the street with eyes totally wide open. Getting used to closing the eyes teaches you how to focus on the deeper parts to your existence, thus, once you gain that perspective, you won't even have to close your eyes anymore when you walk in the streets! You can have your eyes totally open as you walk yet still not notice anything that goes on, because you are focused on thoughts that immerse you.

These can be thoughts such as an upcoming *simcha*, financial problems, *shidduchim*, health, etc. – by thinking about those things as you're closing the eyes, desires won't be able to drag you. You won't be able to notice anything on the streets when you're involved with these immersive thoughts. You might not notice anyone saying “Hello” to you either, because you are so immersed in your thoughts.

### ***In Summary***

Using this solution is the root of rectifying all your physical desires in general - and visual desires in particular.

So you need to get used to closing your eyes; don't do this mechanically, but do so to enter into **imaginative** thoughts [the first solution we gave] or **deep thoughts** you prepare for yourself [the second solution we gave]. The deeper solution is to enter the deepest part of yourself when you close the eyes.

### ***Examining The Differences Between These Solutions***

Now we will go through the differences between the solutions, and why the deepest solution is the most effective.

When a person uses imaginative thoughts as a way to avoid visual desires, while this can certainly help to avoid the improper sight, it still contains a disadvantage. Entering into imagination won't solve the person's curiosity to look. Although he is keeping himself occupied with something interesting to imagine about, deep down he wishes he could just open his eyes and get a little look.

It's more like a *hesech hadaas*, to temporarily "ignore the mind", but deep down he's still curious and he wishes he could open his eyes and look. Why? It is because imagination itself is a force that drags a person from one kind of imaginative thought to another. Therefore, imagination is not powerful enough to stop the eyes from dragging it after visual desires.

If he uses the higher solution, which is to get involved with deep *machshavah*/orderly thought, although these are deeper kinds of thoughts than the imagination, it's the same problem. Our thoughts, even when they are orderly, are still a force that 'drags' us from one thought to another.

When we learn *Gemara*, even if our thoughts are very orderly and they aren't flying around, still, our thoughts still get dragged very quickly from one point to another point. Thus, if our thoughts can get dragged, our physical eyes will also be drag them after visual desires, and we will still be very curious to open our eyes and look even as we are immersed in deep thought.

But if we use the deeper solution, which is to close our eyes and get in touch with the deeper parts of our self [your individual qualities that are unique to you], there, our eyes cannot drag us away, because the closer we are to our essence, the less power desires have over us to drag us.

This solution will give you great self-control over all desires; it is the most complete kind of advice you can use to avoid desires.

### ***'Shemiras Einayaim' In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

Of course, there is no advice that is guaranteed to save you from visual desires, because we are currently living amidst the 50<sup>th</sup> Gate of Impurity, in which improper sights surround us from every angle.

It used to be that when you were faced with an improper sight, you could turn your back to it face the opposite direction, where you could leave the temptation behind you. That was in previous times, when were in the 49<sup>th</sup> Gate of Impurity. But in today's times, when we are in the 50<sup>th</sup> Gate of Impurity, there is nowhere to turn to, because wherever you turn, another evil desire is there to face you.

The only solution is to enter inward and connect to our essence, where desires won't be able to drag us away.

There are other ways how we can develop our soul's sense of sight, in which we can form a spiritual kind of vision to protect ourselves from improper sights. There are both advantages and disadvantages to opening up the soul's spiritual vision; therefore, it is dangerous to learn about those methods.

Here in these last two chapters, we have laid down the two **root** solutions that rectify visual desires – the power of developing visual focus, as well as the power of closing the eyes (the basic part of the solution, as well as the deeper part of the solution).



### 3.8 } *Detaching – Part 4*<sup>236</sup>

#### *The Senses Stem from Thought*

Previously, we spoke about the mental abilities of the soul, which are *chochmah*, *binah* and *daas*. Below the thinking abilities of the soul are the *middos*, the character traits and emotions. However, before we progress to discuss the *middos* and emotions (and how to detach from them), there is another part of the mind which we need to discuss.

Besides for the mental abilities of *chochmah*, *binah*, and *daas*, there are more details that are part of our mind: the five senses [sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste]. This is a vast subject, and we will only cover it a little bit of it.

The Vilna *Gaon*<sup>237</sup> explains about the senses at length when he lists the seventy forces in the soul. These include the senses of seeing, hearing, smell, and speech. These four senses stem from the mind, and two more senses branch out of the original four: touch and taste.

Therefore, when we learn about how to detach from the mind, besides for knowing how to detach from our thinking abilities, we also need to learn how to detach from the senses.

#### *Detaching from the Sense of Sight*

The sense of sight consists of two kinds of sight. In sight, a person can use his intellect to see information through his mind. There is also a lower kind of sight, in which a person sees something through his physical eyes, and this information gets sent to the eyes.

The *Ramban* writes that one's eyes should be pointed downward, but that the heart should be pointed toward the heavens. We also find this in the case of Rebbi, who didn't look out of his four cubits. When a person looks at the ground and he doesn't look upward, what he sees is experienced through his eyes.

To give a general description of this, the Vilna *Gaon* lists two kinds of sight. One kind of sight is a kind of sight which can be felt. Another kind of sight is a lower, physical kind of sense, which is part of twelve general senses.

We can 'wear' and 'remove' our sight at times. We 'wear' our sight through simply seeing, and we can 'remove' it when we detach from looking at things. This can be done by closing the eyes.

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<sup>236</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-inner-world-010-detaching-senses-part-4>

<sup>237</sup> *Yeshayahu* 11:1

Closing the eyes is actually a kind of sense. *Chazal* refer to this as “sleep”. There are two abilities in our eyes – our ability to see, and our ability to sleep. When we see, we are detaching from our sleep, and when we sleep, we are detaching from our vision.

Closing the eyes has two uses. One use of it is when we close our eyes to avoid seeing something forbidden to look at. There is a higher kind of closing the eyes, and that is when a person closes his eyes simply for the sake of not seeing something.

Thus, we detach from sight by closing the eyes, and we detach from closing the eyes by seeing regularly. It is not simply that we are detaching from either kind of sight. It is that when one does this, he is really returning his sense of sight to its root, which is the thinking mind.

When a person gets used to closing his eyes, he will find that his power of thought has become sharper. Why? Simply speaking, it is because he has learned how to concentrate. Before he learned how to concentrate, his soul was scattered (he had “*pizur hanefesh*”), and now that he’s not scatterbrained anymore, he can think better.

But there is a deeper reason to why his thinking improves. It is because by detaching from vision, he has returned the sense of vision to its root, which is the mind.

When a person sees something and focuses on it, he narrows his vision toward it and he can see it better. This is because by taking away some of his vision, his thinking gets sharpened, and now he can see even clearer.

### ***Detaching from the Sense of Hearing***

The sense of hearing is also rooted in the mind. There is also a second sense of hearing that is more physical, as the Vilna *Gaon* said regarding sight.

When a person detaches from his hearing, his thinking improves as well, in the same way that detaching from sight helps one’s thinking improve. The simple understanding of this is that by closing your ears from what you are hearing, you can concentrate better. But the deeper understanding of it is that by closing your ears from hearing, your sense of hearing returns to its root, which is the mind, and that is why you are able to think better now.

### ***Detaching from the Sense of Smell***

The sense of smell is also rooted in the mind. Our nose can smell, and it also can have *charon af* (“anger of the nose”). There is a kind of anger in which a person is seething through his nostrils; this kind of anger is called *charon af*, anger of the nose; it is also known as *roigez* (wrath).

There is a discussion for itself how to remove anger, and now is not the time we will discuss it; hopefully we will return to discussing it (generally speaking, there are two solutions to anger. One solution is by revealing *emunah*, and the other solution is by revealing our true *ratzon*).

To detach from our sense of smell, we can close our nostrils and instead breathe through the mouth.

This connects us to our thinking, in the same idea as we mentioned regarding the senses of sight and hearing: by disconnecting from smell, we return to the root of smell, which is the mind. Detaching from the other kind of “smell” – anger – is another discussion, and it is different. We will hopefully get to it later.

### ***Detaching from Speech***

Our mouth has two abilities: speech and taste.

The sense of speech also stems from the mind. The *Gemara*<sup>238</sup> says that the *chashmalim* (angels) have times in which they function and times which they don't function. From here we see that there are times in which a person uses his speech, and times in which a person detaches from speech. How can a person detach from speech? This is by closing your mouth from talking, which returns you to your thoughts.

When a person talks too much, his mind gets muddled and he can't think straight. Sometimes this happens the other way around – when a person isn't thinking enough, he just talks and talks, because he's not even thinking! By being silent, not only does he concentrate better, but his thinking has sharpened, because he has returned his speech to its root – his thoughts.

If someone is more in touch with his thoughts, he will find that it's difficult to talk so much. He will find talking to be a contradiction to thinking. At a deeper level, he will even find that when he talks, he has fallen from his level.

Thus, there is a need for us to detach sometimes from our speech. Speech needs to be “worn”, which is when we talk, and it also needs to be “removed”, which is when we are silent. When you get used to silence, you will find yourself thinking better. Silence returns your “speech” to its roots, which is the mind, and that is why silence helps you think better.

There is a deeper understanding of this, and that is that by silencing your talking, you gain speech within yourself. There is a kind of talking that a person can reach in which he talks within himself – it is written, “*I spoke with my heart.*” This ability can be reached when you silence your talking, which reveals the “talking of your heart”.

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238 *Chagigah 13a*

### ***Detaching from the Sense of Taste***

Our mouth has another ability: taste. Our mouth can be used in an outward way, which is when we speak. It can also be used in an inward way, which is when we swallow. Swallowing is essentially the ability to taste something.

Taste is rooted in *ta'anug*. This is also a deep discussion. *Ta'anug* is a deep force in the soul that is revealed through taste. When it comes to learning Torah, the *taanug* of learning Torah is revealed when a person has the *Taamei HaTorah* – when he “tastes” the “reasons” in the Torah. When you know the “reason” (*taam*) of Torah, you are essentially “tasting” it.

One way to detach from taste is in the way we described earlier, which is to remove *ta'anug* by having *ameilus*. Now we are speaking of another way to detach from taste, which is by holding back from eating something.

These are the roots of this discussion, but it is really a much bigger discussion.

### ***The Middos/Character Traits and Emotions***

Below the senses of the soul are the seven root *middos*/emotions, which are: *ahavah*/love, *yirah*/fear, *hispaarus*/pride, *netzach*/victory, *hodayah*/gratitude, *hiskashrus*/connection, and *shiflus*/lowliness.

There are three abilities in our soul which are the root motivations in a person: *emunah* (belief), *taanug* (pleasure), and *ratzon* (will). These three abilities make up the first, highest “garment” of our soul which wraps around the essence of the soul, *havayah*.

The second “garment” of the soul, which wrapped around the above grouping, consists of the three abilities of the mind: *chochmah*, *binah* and *daas*.

The third garment of the soul, which wraps around the above grouping, is the *middos*/emotions. Below the point of our *middos* and emotions are the actions we do.

### ***Feelings and Imagination***

The *middos* have two roots to them, and this is a fundamental point. If this point is not understood well, then one's *middos* will not be properly developed.

The first root of the *middos* is: the *middos* themselves, which are otherwise known as the emotions/feelings (“*hergeshim*”). There is also a more inner root of all the *middos*: the faculty of *binah*, and to be even more specific, the power of *tevunah* (imagination). Imagination and emotions thus have the same root.

### ***Fixing the Middos and Uprooting Imagination***

Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote that unless a person works on himself, he is roaming around in his imagination. The imagination is the very root of all our *middos*/emotions. If someone just works on his *middos* without working on uprooting his imagination, he will have a bunch of “branches” without a “root.”

The *middos* themselves are just the branches of the *middos*; imagination is the root behind all our *middos*. We therefore have to work on the root problem of our *middos*, which is: our imagination.

Yet, if we just work on uprooting your imagination without trying to work on the *middos* separately, then although we will have the root, we will still be missing the branches.

Therefore, the real way to work on yourself is to work on both: to work on uprooting the negative imagination, as well as to work on your individual negative *middos*. This will give you both the root and the branches at the same time.

### ***Examples***

For example, a person has the *middah* of *ahavah*/love. When it comes to actions, love manifests itself as acts of *chessed* (kindness). When it comes to our *middos*, love manifests itself as the feeling of love. If a person hasn't uprooted his imagination yet, then he is only “imagining” that he loves – he doesn't really have the *middah* of *ahavah*.

The same goes for the *middah* of *yirah* (fear). When a person is afraid of something, this either comes from a true fear, or it is just coming from an imaginary fear. If he hasn't yet uprooted his imagination, his emotion of fear is just coming from imagination, so it's not a real fear.

### ***Imagination – The Root of Evil Character***

A *middah* means “measure.” Imagination, though, comes and stretches the measurements of each *middah* and shows a person that there is “more” over here than the proper measure.

This is the root of all negative *middos*: the imagination.

When Adam wanted to sin by eating from the *etz hadaas*, what did he do? He was essentially trying to compare himself to Hashem; comparing is “*dimayon*” in Hebrew, which is the same Hebrew term for “imagination”. Here we can see the root of all evil – *dimayon*, which is imagination/comparing.

If this fundamental point isn't understood, we won't be able to work on our *middos*.

### ***Detaching From The Middos/Emotions***

In order to work on our *middos*, we need to see how each *middah* is a “*middah*” – “measured.” If we don’t see the limits of each *middah*, then our imagination is at work, and we won’t be able to work on our *middos*.

For example, let’s say a person is trying to break his habit of overeating. He accepts upon himself a certain diet so that he won’t come to indulge in eating. Simply speaking, he has begun to work on his *middah* of *taavah* (desire), but it is more than that. What he has essentially done for himself is that he has placed a limit on himself: he has recognized how a *middah* must be measured.

He becomes aware of the limits of each *middah*, and he sets up rules for himself when it comes to a *middah*. He sees how the “*middah*” is a “*middah*” – it is measured, and it has limits.

### ***Perfected Imagination***

There is a deep ability in a person to reveal how everything is really unlimited, and this is to reveal the *Ein Sof* (“Endlessness”) of Hashem in everything. This is actually done through *dimayon*. Chazal say “*hevay domeh lo*”, that you should “resemble” Hashem. When you live your life in a way that you are trying to resemble Hashem, this is the perfected kind of *dimayon*, and it is our ultimate goal. We need to use this as well in order to work on our *middos*.

### ***Working On Our Middos: A Double Task***

Imagination, though, comes and breaks the rules of the *middos* – it doesn’t reveal Hashem through them, and instead just seeks to break rules.

Working on our *middos* thus includes realizing the limits of each *middah*, as well as the goal of trying to reveal Hashem through each *middah*.

To give a general description, the first part of our *avodah* of fixing out *middos* is to fight our imagination, which seeks to break rules. The second part of our task is to learn how to use *dimayon* for good – to use our *middos* in a way that will make us “resemble” Hashem.

This is how we “detach” from negative *middos/emotions*. We “remove” our *middos/emotions* by realizing the limits of each *middah*, and we “wear” our *middos/emotions* by expanding them to become *middos* that resemble Hashem. We can also “wear” and “remove” them in the other way.

This needs more understanding, and soon we will explain it better. We have just established the roots of this discussion.

### 3.9 | *The Roots of Our Inner World*<sup>239</sup>

#### *Our Task of Self-Knowledge*

“Hashem, the Torah and the Jewish people are one<sup>240</sup>.” Just like the Torah is “more vast than the sea and wider than the earth”, so is a Jew’s soul endless, because it is part of Hashem and His Torah.

Rabbi Avraham ben David<sup>241</sup> explains to us what our task on this world (to come to “know G-d”) requires self-knowledge of our own soul. He wrote, “You must know that everything which Hashem created on His world is all inside man, for it is written, *“Let us make man in our image and in our likeness.”* All of this was so that we should see the hidden wisdom in what is revealed, for it is written, *“And from my flesh I shall see G-d.”*<sup>242</sup>

What we learn from his words is that a person was created in a heavenly image, and that in order to know the ‘heavenly’, a person has to know what’s first down here, below. (In other words, one must know the essence of the human self). That is why *“From my flesh I shall see G-d”* – when I truly recognize myself, I will be able to recognize my Creator from there.

There are many places in which our great teachers spoke about the human persona, but these teachings are usually not all gathered into any one place; their words are spread out and scattered all over our many *sefarim* that described this wisdom. There are mainly two holy *sefarim* that spoke about our soul: *Tikkunei HaZohar*<sup>243</sup>, and *Sefer Yetzirah*.<sup>244</sup>

*Tikkunei HaZohar* explains the soul, but there is no order to the information there. *Sefer Yetzirah*, however, explains the soul in a very organized fashion. Thus, the main *sefer* which we use to study our soul is *Sefer Yetzirah*; it describes both our physical and spiritual makeup and shows us how to integrate them.

Knowing about our soul is one of the most complicating matters there is, and it is like an endless ocean. Although every part of the Torah is endless, the study of our soul is a classic example of an endless study. Anyone who doesn’t think so doesn’t really know about the soul.

However, “it is not upon you to complete the task, nor are you exempt from it<sup>245</sup>.” It is our mission to clarify what our soul is, more and more; *“They go from strength to strength.”*<sup>246</sup> We must

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<sup>239</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-inner-world-002-layers-soul>

<sup>240</sup> *Zohar, parshas Achrei Mos, 73a*

<sup>241</sup> *Known as “Raavad”, 10<sup>th</sup> century Sage and Kabbalist*

<sup>242</sup> *Iyov 19: 26*

<sup>243</sup> *Attributed to the authorship of the sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai*

<sup>244</sup> *Attributed to the authorship of Avraham Avinu*

<sup>245</sup> *Avos 2: 16*

<sup>246</sup> *Tehillim 83: 4*

learn about our soul more and more until we come to recognize the Creator, which is when we realize with utter clarity that there is nothing else besides for Him, just as when He revealed Himself to us at Sinai.<sup>247</sup>

### ***The Ladder That Reaches The Heavens***

There are three things we need to recognize: our body, our soul, and our Creator.

All of Creation is like “a ladder which is placed on the earth, with its head reaching the heavens.” There are rungs in our ladder which precede the rungs on top of them. Recognizing our body is a step toward recognizing our soul (of course, this is only when a person learns about his body in a way that helps him learn about his soul), and recognizing the soul is the step toward recognizing the Creator. Learning about our soul is thus the tool to receive the light of the Creator.

We will give a parable that will help us understand the lesson. *Chazal* state that learning Torah is great, for it leads one to good deeds.<sup>248</sup> If a person wants his learning to bear results, he must plumb the *sugya*<sup>249</sup> to its depths with all its many details. After this he must connect all the details, and it is then that his learning is “great”; through this he will come to good deeds.

But if someone is learning *only* in order to come to act upon it, he doesn’t learn it well enough, and he definitely will not arrive at the good deeds.

This applies to us in that if a person only strives to recognize the Creator, but he doesn’t work on knowing himself – body and soul – he will definitely lack recognition about the Creator. This is because the person is attempting to get to the goal without going through the necessary prerequisites. To try to know the Creator without knowing the soul is like receiving a great light with nothing to contain it and hold onto it. It is like a soul without a body, and it doesn’t last.

A person should not either think that self-recognition is secondary to knowledge about the Creator. Although recognizing the Creator is the goal, it is no less important to understand ourselves. Knowing ourselves is a discussion in and of itself, which we must know.

Thus, the way to truly recognize the Creator is through recognizing yourself.

### ***To Live In “A World of Clarity”***

Another reason that we must know our soul is because it is necessary if we want to work on ourselves and fix our *middos* (character traits).

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<sup>247</sup> *Pesikta Rabbasi, chap. 20*

<sup>248</sup> *Kiddushin 40b*

<sup>249</sup> *section of Gemara (the Talmud)*



Many people want to work on themselves and improve their *middos*, but in order to really improve, a person has to understand how the soul works. We need to know how to use our soul's abilities – when to use them and when not to use them, and how much. If a person doesn't understand his soul, he will not be able to work with his soul and fix his *middos*.

In addition to this, everything we do involves many parts of our soul. The details to this are endless. Everything we do must be coming from the right place in our soul, and later we will explain how we can work on this. Thus, if a person doesn't know himself well, most of what he is doing is off-base, and he will be making many mistakes in his life that he doesn't realize.

So, a person has to know himself well for two reasons: in order to be able fix his soul and his *middos*, and in order not to act erroneously.

To give an even sharper and exact definition, a person must know himself well in order to be able to live in “a world of clarity.” This is like what one of the Sages said, “You see a clear world.”<sup>250</sup>

To give an example, there can be a person who learns a *sugya* and is able to learn all its details, and he knows as well how to think logically and even know what the Halachic conclusion is; but if he doesn't work hard at clarifying the entire *sugya*, his learning is like “*Toras Bavel*” – *Bavel*, from the world *bilbul* (confusion). He will be very confused, and his learning lacks order to it. Such learning cannot be considered a “world of clarity.”

But another kind of person learns a *sugya* and tries to work hard at it and understand it as best as he can, with the goal of giving it order and really trying to comprehend it. He learns each *sugya* in this way, **clarifying** all the information, refining it so well until it becomes like fine flour that has been sifted and grinded.

The same goes for clarifying one's soul. A person has to work hard his whole life at learning about his own soul, so that he can leave all his confusion and instead live in a clear world.

However, we do live in a very confusing world. The Hebrew word for “world” is *olam*, which has the same root of the word *he'elam*, confusion. The real meaning of life is very hidden from us; this world we live in is confusion amidst confusion. Because of this, we can never really understand our soul with absolute clarity (on this world we live in). In spite of this fact, a person's life should still be directed toward this goal, which is to live in a world of clarity as much as he possibly can.

We need to always clarify who we are, more and more, throughout our life. This is the right kind of life to live – leaving our confusion, and entering into clarity, as much as we can.

It is simple to anyone with a head, though, that it is impossible to arrive at the “word of clarity” just from various, scattered facts that we know of about the soul. If a person knows a little here and a little there about himself, we cannot say this is totally useless to do, but he is still very far from a world of clarity. If a person just amasses various details about his soul and he doesn't have the

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<sup>250</sup> *Pesachim 50a*

general rules about the soul, he's missing the main part. In order to know about the soul, a person needs a lot of knowledge – and in this, there are rules, details, roots, and their branches.

The truth is that even this is not enough. A person might have all the knowledge he needs to have about the soul, but this doesn't necessarily mean that he has *connected* all of it together. He might still have a very scattered soul even if he knows so much; he is still not clear about his soul. His whole life will still be very mixed up and confused.

By contrast, if someone lives in an inner world, and he is always seeking to clarify his soul in a way that he connects all his knowledge, all he sees is clarity. The difference between such a person and the above kind of person is miles apart.<sup>251</sup>

It is clear, then, that the more a person knows himself, the clearer his world will become, and he will act in a more guided way. His soul and his *middos* will be more fixed, and above all, his recognition of the Creator will be even clearer.

### ***Future Clarity Is Based On This World's Clarity***

In the future, all *tzaddikim* (righteous ones) will point to Hashem with their finger, saying, “Behold, this is our G-d that we hoped for His salvation; this is our G-d that we hoped for, we will rejoice and be gladdened in His salvation.”<sup>252</sup> A person can only point to Hashem if he is clear about this fact.

In the future, it will be totally clear who Hashem is, and all *tzaddikim* will be able to point to Hashem and say, “This is our G-d that we hoped for.” If anyone is to be at this level, he must acquire this recognition first in this world, before he gets to the next world.

Our whole aspiration in life should be to live a clearer kind of life, as much as possible. We don't mean to acquire many random facts, but to gain a clear world – in a way that we can point to Hashem and say, “***This is our G-d.***”

### ***1) The Knowledge About the Soul.***

In order to clarify our soul, there are several factors involved.

If a person encounters any certain subject, the first thing he must do is learn the information relevant to the subject. Everyone knows that any *sugya* of *Gemara* has in it much information, both in its general rules and in its details. The way to learn any *sugya* is only through intense in-depth study (*iyun*), each at his level. There is almost no one who honestly believes that you can get by understanding a *sugya* with just reading it and not trying to think into it.

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<sup>251</sup> See the introduction to *Derech Hashem*

<sup>252</sup> *Taanis* 31a

Trying to clarify what our soul is just as exacting. In order to know about our soul, we first have to learn its field. There is a lot of information to know – there are general rules, and there are details. The study of the human soul consists of many factors. The more we enter this field of study, the more we will see how vast it is.

If a person wants to become a *shochet* (kosher butcher), he needs to learn the laws of *shechitah* (kosher slaughter). If a person wants to put up an *Eruv*, he needs to learn the laws of the *eruv*. If a person wants to be involved with his soul, he needs to learn about what the soul is, just like any *sugya* of *Gemara*.

Thus, the first part of clarifying the soul is to learn about the structure of the soul.<sup>253</sup>

## 2) *Combining The Information.*

The second part we need in clarifying the soul is to be able to combine all the information together.

Knowledge about our inner world is called “*Maaseh Markavah*,”<sup>254</sup> by our Sages.<sup>255</sup> This is because the inner world of the soul is very complicating, and it is difficult to put it all together. Besides for this, the knowledge about the soul isn’t just random information. It is about how people are. Knowing how to combine all this information must come along with our pursuit to learn about the actual knowledge about the soul.

If a person only has a superficial outlook, life seems simple and does not look complicating. But nothing in Creation is simple. The brilliant leader and sage, the Chazon Ish, said that he doesn’t know of anything that is simple. When Hashem created the universe, He “looked into the Torah and created the world.”<sup>256</sup> Just as the Torah is vast and complicating, so is the world complicating.

The more we enter the knowledge about our soul, the more complicating we see it is. We will notice how each fact connects to another, and that even the two facts together also involve other factors. It’s endless.

The innermost point of a person’s soul, our very essence, is actually not complicating once we reach it. Our innermost point of the soul is called “*Yechidah*”, which means “*individual*”, because it is in an “individual” class of its own. But the other parts of our soul are very complicating and consist of many factors.

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<sup>253</sup> As mentioned in the beginning, the main sefarim that teach us about the soul are *Sefer Yetzirah* and *Tikkunei HaZohar*

<sup>254</sup> The story of the “Holy Chariot” (*Ezekiel 1:1*), in which the prophet Ezekiel was shown a vision of the heavens and the inner secrets of the design of Creation.

<sup>255</sup> *Chagigah 13a*

<sup>256</sup> *Zohar, Terumah 161a*

If so, besides for the necessity to learn about the soul, we also need to know how to combine all this information. This takes great wisdom and art.

### 3) *The Power of Recognition.*

The third part of clarifying our soul is by using the power of “*hakarah*” (recognition) in the soul.

Most people, even those involved in learning Torah with diligence, only make use of their power of *seichel* (intellect). Learning the Torah is indeed based upon the power of intellect.

But there is a different ability we have that is called *hakarah* – the power to “recognize.” The *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* uses this term many times. This is a power in the soul to recognize matters – it is not necessarily involving the intellect.

We find this power sometimes in the superficial use, such as the ability of a father to recognize who his first-born child is, which is called “*yakir*.”<sup>257</sup> We also find that one can recognize his lost object.<sup>258</sup>

But there is a more inner kind of recognition a person has, and this is when a person recognizes a matter from within himself. It resembles what Tamar told Yehudah, “*Recognize, now, your Creator.*”<sup>259</sup> Recognizing the Creator can only come from an ability to recognize deep matters. This is called the power of *hakarah* in the soul.

The power of *hakarah* is not so well-known to most people. There are those who know about it, but only intellectually. Usually, people only know of something using one of their five senses – seeing, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Since this is so, the take of most people on reality is not exact (to put it mildly), because we can see how most people in the world mistakenly run after their senses. But there is an ability in our soul, *hakarah*, which can see reality as it is. This is not a sensual way of understanding something.

The power of *hakarah* is not the same thing as our feelings, nor is it the same thing as the power to become inspired (“*hisorerus*”). Our feelings are separate from our power of *hakarah*. Feelings include love, hatred, happiness, or sadness. There is another ability in our soul, *hisorerus*, which is to become inspired, such as by being awakened by the *shofar* blast.

Feelings and inspiration are two different abilities in our soul. Usually, our feelings are quieter, while our power to be inspired is a louder ability. Sometimes our feelings work regardless of how we inspired we are, and sometimes we become inspired regardless of how much feelings we experience. Sometimes they are both presently active at once.

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<sup>257</sup> *Kiddushin 74a*

<sup>258</sup> *Bava Metzia 23b*

<sup>259</sup> *Rashi, to Beraishis 38: 25*

We can use these two abilities – feelings, and inspiration - to reach our innermost point of the soul, which is *hakarah*. This is because “doing actions causes our heart to be pulled after what we do”, leading us to the goal. The power of *hakarah* is essentially the inside layer of our feelings and inspiration. Yet, our inner work here is not based on either feelings or inspiration alone. It is based on a power of recognition that comes directly from the soul itself; it is the ability to recognize heart matters.

To our chagrin, most people live a superficial kind of life. Even those who have a desire to live a more inner kind of life are trying to do so with a superficial outlook. They don't have the inner tools to get there. This is because usually, people do not recognize what the inner world is, and they do not understand that you can't use their superficial understanding of the physical world if you want to understand the inner world.

We can compare this to someone who just converted to Judaism, who hasn't yet learned the laws of keeping kosher. He doesn't know anything about the concepts of meat and milk or of damaged animals that are forbidden to eat. He thinks he can keep using the same kitchen he is used to.

Knowing the inner world is really the power of *hakarah*. The power of *hakarah* is not revealed to someone who lives a superficial kind of life, nor is it revealed to someone who only lives in his feelings and inspiration. The world of *hakarah* is found in the innermost depths of a person's heart, and it is revealed only to someone who lives it.

If someone doesn't understand this fundamental, he tries to enter the inner world using his superficial abilities. This is like *shaatnez* – a forbidden mixture. You can't mix the inner world with the outer world.

The more a person enters his inner mission, the more he refines his inner tools. This inner tool is *hakarah*.

Thus, our job here is to realize that we have a power of *hakarah*, and to live in a way that our whole life will be based on the ability to recognize heart matters.

#### ***4) Connecting The Knowledge To Our Heart***

Until now we have said three parts we need to recognize our soul: the knowledge about the structure of the soul, the ability to combine and connect all this information, and the ability to recognize realities.

There is a fourth part we need, and that is to combine all our knowledge in our mind with what we recognize from our soul.

Before, we explained that the knowledge about the soul is vast, and that we must also connect all the information. This is still using our intellect to connect all the information. Now we are speaking of a different ability to combine information, and this is the ability to combine two different components of our soul: our mind together with our power of inner recognition.

To illustrate this concept, when a query is sent to a Rov, the Rov has to check out all the details: What is this issue made up of? Sometimes the issue involves only one section of *Shulchan Aruch*, but sometimes the issue involves all four sections of *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim, Yoreh Deah, Even HaEzer*, and *Choshen Mishpat*.

Sometimes a person has to only make use of his intellect, and sometimes he must only use his heart recognition. But in order to enter our inner mission, we must combine both of these abilities. We need to see our mind's knowledge from our soul's recognition; if we know about something in our mind, we should be able to recognize it through our soul as well.

Of course, we must mention that we are referring to knowledge that is true, not imaginary thoughts, which are from a world of falsehood. (There is a lot of information which does not come from the Torah, but from the hearts and fantasies of people who are not connected to Torah...) After this, we must internalize this information in our heart, and clarify to ourselves if our hearts are in line with our mind. We must make sure that this knowledge is coming from the Torah and not from other sources, which have no basis.

This is our mission of internalization. We need to get our mind's knowledge into our heart – as it is written, “*My heart has seen much wisdom.*”

This ability is also known as *da'as d'kedushah* (holy knowledge), and the Baal Shem Tov calls it *da'as hamechaberes* (knowledge that connects). Moshe Rabbeinu personified *da'as*; he brought the Torah into the souls of the Jewish people. *Da'as* connects the intellect with the heart.

When a person only uses his intellect, he involves himself with knowledge that is above his level. If what he knows isn't connected to his heart, then he has no “I”, and he isn't living his self. His life will be full of contradictions between what he knows in his mind with what he knows in his heart, and he will not have clarity in his life.

But if someone does connect the intellect with the heart, all the parts of his soul become connected and complete each other. Such a person has the world of clarity, and he actually lives through his true self.

Such a person will be opened up to all wisdom, and he will be able to truly connect to the Torah. If someone doesn't make the connection between his intellect and heart, he has no real understanding of what it says in the Torah. This is because the Torah is called “wisdom of the heart”, and it is also written, “*My heart has seen much wisdom.*”

“*Say to wisdom, You are my sister.*” If you are clear in the matter as if it is your sister (who is prohibited) to you, you may say it, and if not, do not say it.”<sup>260</sup> When a person connects his mind's knowledge to his heart, he connects to his root, and the Torah he learns will come from this same root – the root of his soul.

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<sup>260</sup> *Sanhedrin 7b*

Therefore, a person has to work very hard at this and connect the level of his heart to be on the level of his mind's knowledge, if he is to live in a clear, inner world.

### **5) Recognizing Layer Within Layer.**

Another part we need in this is the ability to recognize “layers” in the soul, and the ability to cross over from one layer to another layer in the soul.

Layer in Hebrew is known as “*rovad*”; we find this in the Torah, in the word “*marvadim*”, which is referring to the garments of the Kohen Gadol<sup>261</sup>. We also find that it says “The fourth *rovad* of the Courtyard”,<sup>262</sup> and “*rovadim* of stone.”<sup>263</sup>

All of Creation is a layer upon layer. The soul of a person is also layer within layer.

Before we explained that there are feelings and inspiration in the soul, which are two distinct abilities. Now we can understand that they are two different layers in the soul; in these layers, there is layer within layer, and anyone can relate to this.

Sometimes our feelings and our inspiration is strong, and sometimes it is weak. This is not simply because our feelings or inspiration become weakened, but because our soul is only revealed superficially. When we have only revealed the outer, superficial layers of our soul, then our feelings or inspiration can grow weak. The more inner layers of our soul we uncover, the stronger our feelings and inspiration become.

When a person merits to live with the ability of *hakarah*, first of all, he reveals a whole new layer in the soul – the layer of *hakarah*/recognition. Besides for this, the very fact that he has entered this world of recognition opens up his heart and soul more. There are rooms in the heart, “*chadrei halev*”.<sup>264</sup>

When a person knows about the layers of his soul through this power of recognition, he reveals an entire world that has in it layer within layer, room within room. Each layer in the soul contains a different kind of recognition. The more inward one enters these layers, the more of an inner recognition the person develops, and he reveals a totally new world.

There are also layers within our feelings and our inspiration. But there is a fundamental difference between one who just lives with feeling and inspiration alone, to one who lives with the deeper power, inner recognition. A person who only knows of feelings or inspiration only sees soul layers as “layers”, and he doesn't see how they are all unified. He sees a layer in the soul, but he doesn't see what it has to do with a different layer in the soul.

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<sup>261</sup> *Midrash Tanchuma, Beraishis*

<sup>262</sup> *Yoma 4: 3*

<sup>263</sup> *Tamid 1:1*

<sup>264</sup> *Mishlei 24: 4*

But someone who lives with inner recognition sees all the layers in the soul as unified. His world of inner recognition is all one reality; it's all one piece. The more of an inner recognition he acquires, the more he unifies the layers. Instead of seeing contradictions in his soul, he sees how they all connect and complete each other.

Not only that, but he will even be able to see how the layers of feelings and inspiration connect. For example, if a person only lives with his feelings, then he thinks that he loves many things, and he doesn't see how all the things he loves connects. When he has a strong love for something, he doesn't identify it as the same love as his normal ability to love; he just thinks that it's perhaps a different kind of love than anything else he loves. But if someone has the ability of inner recognition, he sees that he only has one power to love, and that this same ability to love just has many layers to it.<sup>265</sup>

When a person dies, he leaves this physical world and goes to the World To Come. In this world as well we can leave the world and enter into a different world! This is when we leave one room in our soul and enter more inward to a deeper room in our soul.

For one to cross from one room of his heart to another room, he has to have revealed his ability to recognize the "layers" of the soul. The more inward one enters into the layers of the soul, the more of a recognition one has from his soul for these matters.

Our task is thus to reveal these layers, using our power of inner recognition. We must realize that each layer has a different recognition than the one before it, and we need to be able to leave one layer and enter into another layer. We then have to let that recognition carry over into our actual life.

We must always strive to enter even more inward, until we finally reach the innermost point – the essence of our soul itself, which is really connected to the Creator.

### ***The Problem***

We have explained what we need to do in order to work on clarifying what our soul is, but there is something that greatly holds us back from doing so: the very fact that we are living on this physical world.

Ever since the sin of Adam, this world has never been a place to be at peace. Yaakov Avinu wanted to be at peace, but this hope was shattered right away with the sale of his beloved son Yosef. When we received the Torah at Har Sinai, we touched the level of Adam before the sin, and we saw the "world of clarity" described before. But then our lofty level once again fell after the sin with the Golden Calf.

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<sup>265</sup> *What the author might mean is that feelings and inspiration are deemed to be "separate", while inner recognition is something that "unifies".*



As the generations pass, we are further away from our state of perfection, and life only becomes crazier. “Each day is more cursed than the day before it, for it is written, *“In the morning, people will say, “When will it be night already?”, and at night, people will say, “When will it be day already?”*”<sup>266</sup>

Our generation is especially bogged down and confused, and we are all like people drowning in a storm at sea. If a person is immersed in this physical world, he is disoriented from what he sees and hears in his life. Someone who desires to be close to Hashem makes some time every day to make a self-accounting, and this is good and praiseworthy.

But, we must understand something very well. The inner world and the physical world we live in cannot coexist. The inner world is pure and clear; it is a world of clear recognition. But the world which we are found in is a mixture of good and evil, and most of it is evil.

Even our hearts on this world are mixed up. Any second of connection to this world makes a mark that isn't so easily forgotten. Anyone who thinks about it will find that there at least 2,000 bad marks that get left on a person each day just from being connected to this world.

When a person is very busy in worldly matters, he has no inner peace. When he tries to make a self-accounting, he hits a metal wall and finds that he can't enter the inner world of the soul. He is so bogged down and confused. Even when he tries to succeed in freeing himself from this, the marks are still left on him, and this doesn't let him concentrate on working with his soul.

*“And Yaakov left Beer Sheva, and he went towards Charan.”* When a person is still on this outside world and never enters inward, he is found in the *“charon”* – anger – of this world. It's not possible to live in the physical world and try to enter inward. Even if someone does attain some peace of mind, the soul is still confined to the physical world, for someone who mainly considers his life to be in the physical. Such a person will not be able to understand his soul, because his whole viewpoint is a physical viewpoint that is superficial.

In order to enter our inner mission here, a person has to disconnect from the physical world. The more we disconnect, the more we can enter the inner world.

Thus, there must be some disconnection from physicality if we are to have any hope of entering inward to our soul. Yes, we still need to be involved in this physical world, but only in what is absolutely necessary for us to take care of, and not more than that.

The main part of our disconnection here has to be an inner one; meaning, we should feel like we are just guests on this world that are merely passing through. We must enter deep into our soul, and close the door to all winds of impurity that blow on us from all directions. We need to get used to living a life of clarity.

Only if a person disconnects from this physical world can he receive the inner tools he will need to work with. He will then be able to reveal a new “I” which he never knew of until now, and he will live in an inner world that is full of clarity.

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<sup>266</sup> *Sotah 49a*

### *In Conclusion*

Anyone who thinks about these words will be able to appreciate the words of Reb Yisrael Salanter, who said that it's harder to break one bad *middah* than to finish all of *Shas*. People look for all kinds of practical advice to be able to fix themselves. *Baruch Hashem*, people are searching for advice. But in order to even reach even one *middah* with our soul, we need a lot of tools and introductions to get there. It is surely much harder to fix a bad *middah*. This doesn't only apply to trying to fix our *middos*, but it applies to all aspects of serving the Creator.

If a person isn't aware of this, he might try many years to enter the inner work of serving the Creator, yet he won't know why he isn't succeeding.

It is definitely possible for one to be directed toward the right path with the help of Hashem, when one acts very earnestly and is dedicated to acting for the sake of Heaven. But besides for this path (which is only possible for rare individuals), the way to enter the "inner world" is normally very obscure. That is why it is called the "inner" world – it is internal, and it is found only in the innermost depths of a person's soul.

To quickly review the fundamentals we will need: knowledge about the soul, combining the facts together, the power of inner recognition, fusing our intellect with our heart, recognizing layers of the soul, disconnecting from the physical world and being able to enter an inner, clear world; these are the basics and roots which are absolutely necessary for our inner work here.

Obviously, it is impossible to describe all that we have to do in just these few short lines. In the coming chapters, these concepts will hopefully gain greater clarity, with the help of Hashem.

May the Creator to merit us to reflect upon these matters and continue further.

### 3.9 | *Conceptualization Vs. Visualization*<sup>267</sup>

#### *Every Force in Creation Is Found In The Soul*

Let us continue to discuss the additional points about our element of earth.

We will first give a short introduction: Although we have brought the words of Rav Chaim Vital that the negative traits which result from earth are laziness and sadness (sadness is the root, while laziness is its branch), those are just the *middos* that come from our earth. Our four elements of the soul contain more than just *middos*; they contain every force in Creation. There's nothing in Creation that you can't find manifested in one of the four elements of the soul.

Since all of Creation is found in our soul, then understandably, there are endless details to the soul. Yet, although the details are endless, we will still try to understand the forces in Creation that are found in our element of earth in the soul.

We are not coming here to explain this as a kind of science. We are discussing “earth”, but we are not studying physical earth; we are studying the earth of the soul.

We will try as much as Hashem allows us to in this, and to probe into the understanding of some of the forces found in our element of earth. We will try to see how a certain matter manifests in our soul, what damages it can cause when left untreated, and then how to fix it.

Let us continue to discuss more about *atzvus*, which is what we are currently learning about – and with the help of Hashem, we will learn about the various matters that branch out from this concept.

#### *Earth Makes Formations*

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, the word *atzvus* has many meanings. It can mean simply sadness, or it can mean to become constricted. It can also mean “to form”, as we find in the possuk, “Your hands fashioned (“*atzvuni*”) and made me.”<sup>268</sup>

Therefore, there is a connection between sadness and forming things, since both of these concepts are usages of the word “*atzvus*.” Sadness can therefore “form” things, as formation is a concept that branches out of sadness. Let us try to understand what this power of “formation” is and the connection that it bears to *atzvus*/sadness.

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<sup>267</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/understanding-your-middos-05-conceptualization-vs-visualization>

<sup>268</sup> *Iyov 10:8*

In the four elements, which of them is used to form things? Fire cannot form things. Although fire sometimes can have a shape to it, it's constantly changing its form, so it has no permanent form. Wind is air, so it definitely has no form. Water naturally does not have a form; you can put it in a cup and contain it, but water by itself has no form to itself.

Only the element of earth has a form to it. Hashem used earth to create from it the mountains, hills, and valleys. So earth is the element which is used to make formations. If so, we can understand that our power to make formations comes from our element of earth. Man was fashioned from earth, and thus our entire power to make formations comes from our element of earth.

Now, if someone has a weak amount of earth in his soul, then his power to make formations will also be weak. If someone has a strong amount of earth in himself, he will have a stronger ability to “form” things.

The Arizal says that originally, all souls were contained in Adam's soul, and then they split up into Kayin and Hevel. Hevel was a shepherd – someone who deals with animals - hinting to the animalistic aspect of a person. Kayin, however, was a farmer. He dealt more with earth, hinting to the ability in a person to fashion and forms things. Therefore, if someone's soul is rooted in Kayin, he has more of an ability to form things, a nature of earth.

### ***Forming Things Through Our Actions, Thoughts, and Fantasies***

There are three kinds of formations we can do: in action, in thought, and through fantasizing.

The first kind of forming we find is by Kayin, the first farmer – who was able to fashion things out of the ground. This is physical formation – to simply fashion an item out of the natural materials found in the ground.

There is a spiritual kind of formation, and this is the ability in a person to be able to form things with his thoughts. This is called *tzurasa d'shmaatsa* (body of the discussion) by our *Chazal*; it is when a person develops a structured way to understand things.

A third kind of formation is the ability in a person to imagine things. Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote that “a person freely roams around in his imagination”, and the reason for this is because “a man is entirely made up of fantasies”, as one of our Rabbis write. Man is *adam* in Hebrew, which comes from the word *dimayon*, imagination; because since a person fantasizes a lot, there is a tendency in a person to form things through the imagination.

So these are the three ways how we can form things: 1) Physical, material formations. 2) Forming something through our thoughts. 3) Forming something through our imagination.

First let us think into what it means to “form” something, and then we can understand what these three different abilities are.

### ***Before The Sin and After the Sin – How We Perceive Our Sins***

There are two words in the Torah which can mean to “form”. One word is *tzurah*, as we find in the possuk, “*And Hashem fashioned man out of the dirt of the earth.*” Another word for formation is *itzuv*, from the words *atzvus*, as we find in the possuk, “*You fashioned and made me.*”

These are two different kinds of formations – *itzuv*, and *tziyur*. What is the difference between them?

*Itzuv* is to make a formation out of its original material. *Tzurah* is to take something from outside the material and to combine it together, reshaping it with the added material. An example of *tzurah* is to take a shape and carve it into the material. There is a huge difference between these two kinds of formation – and thus our soul has two totally different ways on how to form things, which we will explain.

After Adam sinned, he was cursed with, “*Earth you are, and to earth you shall return.*” What was the first part of the curse, “*Earth you are*”? If the curse to mankind was that there would now be death, then the second part of the curse, “*To earth you shall return*”, makes sense. But what is the first part of the curse – “*Earth you are*”? Adam was already earth, even before he sinned, because he was fashioned out of earth. So why he is being cursed now with “*Earth you are*”?

As we are about to explain, the depth of the curse was really this fact, that “*earth you are*”.

Why are we called “earth”? True, our body was made from earth, but we have a soul as well. We are made up of body and soul; so why are we as people defined as “earth”?

The answer is: the first sin made man define himself as earth! The fact that man perceives himself as earth is all a result of the sin. Before the sin, man was not called “*earth you are*”, because he instead perceived himself as the G-dly spirit that resided within him. Before the sin, man was defined by the fact that he is *ruach memalelah*, a “social” creature. That was the soul which was breathed into him – the ability to articulate his speech, which differentiates man from an animal. After the sin, however, man is now defined as “*earth you are*” – in other words, because of the sin, our perception of how we view ourselves changed.

This is the depth of the difference between before the sin with after the sin. Before the sin, man would identify himself as a pure soul, and thus man was defined as a soul, a G-dly spirit. He realized that his body was just a garment on top of his true self. After the sin, man’s self-esteem got lowered, and now he views himself initially as “*earth you are.*”

What results from all of this is that since after the sin we identify ourselves as earth, and earth has in it the power to make formations, then ever since the first sin, we have identified our power to make formations as our essence, and not merely as a garment covering over our true self.

Before the sin, a person viewed the element of earth as simply a container for his other three elements of fire, water and wind. He viewed earth as his garment, and thus he viewed his power to make formations as just a garment, not as his essence. After the sin, however, a person thinks that his power to make formations is his essence.

Now we can really understand the difference between *tziyur* and *itzuv*. The possuk uses the word “*tziyur*” in describing how Hashem fashioned man out of earth. This shows us that before the sin, man’s power to make formations is viewed as just a garment of himself, but not as his essence. After the sin, however, Adam was cursed with *etzev*/pain, which is a usage of the word *itzuv*. *Itzuv* is the ability to make formations which came about after sin – in which a person identifies his essence as “someone who can make formations.”

So when we view our ability to make formations as just a garment over ourselves – but we are aware that it’s only an ability we have, and that it does not define who we are – then such formation is called *tzurah*. However, if we think that we are defined by our power to make formations, then this is called *itzuv* – the viewpoint of after the sin.

When a person thinks that his essence is a formation from the ground, and that his ability to make formations defines who he is – this is *itzuv*, the lower view. If we adapt the higher attitude, however, which is *tzurah*, then we realize that although we were fashioned from the earth, we are really above the earth; that there is more to us than just being able to be creative and form things.

### ***The Difference Between Hashem’s Creations and Human Creations***

*Chazal* state, “Come and see how the trait of the Holy Blessed One is not like the trait of a human. A human fashions an image on a wall and he cannot breathe into it a spirit of life, insides and intestines; the Holy Blessed One is not like this, for He can fashion images within images and breathe into them a spirit of life. This is what Channah said, “*There is no ‘rock’ like Hashem*” – there is no “artist” like Hashem.”<sup>269</sup>

What is the depth to this, that Hashem can fashion images and breathe into them a spirit of life? Besides for the simple meaning of this, which is true, we can understand these words of *Chazal* with greater clarity, according to the concept we have explained earlier. A human being can fashion images, but the images are never made from the actual essence of the material. By contrast, Hashem took the dirt and made man from it – the essence of man’s life comes from the spirit of life which Hashem breathed into the person, while the physical material that man is made out of is not his essence, but rather a garment covering over his essence.

That is the difference. Human beings can make all kinds of things from the earth, but they are essentially creations made out of earth and nothing more. But when Hashem makes something, the material He uses to make isn’t the essence of what He is making, but rather, the spirit of life He breathes into it is the actual essence of His creation. To illustrate this concept, there was a miracle that the Aron was able to lift itself on its own; the spirit of life breathed into it from Hashem was enabling the Aron to life itself. This is an example of the perfected kind of *tzurah*, [which only Hashem can make].

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269 *Berachos 10a*

When a *tzurah*/formation does not contain in it a breath of life from Hashem, it remains merely as a carving, which is *itzuv*, from the word *itzavon*, sadness. *Tzurah* also comes from the word *tzarah*, “pain” – and this hints to how *tzurah* and *itzuv* are both the same idea. The kind of *tzurah* that is “*tzarah*” – a “sad” kind of formation – reflects the meaning of “*For you are earth, and to earth you shall return.*”

The body of every person disintegrates in the grave (unless he is someone who became extremely holy in his lifetime). His *tzurah* vanishes, but when a person is resurrected by the future *techiyas hameisim* (revival of the dead), he attains a new *tzurah*. Why does a person’s original *tzurah* have to vanish in the first place? It is because a person’s original *tzurah* does not represent the true kind of *tzurah*, for man is fashioned out of the earth, which represents sadness. But when the original *tzurah* of man vanishes in the grave, a person sees that his *tzurah* was not his essence, and it was merely a garment – a kind of *itzuv*, a mere formation. That is exactly how the *tzurah* of man gets rectified.

*Tzaddikim* (righteous individuals), however, merited in their lifetime to realize what their true *tzurah* is, and that their physical body is just a garment over their true essence – and therefore, the body of the righteous individual does not disintegrate in the grave.

### ***The Power of Tziyur/Imagination***

How does a person use the power of *tzurah* for holiness, and how it is used detrimentally? Here we come to a very subtle point in the soul. We will try to explain it.

There are two ways how we conceptualize something. When we are informed that someone got into an accident and his car smashed into a building, what are we thinking as we hear this story? Do we process it as intellectual information, or do we picture the story in our heads, visualizing the car as it smashes into the wall?

As children, whenever we heard a story about a Torah personality, we naturally pictured them in the stories. A child is so used to picturing things that when he is taught about Hashem, there is a tendency to try to picture Hashem, *chas v’shalom*. It is forbidden to try to give a picture to Hashem – as it is written, “*To whom can you compare Me, to that I should be an equal with?*”<sup>270</sup>; yet people have this tendency, since they are young, to try to picture Hashem.

From where does this nature come from? It comes from the nature of earth in the soul. Because earth is the source of giving picture to things, we tend to give a mental picture to everything that we hear about. We tend to visualize a concept as soon as we hear about it, immediately picturing it in our heads.

As an example of what we mean, if someone hears about a building on his street, he doesn’t have to picture it, because he already recognizes it. Even if he has never actual seen the building but only in a picture, when he is told about the building, he doesn’t have to picture it, because he already

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270 *Yesayahu* 4:25

knows in his head about this building. But when someone is being described a building that he has never seen or hears about before, and it's the first time he is hearing about this building, how does he process the information? He will immediately imagine it. This is called "*dimayon*", imagination. People are not ready to just conceptualize something unless they can visualize it in their head – this is the power of imagination.

People tend to imagine because by nature, we tend to give "*tzurah*" to everything we hear about. When we don't know what the accurate *tzurah* of something is, we imagine how it looks, but either way, we keep giving "*tzurah*" to everything in our heads.

This power in human beings contains a gain and a drawback. The gain of imagination is that it helps us understand something better. We can see this from the fact that we are supposed to understand a *moshol* (parable) and its *nimshal* (lesson); hearing the *moshol* helps us understand the *nimshal* that we are supposed to take out of the story (Of course, there is always a possibility that a person will get carried away with his imagination and misunderstand the *moshol*, which will lead him to take out the wrong *nimshal*). The prophets as well were able to give proper *tzurah* in their heads to the information being poured down upon them from Hashem. They knew how to use the power of *tzurah* in the proper way. This is how we see *tzurah* being used constructively.

But there is a drawback to using *tzurah*. Besides for the problem we mentioned earlier in using *tzurah* – which is that a person will not understand the *moshol* properly and thus take out the wrong lesson from it – there is another problem. Even if a person does know how to figure out the *nimshal* from a *moshol*, because he has a good imagination, the problem is that by getting used to *tzurah* too much, the *tzurah* will become "*tzarah*", "pain." We will explain what this means.

The word *tzarah* comes from the word *tzar*, which means "narrow." In other words, when a person is picturing something, he is apt to perceive only a narrowed perception of the concept. When a person imagines something, the imagination is essentially narrowing the information and limiting it to the bounds of the imagination. The person will then only receive a limited perception of the concept, because he has tried to understand it through imagination. Our imagination is, after all, limited to what we can imagine.

When we use imagination, we try to give something a mental kind of picture, but these images are all somehow lodged in our head from something else we have seen. We try to make the new picture somehow fit a previous picture in our heads, while in reality, it doesn't necessarily fit that picture.

Another drawback to imagination is that we are not able to imagine something which we aren't able to identify with. When we imagine things, we are always using the giant videotape that has developed in our mind throughout our entire life, and we are attempting (erroneously) to use some previous image lodged in our heads in order to be able to understand anything we come across. If our imagination isn't able to use the full version of a previous mental image, it will break up a previous image and use some parts of it to once again try to perceive new information we come across, and form a new picture, based on the old information.



Imagination is thus using our power of *tziyur*. Of course, our imagination certainly changes the original *tzurah* of a concept, but it is essentially a distortion and exaggeration of the same old information. Our imagination can exaggerate information in our heads, but it cannot really come up with anything new. It will always fall back on some previous image in the mind and use that to understand something.

Our imagination is thus limited, and it cannot imagine beyond what it can picture. It will not accept any information that it cannot picture. This is the drawback of imagination – it is a limited kind of perception, because it is always a narrow-minded kind of understanding.

### ***True Conceptualization***

Now we can understand the depths to the words of our Sages we brought earlier, which is that Hashem fashions images and breathes life into them, while humans, by contrast, cannot.

Because we have a breath of life from Hashem that was breathed into us, we are able to transcend the lower kind of *tziyur* and attain a true kind of *tziyur*. The higher kind of *tziyur* which we can use is not the regular kind of mental picturing which we just addressed. What is it, and how does it differ from regular imagination?

We have mentioned earlier that there are three kinds of *tzurah*: to simply make a physical object; to imagine; and to intellectualize.

We are able to use *tzurah* even without imagination: we can intellectualize the information, without picturing it. This is the meaning of “*tzurah d’shmaatsa*” which we mentioned earlier. When a person is learning in the *Gemara* about an ox goring a cow, he will tend to imagine the scenario, and if he has a vivid kind of imagination, he will imagine all the details going on. He will find that his knowledge of the *Gemara*’s discussion here has become clearer. In fact, many people who have a vivid kind of imagination possess a quality in that they see all the details going on, and therefore they gain greater clarity in knowing what the *Halacha* is; most people who are like this often aspire to become a *poisek* (Halachic authority). Vivid imagination can help a person know what’s really going on in what he learns in *Gemara*; that’s an obvious gain.

But that’s only one side of the coin. The drawback here is that if a person uses imagination a lot in trying to understand the *Gemara*, his understanding gets limited to what he’s imagining. In reality, the laws of the ox goring the cow are not limited to an ox and a cow. They apply to many more situations which do not involve an ox and a cow.

A classic example of this concept is *ben sorer u’moreh* (the rebellious child).<sup>271</sup> The *Gemara* devotes an entire lengthy chapter to delve into the laws of *ben sorer u’moreh*, yet, the Sages revealed that *ben sorer u’moreh* never happened, and it never will happen. If so, the Sages ask, why do we learn about *ben sorer u’moreh*? It is so that we should get reward for learning about it. In this, the Sages revealed

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271 See Tractate Sanhedrin, Chapter Eight

to us a certain fundamental concept: Even if something isn't going to happen in the practical sense, there is still what to gain from when we just learn about it on the purely intellectual level.

Of course, the Sages also said that “Learning Torah is great, for it brings one to proper deeds”<sup>272</sup>, and this implies that we are supposed our Torah learning practical in our lives. This is true, but the Sages revealed to us through *ben sorer u'moreh* that we contain as well a deep power in our soul: to gain an intellectual understanding of a matter, even if it will not lead to anything practical.

We do not mean that one should not try to understand what the *halacha* is and not be concerned for practicality in how to act. We of course have to learn *halacha*, and we must know how to act in the practical sense. But it is just that we also have to learn about Torah concepts that are purely intellectual, even if there will be no gain from this learning when it comes to how we act in *halacha*.

To give a simple example of what we mean, when you ask a person what two plus two is, and he answers four, what is he thinking? Does he have to picture in his head two apples and then two apples, or can he just think “two plus two is four”? When we teach math to children, we use illustrations to help them, so we show them picture of two apples plus two apples. Adults can figure out the answer quickly, and without having to see an illustration.

This power can be used in an inner way: that a person is able to simply conceptualize a fact, without having to picture it.

### ***Chochmah and Tevunah***

The following concept helps us better understand the true use of *tzurah*. Our mind contains two abilities – *chochmah* (wisdom, or knowledge) and *tevunah* (understanding). *Chochmah* represents the raw material of the information, when it is undeveloped and unstructured. *Tevunah*, though, is when the information is built upon and developed; *Tevunah* is from the word *binyan*, to “build.”

Women are blessed with extra Binah<sup>273</sup>; they possess a greater ability of *tzurah*, to give form to the information. We see this from the roles of of husband and wife, when they unite to have a child. The husband provides the actual droplet, which is the raw substance that has the potential to become a child. The woman's body takes the raw droplet and develops it, giving formation to the droplet – until it eventually emerges a child. This is because women represent *Tevunah/binyan*, the idea that represents the power of true *tzurah*.

### ***Changing Our Thought Process***

Most people are using [the undeveloped kind of] *tzurah* in trying to understand Torah. As a result, the actual wisdom of the Torah is often not being accessed, and people are only giving a

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<sup>272</sup> *Bava Kamma 17a*

<sup>273</sup> *Niddah 45b*

mental picture in their heads to try to perceive the Torah's information. The actual wisdom of the Torah, besides for affecting us practically, goes much further than the practical use of the Torah's information.

Here we come to a deep point in how we use our soul: that we need to come out of our perception based on *tzurah*.

Originally, before the sin of Adam (and again as we stood at Har Sinai) we were able to use *tzurah* as an accurate way of understanding things. This was the actual ability known as *tzurasa d'shmaatsa*. After the sin of Adam [and once again after the sin with the Golden Calf], our power of *tzurah* was damaged, and it instead became a tendency in people to give something a mental kind of imagery, which is an inaccurate understanding of the information. The true way to conceptualize something, *tzurasa d'shmaatsa*, has nothing to do imagining something in the physical sense. It is about intellectualizing the information, without trying to give it a physical kind of picture in our minds.

The Torah can be learned with two different kinds of perception. Matters that we learned in Torah can either be imagined vividly, or they can be learned on a purely intellectual level. The second kind is that when a person learns a *sugya*<sup>274</sup> of *Gemara*, he sees the *tzurah* of the *sugya*. These are two kinds of perception which our soul is capable of.

Before the sin, our thinking process was entirely *chochmah*/wisdom. Now that we are after the sin, "a person does not sin unless a spirit of folly enters him."<sup>275</sup> How did that original spirit of folly enter us in the first place? It was because "the eyes see, then the heart desires – and then the vessels of action complete." First Chava laid eyes on the tree, and then she desired it. This shows us how visualization of a concept makes a person think that he understands what a concept it – and that such a perception can lead to sin.

It is written, "*My heart has seen much wisdom.*"<sup>276</sup> Before the sin of Adam, our perception was pure; we perceived things through *tzurasa d'shmaatsa*. We perceived things through actual conceptualization. After the sin, the "eye sees and the heart desires"; we initially seek to understand something only in the practical sense, or if we can imagine it. This kind of perception, when we remain with, leaves us at our element of earth, which represents the lowest realm – the "world of action", in which "action" becomes the focus [as opposed to intellect].

Before the sin there was no need for the 613 mitzvos, because man lived in a higher realm than "the world of action"; man lived in the plane of intellect, and everything was perceived through *tzurasa d'shmaatsa*. Once Adam sinned, man descended to a lower kind of existence – the realm of action, and thus now we need the 613 mitzvos, which are actions.

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<sup>274</sup> section of *Gemara*

<sup>275</sup> *Sotah 2a*

<sup>276</sup> *Kohel 1:16*

At the giving of the Torah, Hashem commanded us “*For you shall see no image.*” The depth of this matter was that true perception is not attained through mental imagery, but rather through pure intellectualization of a matter, with no physical picture involved.

There are people who can only understand something if they can picture it. They need to be able to smell something, or to taste it, or to see its color. These kinds of people are very entrenched in the lowest kind of existence, the realm of action, and thus they need to be able to clothe everything with the physical. But when a person lives a more internal kind of life, he gains the intellectual perspective on things, and he will be able to understand things even if they don’t have some practical application.

Of course, we do not mean to negate the fact that we must seek practicality; if one ignores practicality, he is denying the Torah, because then he isn’t keeping it. But what we mean is that besides for knowing the practicality of matters, we also must develop an interest to be able to explore a matter on the purely intellectual level, even when something doesn’t have a practical outcome.

The more a person leaves the lower perception coming from “the world of action” and he enters the perspective of a Torah scholar, he’s building the world, because Torah scholars are called builders of the world. He is building his thoughts, even though these buildings cannot be physically seen. And when he learns *Gemara*, not only does he picture the entire scenario going on so that he can get down to the practicalities of the *sugya*, but he also thinks about the *sugya* on a purely intellectual level.

In the language of the Sages, this concept is called “remove your body from your soul.” In more down-to-earth language, there are two ways in how we approach learning Torah: to seek the practical applications of what we learn about it, which involves the use of our imagination; and to learn about a matter in Torah even we were to be informed that the matter will never be relevant in the practical sense. The second kind is *tzurasa d’shamaatsa*.

One of the Sages is praised for having never seen the image of a coin.<sup>277</sup> The depth behind this matter is that the less we get used to physical imagery, the more we will be able to identify with *tzurasa d’shamaatsa*.

### ***The Depth of Teshuvah: Returning To The State of Adam Before the Sin***

To summarize this chapter thus far, we have differentiated between two kinds of perception: the mentality that is called *itzuv*, and the mentality that is called *tzurah*. When a person can have a purely intellectual kind of conceptualization of a matter, this is called *tzurah*. When a person focuses on *tzurah*, though – when he needs to imagine something in the physical sense, in order to identify with the concept at hand – this is called *itzuv*.

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277 *Pesachim 104a*

This was really the depth behind the curse placed on Adam: “*Earth you are, and to earth you shall return.*” Man has to die, because that is the only way for him to leave his element of earth. By contrast, before the sin, there was no concept of death, because man would have been able to transcend his element of earth, for he had the true *tzurah* (image) that he had originally been created with.

We, of course, are not on the level of Adam before the sin. But we can try to draw ourselves closer, somewhat, to that pure state. When we do *teshuvah* for sins, there are two aspects to our *teshuvah*. We need to *teshuvah* for our various private sins, the “branches” of the problem. But we also need to do *teshuvah* for the root of all sins – the sin of Adam. If we attain this kind of *teshuvah*, we are able to touch the kind of spiritual light that existed before the first sin – each of us can do this, according to our own respective levels.

We have explained thus far the three kinds of *tzurah* altogether. We have explained two kinds of physical *tzurah* - seeking practicality, and the use of imagination. We have also explained spiritual *tzurah*.

### ***Attaining Our True Tzurah***

We all need to attain our *tzurah*; being human means that we all have a certain *tzurah*. Hashem fashioned man out of the earth, so we all have *tzurah*. Although we have explained here how *tzurah* affected mankind in the negative sense, that is only if we remain with our undeveloped *tzurah*, in which the only way to erase this *tzurah* is through death. If we attain the ideal kind of *tzurah*, we won't need death to return us to the right kind of *tzurah*.

How do we remove ourselves from the undeveloped kind of *tzurah* and attain the true *tzurah*? We do not want to erase and destroy our *tzurah*; rather, we want to develop it. How can we do it?

Since *tzurah* is a nature in our element of earth, we will need to find which of the other three elements can improve the earth: wind, fire and water. Wind and fire are unfeasible, since they destroy *tzurah*. Fire simply destroys, so it cannot be used to improve our *tzurah*. Wind doesn't destroy *tzurah*, but it breaks *tzurah*. So we cannot use fire or wind to improve our *tzurah*, because we are not trying to destroy or break our undeveloped *tzurah*. The only time we have to break and destroy images is by idols, in which we have a *mitzvah* to break them. But when it comes to the *tzurah* of a human, which is holy, we cannot use any methods that break or destroy.

The way to improve *tzurah* is through using the element of water. Water will not break through the *tzurah*; instead it takes the *tzurah* and spreads it out. Water can return the *tzurah* to the way it is supposed to look like.

We can see this from the following *halachah*. If someone steals something and he changes the physical formation of the item he stole, it's considered changed, and he does not have to return the

item he stole.<sup>278</sup> But if a person steals water that was congealed and then it melts, this is not considered a change to the water, and he has to return the water he stole. Water doesn't change its form; it simply contracts or expands its own form.

The element of earth is the root of all *tzurah*, and earth can't expand its *tzurah*. Any changes that happen to earth make it into a totally new *tzurah*. But the element of water can take *tzurah* and expand it and develop it. In the element of water lies the key to giving true *tzurah* to the element of earth.<sup>279</sup>

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*278 But he must pay for the item he stole; see Bava Kamma, Chapter Nine.*

*279 We will learn more about the element of water beginning from Chapter 31.*

### 3.10 | *Sadness Caused By Fire-of-Earth*<sup>280</sup>

#### *If You're Not Sure What Makes You Sad*

We have so far described different sources for sadness, and it is up to each person to determine which of these kinds of sadness are mainly manifest in his own personal life. Then he can know what to mainly work on.

What happens if a person is trying to figure out the cause of his sadness, using the list we have outlined so far [we gave 12 out of 16 reasons so far], but he cannot determine the main cause of his sadness? If a person is not sure and he's in a lot of doubt about what makes him sad, his sadness is probably coming from **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, which we explained about before. This is when a person lacks general of clarity about himself and he finds himself in darkness and doubt.

#### [FIRE-OF-EARTH]

We have mainly explained the other three kinds of sadness, which stem from the aspects of 'earth' of the element of earth, the 'water' of earth, and the 'wind' of earth. Now we will elaborate upon the sadness which comes from the **fire-of-earth**: the sadness caused by separation.

When it comes to **fire-of-earth**, there are four different subdivisions, as well: the "fire" aspect of fire-of-earth, the "water" aspect of fire-of-earth, the "wind" aspect of fire-of-earth, and the "earth" aspect of fire-of-earth. We will go in the order of lowest to highest of the elements. We will begin with earth, then water and then wind, and then we get to the highest aspect, which is fire.

#### *Fire-of-Earth: Sadness Due To Separation*

Fire is an element that causes dividing and separation. When there is fire, people jump back, and the fire creates a wall of division in between its two surrounding sides. When a person feels sad due to some feeling of separation and division, this is coming from the 'fire' aspect within the element of earth, because it is a feeling of "separation" (fire) caused by sadness (earth).

All of the kinds of sadness which stem from **fire-of-earth** are sadness that comes from some feeling of separation; there are four particular branches of this type of sadness.

##### *1. Sadness of Mourning (Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth)*

A classic example of the sadness which comes from a feeling of separation is the sadness one experiences upon mourning. Mourning is brought about by the death of another, and death is the

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<sup>280</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-006-sadness-caused-fire-earth>

greatest kind of separation. Death is the ultimate kind of separation that there is, thus it causes pain to the person who is connected to the one who died. It is a feeling of total separation from the deceased, whom the person felt connected to. The deceased has been separated from the “earth”, which makes us feel that the person is permanently gone.

(Of course, we know and believe that even death is not yet the total separation, because our souls continue to exist even after physical death. Death is only a temporary separation, because the soul will eventually return to the body. Death only makes us, from *our* perspective, to feel separated from the deceased. Later, when we discuss the solutions for sadness, we will see how this concept contains the key to the solution and healing process over the sadness of mourning).

When we feel sad from mourning the deceased, the sadness is coming a “fire” within our element of “earth” – a separation (fire) caused by the sadness (earth) of death, in which the deceased has permanently been separate from the earth (hence, the sadness we are feeling here comes from “earth”-of-earth-of-fire).

## ***2. Sadness From Feeling Lack of Unity (Water-of-Fire-of-Earth)***

There is another kind of separation that exists, and that is when one feels a lack of love revealed in his life. Not only do we feel separated when there is separation in the simple sense (fire), but even a lack of connection with others makes us feel separated.

The element of fire is the root of separation and strife, and the element of water is the root of love and connection. Love is the opposite concept of separation; love, which is “*ahavah*” in Hebrew, has the same *gematria*<sup>281</sup> as “*echad*”, one. When we feel one with others, there is love. When we are separated from others, there is no oneness, and then there is no love.

This results in a different kind of sadness, and it comes from the water within fire, because water is the root element of love. When there is a lack of water – a lack of love – this causes its own feeling of separation, which results in sadness.

We aren’t talking about hatred. We are talking about something else: a situation in which there is simply no love going on. It is like people who live with each other and don’t hate each other, but there is no love between them – an uncomfortable feeling to live with.

This is the situation of most people’s lives today. The usual situation with most people is that they live amongst each other with neutral feelings. People don’t often hate each other, but they don’t usually feel a love for each other either.

On a deep note, if someone doesn’t love others, deep down, his heart is full of hatred for others; he “hates the whole world”, deep down, but he is not conscious of this. (Anyone as well can discover this in himself when he reflects deeply). But this deep hatred isn’t revealed out in the open, and people just live amongst each other with “neutral feelings”. People also have a power deep down to

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<sup>281</sup> Numerical value in *Lashon HaKodesh* (the holy source of the Hebrew language)



love everyone in the world, but they don't either reveal this power. So in terms of how revealed the soul is, people usually don't feel a hatred for other people; nor do people usually feel a love for others.

This sounds like a neutral kind of existence, but really, what it does for the world is make this world into a very cold environment. When people don't feel anything toward each other, even though they don't hate each other, everyone is cold toward each other, and this creates a divide among people.

If a person is strong in his element of water-of-fire-of-earth in a spiritual way (which stems from his *Nefesh Elohis*), he senses the general cold atmosphere found on this world. It bothers him (and any person that thinks about this) that most people are absorbed in themselves and only worry for themselves. This doesn't bother most people, but someone who is sensitive to it is very bothered by it. It bothers him deeply that there is not enough love on our world.

Again, we are not describing hatred. We are speaking about a different kind of separation amongst people, which is more subtle and not as easily noticed: when there is simply no love and mutual closeness between people.

The general coldness that people have towards each other only bothers a few people (who are strong in their element of fire) when they realize it, but there is a kind of 'coldness' that most people can relate to: when there is coldness amongst family members when they act hostile to each other, or if someone live in an apartment buildings where the neighbors are cold and unfriendly.

The more a person has a nature to be loving and friendly toward others, the more pain he experiences whenever he feels this "coldness" in the world. The more this bothers a person, the sadder it makes him. He also feels a big complaint on the whole world: "Why can't people just love each other more?!"

On a deeper note, it is written, "*And Hashem mourned in His heart.*" This shows us that there is an inherent sadness going on about the entire Creation; Hashem is sad, so to speak, because there is no unity going on in the world. When one feels this kind of sadness in Creation, it is coming from **water-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul

The more a person feels the lack of love and unity going on in the world, the more of a state of 'mourning' he feels like he is in. A person is apt to feel like he is in a state of 'mourning' when he feels coldness from family members, or when his neighbors in his apartment building are cold towards him, or when he wishes that he could be closer with other Jews. When a person doesn't see the love and closeness from those whom he wants to be close with, this causes a kind sadness that feels like a state of mourning.

It is written, "*Seeking desire causes separation.*" When each person worries and cares only for himself, there is a separation amongst people, and although there is no hatred, the lack of love creates a rift between people, causing certain sadness. Although the trait of desire can be holy when it is channeled towards desiring a relationship, desire is misused for evil when people become absorbed

in themselves as they pursue their various desires, and this brings with it the sadness of separation. (This is referring to pursuing spiritual desires, not material desires.)

### ***3. Sadness Caused By Wind-of-Fire-of-Earth: Inner Contradictions***

There is also sadness which comes from the ‘**wind**’ aspect of fire-of-earth. This is when a person has contradictory desires, similar to the nature of wind, which clashes when it meets with other directions; and the person feels sad at the very fact that he wants two different things. He feels a kind of separation inside himself due to his contradictory wishes, thus, his sadness is coming from the ‘wind’ (contradiction) within his ‘fire-of-earth’ (sadness of separation).

We mentioned a similar kind of sadness before, but now we are discussing a more inner kind of sadness. This is when a person feels an inner contradiction inside his soul; it is caused by the **wind** within the **fire-of-earth**.

To give an example of this kind of sadness, a person has a body and a soul. The body has its desires for materialism, and the soul wants spirituality. The desires of the body and the soul contradict each other. A person who is very strong in his element of **fire-of-earth** (in particular, ‘**wind**’-of-fire-of-earth), will feel this contradiction a lot. The fact that he has these two different desires within himself makes him sad. He feels like his very self is split up into different directions. We aren’t talking about low self-esteem; we are referring to a more inner kind of frustration.

In the same way that a person can be bothered and sad at the lack of unity amongst people (which stems from **water-of-fire-of-earth**), a person with dominant **wind-of-fire-of-earth** is bothered and sad at *lack of unification within his own soul*. Since the soul itself is by nature unified, a person who has contradicting desires in himself feels a disparity and separation inside himself, so he might be sensitive to this and feel like he is split into two beings. This makes him feel sad.

### ***4. Sadness From Fire-of-Fire-of-Earth: Feeling Separation***

We mentioned earlier that mourning the deceased – when a person felt a connection with the deceased - causes sadness; it is caused by ‘earth’ in fire-of-earth. This affects a person only if he felt close and attached to the person who died.

If the person is feeling sad, though, at the very fact that someone died – even if he didn’t feel close to the deceased – this is a different aspect of the sadness. The very fact that a death took place is what bothers him, because he is bothered by the very separation. He is a kind of person who is sensitive to any situation that contains an aspect of separation. He is bothered by any separation that takes places in Creation.

Separation is rooted in fire, thus, if a person is sad at the very concept of separations in Creation, his sadness is stemming from **fire-of-earth-of-fire**.

This kind of sadness - which is when one feels sad upon any kind of separation – is a very deep point which we need to explain more about.

### ***The Power of “Echad”***

In the future, Hashem will unify the entire creation. *“And it will be on that day that Hashem will be one (echad) and His Name will be one.”* The power of *echad* (“oneness”) will be revealed onto the world and everyone will be unified – it will be the power that will unify all of Creation together one day.

The more firmly a person has revealed his *Emunah* and believes in this, the more it bothers him that there is currently a lack of unity in the world, that the state of “*echad*” hasn’t been revealed yet.

“*Echad*” will not be fully revealed until the future, but it is still a power that lies deep in our own soul, in which we are able to view everything in Creation as one unit, and in turn, to unify Creation together. Understandably, we cannot ever attain total unity on our current level, since “*echad*” hasn’t been revealed yet. But “*echad*” can still be revealed somewhat to a certain extent, to shine some unity upon Creation.

It is accessed when a person deeply desires that there should be unity in the world. There are only a few rare individuals who have revealed this power.

To give an example of the concept, a person who desires that there should be more “*echad*” revealed in the world is bothered when he has to break apart things. If he wants to cut his *challah* on Shabbos into two different pieces, and by mistake he cuts it wrong and ends up with some crumbs, it bothers him that he caused unnecessary dividing. There is almost no one whom this would bother, but those who have are sensitive to the point in the soul we are describing here is bothered by this unnecessary cutting: “Why should I separate more than I have to?”

When it comes to a lack of unity amongst people, which is the kind of sadness we spoke about before, most people can identify with being sensitive to this kind of separation, and therefore it is understandable to most people that a lack of unity amongst people can make a person feel sad. But to feel sad at any kind of separation, even to separate items unnecessarily, is a very sensitive point which most people cannot relate to. It is only felt by those who are sensitive to the concept of *echad*, which comes from **fire-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul.

This deeper kind of sensitivity that there should always be “*echad*” therefore only exists by those who have revealed a deep power of love for all of the *Creation* – not just a love for all *people* in Creation.

As we said, most people do not feel the point of “*echad*” in the soul. However, all people according to their respective level can reveal this point in themselves somewhat and become sensitive to separation, to desire more unity in Creation. All people need to reveal some more *achdus* (unity) in their lives, even if they can’t fully relate to the depth of the concept, and they should come to a

point in which they feel sad just from how there is a lack of unity with others, even when we aren't on bad terms with others.

***“Echad” – To Desire Unity Even When There Is Hatred***

What will happen if it never bothers a person that he has a lack of feeling unified with others (even if he doesn't hate anyone)? There are people who don't hate anyone, but they don't feel a love for others either. What will result from this?

We can see what erroneous attitude will develop in the person, in the following example.

We have a *mitzvah* to hate a sinner; “It is written in *Tehillim*,<sup>282</sup> *“I hate those who hate You, Hashem, and I will fight with those who fight You; I hate them with utter hatred, they are enemies to me.”* There are certain people who are considered enemies to us, and we are commanded by Hashem to hate them.<sup>283</sup> The word for “enemy” in Hebrew is called *oiyav*, which is similar to the word *oihev* – “beloved one.” This shows us that in order to have the proper attitude toward our enemies, we have to at least be able to have some *ahavah*/love on the agenda. If we can love him, then we can deal with the enemy properly. If we have no goal of loving the enemy, then we won't know how to properly deal with the enemy, and we will just view the sinner as someone who's like another “Haman” to us....

Let's say that a person has never developed a sensitivity to want to have more unity with people. If we tell such a person that he has a *mitzvah* to hate a wicked sinner, the person won't go about this with the proper attitude, because he has never revealed his power to have unity with others. It doesn't bother him that now he has to hate another person, so when he hears that he is commanded by the Torah to hate a sinner, he will hate the sinner with the same kind of base hatred that he has for anything else he hates.

If a person doesn't know how to love another, then he won't know how to reveal any love for the person he hates.

Really, it's not supposed to be the same kind of baseless hatred. Even when we are supposed to hate a sinner, it doesn't mean to hate him just like how people have *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred). If we have to hate someone, such as a sinner, then we are supposed to wish that we could somehow come to bond with him in the end. We shouldn't just hate him without the goal of eventually unifying with him.

On a more subtle note, even when we have to hate, there are parts of the enemy which we should hate, but there are also parts to him which we should love, and it is just that we have to know which parts of him we need to love and which parts of him we need to hate.

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282 139: 21

283 See *Pesachim* 113a in which, when certain conditions are fulfilled, we are commanded to hate a Jew who sins.

By contrast, if a person is strong in his love and connection to others, he is able to separate from others in the right way. He doesn't hate a sinner with a base kind of hatred; he knows how to have a separation from them, and he knows how to love and hate a sinner at the same time. He will actually be able to reveal more unity from the separation, because he knows how to approach separation.

We mentioned before that there is a deep sadness and mourning inherent in Creation; as it is written, "*And Hashem was sad in His heart.*" The deep sadness going on in Creation, which Hashem is in mourning about, is that there is lack of unity in the world, only separation. This was the real sadness that came onto the world ever since the first sin; sin caused the world to become a place of separation (*alma d'piruda*), in which each person only lives for himself.

### ***In Conclusion***

We have gone through the 16 possibilities of what makes a person sad. See which of them are mainly applicable to you. If you really work to understand it, you will find that you can break up these matters more and more into endless additional details. But the point of this study is to be able to figure out your own source of sadness.

Before you begin to work on ourselves and discover how we can solve our sadness (which we will explain in the coming chapters), you first have to know these matters very well, in order to first see what the causes of your sadness are.

All of this is for the sake of getting clarity in what makes us sad; it is not meant to cause confusion. We are only trying to gain clarity here in ourselves. If this is just confusing you, it's a sign that this isn't meant for you to work on.

### 3.11 | *Imagined Honor*<sup>284</sup>

#### *Wind-of-Wind-of-Fire: The Intangible “Air” of Honor*

We will continue with the help of Hashem to discuss *kavod* (honor). Here we will discuss the particular kind of honor that stems from **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. “Fire” refers to honor, “wind-of-fire” refers to the movements towards honor, and “wind-of-wind” (of fire) refers to “gathered air” – the intangible and insubstantial.

Honor, as opposed to other kinds of pleasure, is a pleasure that cannot be tangibly felt. It is the most spiritual kind of pleasure that can be felt on our physical world. This is because honor is an offshoot of the heavenly realm, a higher level being revealed onto our own physical, lower realm. Therefore, we, who are on this lower, physical realm, cannot fully understand the pleasure of honor, because honor is really a force that is above human comprehension.

In terms of our personal souls, this manifests when a person encounters something where there is nothing substantial, yet even so, he “feels” something.

#### *Delusions About Honor*

A very good example of this is the power of imagination, where a person is thinking about something that is not real and nonexistent, nothing substantial. In the case of imagination, the person is thinking about the completely non-existent. The pleasure in honor is similar to this concept, but not quite. When a person enjoys honor, he is feeling that something exists. It is just that he doesn’t understand what it is, because it is above his comprehension.

Since honor is above our understanding, a person who feels it is involving himself with something that he cannot fully understand. Therefore, if a person tries to connect fully to the honor, it is a form of fantasy. Although there is something existing here, it is still a fantasy for him to try to reach it. For example, if a person tries to attain a higher spiritual level which he cannot reach right now, he is being delusional, even though that higher level exists, because since he cannot actually reach it, to try to reach it is fantasy.

To illustrate further, if a person thinks he has 100 dollars and he only has 50 dollars, he is fantasizing, even though there are 100 dollars existing on the world. He does not own the 100 dollars, so if he thinks he owns it, he is fantasizing.

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Similarly, when a person wants to reach a higher spiritual level and then he tries to live on that level, when it is really above his actual level, he is living in a fantasy. This is a very common kind of fantasy, which envelopes the lives of many people.

This is not the simpler kind of imagination, where a person who doesn't own a car imagines owning the car, or when a person dreams at night that he lives in a bigger house that he wants. Here we are talking about a different kind of imagination, where a person imagines something that exists, but which is not within his reach, and he imagines that he has attained it. When people try to reach higher levels that are not within their reach, they are being delusional.

Honor is the higher realm being revealed within the lower realm. Therefore, the higher level does exist in the lower realm. This is what allows people to have delusions about feeling that they are honored [when, in reality, they are not being honored].

We will soon give some examples of the concept, but the idea is that honor connects a person to a higher level, and therefore the pleasure in honor is not a total delusionary experience, because it is existing [and since it is not totally delusional, the person convinces himself that he is really being honored, or he exaggerates the feeling of honor upon experiencing a bit of it].

If a person is experiencing honor and he is aware that it is just an offshoot of something from the higher realm that is becoming manifest on the lower realm, and that it is not the actual revelation of the higher realm - then he wouldn't be delusional about the honor. But when this understanding about honor is missing, a person will connect himself fully to an intangible experience of honor, which only exists in the world of fantasy. When a person gets used to this, it can eventually lead to fantasizing about things that are totally delusional.

### ***Imagined Honor***

To give an example of what this is, if you ask a first grade child who his friends are, and he answers you that it's so-and-so and so-and-so, the child's answer is not necessarily a reflection of the reality, and if you investigate, you may discover that the truth is totally not like what he says. The "friends" that he claims of are not actually his friends at all, and he really has different friends. The child, though, is perceiving his reality in a certain way, because wishes to have social standing amongst these "friends". This is the trait of honor at work, which can easily fool his perception of reality.

Many people think that they are honored by others for various things they do, but the truth is that if we ask around, we will see that no one is consciously trying to honor those people. If we say to the person who thinks he is honored, "Do you think that others honor you and know who you are and what you do and value you and consider you important?" he will not even be in doubt about this; he is sure that others are honoring him and valuing him for what he does.

Others have the opposite problem, and they think that they are not respected or valued by anyone, because they suffer from a low self-image. But here we are talking about a person who does

have a positive self-image, who may have a problem of being delusional about honor: he thinks that everyone around him honors and values him and recognizes his worth, and if we examine the situation a bit deeper, we may discover that this is not the case at all.

Why would a person fool himself and convince himself that he is so honored by others? It is because honor is a heavenly force, which is above human comprehension. When a person does not know how to interpret it precisely, he will connect himself to a revelation of honor that *does not exist!*

### ***Imagined Honor\Good Feeling That Comes From The “Air” (Atmosphere) Around A Person***

Usually the person is not being a complete fool when he feels that he is honored by others. If he feels that others honor and value him, it must be that there is a certain pleasant atmosphere around him, which gives him a good feeling about himself. From there, he interprets the general “good feeling” that’s “in the air” around him, expanding upon this feeling and exaggerating it. But the good feeling of honor that he subsequently feels from this is not real, and therefore he is connecting himself to something that is way beyond him, which is not within his actual reach.

This idea envelopes a person entirely, and its root is in the trait of honor, as we are explaining here. So far, we have explained one area in how it manifests in the soul.

A large part of a person’s life is dependent on the “air” (atmosphere) around him. There may be a *simchah* (celebration), event, or some experience, which is pleasant, where it is not possible to actually pinpoint where the pleasant feeling is coming from. It is simply the pleasant “atmosphere” that the person is enjoying. If a person went to a certain place and he was happy there or sad there, he might be aware if he was happy or sad there, but many times cannot pinpoint what exactly made him happy or sad there. It all depends on the atmosphere there, the “air” that’s there.

Can someone go to a certain place or event and tell if the “air” there is good or not? It is something inner, which each person interprets differently. If a person went on a vacation to a certain place and he enjoyed it there, sometimes he can pinpoint what he enjoyed: It was a calm and quite place to be in, it settled his mind, etc. But sometimes the answer is very vague: “The air (or atmosphere) was good there.” He is not describing anything tangible.

This is also very commonly experienced on the festivals, such as when sitting by the Pesach *seder*, where most people will feel that there is something “uplifting”, and surely it is, but the feeling is not coming from anything tangible. It is just coming from the “air” there....

We should understand this deep point, that there are people who live their entire lives until death, based upon the kind of “air” around them. Sometimes the “air” feels like the beginning of the week or season, the middle of the week or season, or the end of the week or season, and sometimes this “air” depends on the age of the person or stage of life a person is at. But in either case, living life in this way is to constantly try to hold onto something that isn’t tangible.



### ***Spiritual Elation In The “Air”***

In the world of *Avodas Hashem* as well, this idea of the “air” (or atmosphere) really comes to play.

For example, a person will say that he received tremendous *chizuk* (inspiration) from learning a certain *sefer*, and he won’t be able to name exactly how he has been inspired. He will just say something like, “It was so uplifting!” But if we ask him what exactly affected him in the *sefer*, he can’t name anything specific. He may say, “Every word in this *sefer* is gold!” But what is it that affected him? “After I learned this *sefer*, my entire reality changed.” He just can’t pinpoint it exactly. There are many other expressions as well a person may use, but the point is that there is nothing tangible in what he has felt.

Sometimes this is only on a smaller scale, regarding a certain stage or event in a person’s life. But in other cases, a person is living his entire life based upon the feelings of elation that come from “atmosphere”, which cannot be tangibly felt and named for what it is. When a person lives in this way, it is actually destruction to his soul. It is just gathering heaps and heaps of air, and this becomes the person’s entire life! He does not live with any clear definitions of anything, just feelings of general elation.

For example, if a person goes to hear a *mussar shmuess* during the Three Weeks, and he is asked what he heard in the speech, he might say something like: “The speaker was bringing us into the atmosphere of the Three Weeks.”

Although there is something true to what he is saying, he is not pinpointing exactly why we must mourn during the Three Weeks. He cannot define it exactly, he just knows that the general atmosphere of the Three Weeks is to feel mournful. To him, Tisha B’Av is the “atmosphere” of Tisha B’Av, a mournful atmosphere; Yom Kippur to him is nothing except an “atmosphere” of purity, something which can be felt in the “air” on Yom Kippur. Although there is something truthful to what he is saying, a person cannot build his life [spiritual speaking, in his *avodas Hashem*] upon what the air/atmosphere around him is like.

There are people who live based upon the atmosphere around them. They feel the “air” and mood of the Three Weeks, then they move on to the “air” and mood of vacationing during *Bein HaZemanim*, and then they enter into the “air” of Elul, and before they know it, they have gone through the “air” of the *Yomim Noraim* and *Succos*; then comes the “air” of the winter season, etc. That is how they live. Every situation and point in their life to them has no clear definition to it, and it is just the “air” around them. That is **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

### ***The Problematic Attitude Towards Learning Mussar***

Any sensible person understands that when a person is always identifying with something intangible, this is clearly fantasy. But what isn’t as obvious is when a person is feeling something real, but it cannot be clearly defined or understood. This is a very encompassing nature of the soul which affects many areas.

When it comes to learning Gemara, the words of Abaye and Rava, generally speaking, a person will not feel that there is some kind of “air”\atmosphere to the words of Abaye and Rava. The words of the Gemara, with the commentaries of the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, are all definitions; there is no “air” here. Though a person can also be amazed on an emotional level when he hears a certain novel Torah insight, generally speaking, a person does not feel the “air” in the words of the Gemara he is learning.

The same goes for learning *halachah*, where person must learn what the definition of the *halachah* is, and there is no way for a person to get a vibe of it based on its “air”, because it is clearly defined. It is defined information which needs to be learned and then acted upon in the practical sense.

But in the area of learning *mussar* (ethics or self-discipline) this concept of feeling the “air” comes more into play, where it becomes a problematic attitude. Reb Yisrael Salanter said that when learning *mussar*, one should learn the words “with a mournful voice”. This is be erroneously understood by many people that learning *mussar* should feel like an inspirational kind of air\atmosphere, or a kind of atmosphere that “demands truth”, or other preconceived notions that people may have about *mussar*.

But *mussar* is not really a concept that we need to understand. We all “know” the fundamentals of *mussar*. We all know “know” the definition of *zehirus*, and *chessed*, etc. So what does *mussar* teach? It seems to many people that *mussar* is defined by the “air” that *mussar* gives off, the atmosphere of learning *mussar*, which causes us to live what we know. This erroneous attitude towards *mussar* is not uncommon, and it affects all of a person’s *avodah*.

A person can learn *mussar* for many years, yet he is involved with learning something intangible. With such a perspective, *mussar* will be dependent on the mood, tone, the “air”. When a person feels uplifted, the “air” feels inspiring, and he may perceive this as “greatness of mind” or “opened heart” or “paying attention with the heart”; and when he feels down in his spirits, the air around him feels like “smallness of mind”, or “closed heart”, but he doesn’t feel anything tangible.

If a person learns *Chovos HaLevovos* even for a long time [where the chapters are arranged in the form of “gates”], he may view it as “gates” becoming opened to him, without knowing exactly what these “gates” are. Is it the “fifty “gates of understanding”? What new things in *Chovos HaLevovos* has he now learned, which he didn’t know beforehand? He may not pinpoint exactly what new things it taught him, and he will just say that the words of the *Chovos HaLevovos* have certain “power” or potency to them, but he can’t define it exactly.

A person should really know what a *sefer* has taught him, what he didn’t know beforehand and what he has now learned. If not, he is just gathering air, and any of the inspiration he felt was just temporary and fleeting, nothing substantial that stays with him afterwards.

Earlier, we described the problem where a person perceives a certain feeling based on the “air” or atmosphere around him. But when this problem is brought into one’s *Avodas Hashem*, it causes a person to think that all of *Avodas Hashem* is based on the inspiration in the “air”.

From a true perspective, any sensible person knows that *mussar* contains certain definitive concepts, no less definitive than the definitions found in the Gemara. It is all one Torah, and the Torah is all about clearly defined concepts. But not everyone is aware of this, and therefore they view it based on the vibes they're getting from the "air" around them when learning. With this perspective, a child will not be able to feel the elation in the air around him, and he doesn't have a developed mind yet, so he will view matters of Torah as nothing but something interesting to think about, but not more than that.

We are describing a problem in which a person connects to something where it is not based upon reality, and it is instead based upon the vibes he is getting in the "air" atmosphere around him.

### ***Accurately Feeling The Inspiration "In The Air": Only After Giving Clear Intellectual Definition To Something***

Now let's see what the truthful way of living is.

Is there such a thing as picking up certain vibes from the kind of air atmosphere that's in the place? Of course it exists. But it is only to be considered as real after a person can clearly define what is there, and upon that, he can then feel the elation in the air that's there.

The true meaning of a Torah scholar is that he can give clear definitions to what he's involved with, whether he's dealing with a matter of intellect or a matter of emotional. There are always definitions, whether it is an area of *halachah*, Gemara, and *mussar*. Even the elation experienced on a festival has a clear definition to it; and each of the festivals has its own specific points that inspire a person. Pesach contains a certain kind of inspiration, when it comes to certain points; Shavuot inspires a person in other areas, and Succos provides inspiration in other points, etc.

There are always two parts in whatever a person is involved with – the intellectual definition of the matter, as well as the emotion towards that matter. Once there is a clear definition in place, a person can then have a more accurate emotional reaction towards it, and he will accurately feel what's in the "air" there. From a deeper understanding, the intellectual definition of a matter tells us what's in the "air" in a place.

When learning Gemara and *halachah*, people are familiar with the concept of giving definitions. When learning matters of *Agadta* (ethical teachings of the Gemara) though, there is less awareness of this concept that one must give definitions to the concepts he is learning about. If you have ever learned the sefarim of the Maharal, you can see that all matters of *Agadta* in the Gemara are based upon certain intellectual definitions. The definitions may be too abstract to comprehend, but they are still clearly defined.

When it comes to learning *mussar* as well, many are not aware that these are matters based upon certain intellectual definitions. When a person learns *sefer Orchos Tzaddikim*, he sees the words of Chazal that explain why a certain trait is praiseworthy, and how it can also be detrimental, when

used incorrectly. That is the simple perspective, but if a person has a deeper understanding into the words of Chazal, he is aware that the words of Chazal are describing definitions of a matter.

It seems to a person when learning *Mesillas Yescharim* at first glance, that the levels of *zehirus*, *zerizus*, *nekiyus*, etc. are just praiseworthy levels to attain, and he sees why these are praiseworthy traits. But the concept of *zehirus*, let's say, can be studied more in-depth in the words of the Maharal in *Nesivos Olam*. Then a person can go back to learning about *zehirus* in *Mesillas Yescharim*, and he will then see a different definition there.

When learning *Agadta* and *mussar*, and when it comes to all of a person's *avodah*, there are certain definitions. When it comes a festival or a certain time of the year, a person can also give a definition to what is taking place. When it comes the Three Weeks, for example, a person can learn about what the *Beis HaMikdash* was like when it was built, what changed after it was destroyed, what we are now missing – and after that, he can become moved on an emotional level, until he cries. But there are exact intellectual definitions to it, just as in all other areas of Torah.

When a person gets used to this perspective, his intellectual perception of a matter will become sharper and clearer, and then he will know he's feeling something tangible in the air around him when he's feeling it.

### ***Intellectually Connecting To A Festival, Then Emotionally Experiencing It***

If the above has been understood, we can proceed to the next step.

The festivals are times of the year that have been sanctified by Hashem, with *kedushah* (holiness). What is the holiness of the festivals? For most people, the “time” is above their actual soul level, so the holiness of the time is also above them and therefore out of their actual reach; but through the light of the festival, a person can receive higher revelations that are really beyond his reach.

There is also a higher level where a person is above time, “*Yisrael* (the Jewish nation) is above time”, but most of the time, a person is “below” the level of time, and therefore he needs certain times of the year to provide him with the holiness that he normally can't reach. So a person is usually below the plane of “time”, and the special time (of the festival) can shine holiness upon him. But why is it that many people will feel very high, elated feelings on the festivals? Is it because they are really comprehending and reaching these high, lofty levels of holiness?

Time is really above the person. On a festival, there are people who like to study highly spiritual matters, and they feel that since it's such a special time, they have to grab onto it before it's gone. But since time is above the actual level of most people, it can shine holiness onto them, but its revelations cannot actually be comprehended. This is similar to the concept of honor, as we explained earlier, that honor is really a revelation from Above, and it is above comprehension.

When it comes to gaining from the holiness of the festivals, a person really first needs an intellectual definition of a matter about the festival, and only after that can he feel the elation of it.

After a person gives some definition to a concept regarding the festival at hand, there are one of two ways of how he becomes emotionally moved and inspired, feeling the “air” contained on the festival. Either he reviews and repeats the matter several times, or, if he possesses refined subtle thinking, he can be emotionally moved in his heart just from subtly reflecting into the intellectual definition.

There are two kinds of people who experience elation on the festival. One kind of person hears highly spiritual matters about the festival, which uplifts him, and a second kind of person hears a certain subtle definition which penetrates deeply into him, and that is what inspires him. Two people can hear the same words, but one person will hear the general concepts, on an external level, which can lead to inspiring him; and another kind of person will hear something subtle, and that is what penetrates his heart and inspires him.

### ***Maturing Beyond The Level of Childhood Imprints***

This leads us to the following point.

We all have childhood imprints, where our intellect wasn't developed yet, where there was only a world of emotion and feelings, and that was how we connected then to anything we encountered. Many adults did not mature on their inside yet, and they are still like children, when it comes to how they perceive the spiritual. They continue to experience something based on the vibes they got from the air when they first experienced it.

For example, an adult may experience Pesach every year in the same way that he remembers it as a child. Although he has gone through Pesach over 30 times since then, his experience of Pesach is always a return to his childhood perception of Pesach. The same goes for all other festivals and times of the year.

One should become aware of what his childhood imprint of something is. There is certainly worth to the childhood imprint one has about something. But when a person has become older and he is now an adult, he must understand that just as a person must mature when it comes to the rest of life, so must he mature when it comes to spiritual matters. He should realize that his current perception towards the festival stems from his childhood experience of the festival, and after realizing that, he should then try to gain a more mature understanding of the festival.

Many times when people lose their childhood feelings towards the festival, they feel that they have undergone a descent in their level, wondering where their inspiration has gone. But the truth is that they did not undergo a spiritual descent. Rather, their imagined feelings have been steadily lessened, and now they have reached a point where they can no longer live with feelings that are not real. They experience this as a spiritual descent from their level, but in reality, it means the person has matured. It is the key to entering the reality correctly.

The new change of perception is that there will first be an intellectual definition given to what they are experiencing, and that is what leads them to emotional reaction.

### *Solving The Issue of Imagined Honor*

Now that we have outlined the idea, let us return to discussing honor, and to see how this all applies in particular to rectifying honor that stems from **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

When a person feels honor, in a large percentage of cases, the person is feeling something tangible; a person goes to a certain place and people are giving him actual honor there. But in a very large amount of cases as well, the honor that a person feels is being imagined. It is not happening in reality. Sometimes a person is genuinely honored, and sometimes the honor is false, but even when the honor is false, at least it is happening in reality, and there is someone here being “honored”. But in many cases, the honor is entirely being fantasized, and it is not real. The honor will only exist in the imagination of the person, who thinks that he is worthy of being honored by others.

How does a person leave imagined honor? It is by gaining the perspective we have explained here, of first giving an intellectual definition to the situation at hand, and only after that attempting to feel it.

When a person reacts to others first through his emotions, he will feel that others are honoring him – whether they are truly honoring him, or whether he is only imagining this. But if a person gets used to analyzing a matter first before reacting emotionally, by getting used to giving intellectual definitions, he will be distanced from having delusions about honor.

This is also helpful in avoiding delusion altogether, but we are not dealing with that here. Here we are only speaking of a specific kind of delusion, the problem of imagined honor. Getting used to applying definitions is a matter that weakens imagined honor. This does not directly attack the power of imagination\delusion. Rather, it is by keeping the focus of the work on giving definition to something, and as a result, the imagination will be weakened as well.

When a person gets used to taking apart a matter intellectually, when he encounters something that involves emotional feeling and he finds himself in wonder over something, he will see that the emotional feeling doesn’t match up with the intellectual definition of the reality before him, and then he will be able to dismiss the emotional feeling of wonder as insubstantial.

The words here are how a person can practically work on avoiding the entire problem of delusion caused by the power of imagination. It enables a person to have accurate, definitive thinking into anything before him, and it enables a person to accurately experience what he is feeling, when he encounters an emotion. He can think to himself: “What is the emotion saying? What is the intellectual definition of it saying? What is the contradiction between them?”

After noticing the contradiction, a person will then be able to chip away at the imagination which has been fueling his feelings about the matter – an inaccurate perception, nothing tangible and nothing substantial, like a tower floating in the air which has nothing to stand on. Impaired **wind-of-wind-of-fire** is the intangible, the insubstantial, which has no grounding in reality.

When a person gets used to giving intellectual definition to something and he is seeing how his emotional reactions are inaccurate and insubstantial, he will find himself becoming more in touch with reality. In fact, the more truly inward that a person becomes, the more realistic he is.

***Our Entire Avodah: Becoming In Touch With Reality, And Distanced From Fantasy***

There are those who think that “inward” people are less realistic kinds of people, but the truth is totally the opposite. True inward *avodah* is based upon reality. A person has to be as in touch with reality as can be, in order to connect to Hashem, Who is the true essence of reality.

This is really the deep ability to recognize *havayah* (reality) and to thereby run away from *dimayon* (fantasy). True recognition of the Creator is based upon distancing oneself from fantasy, and to instead recognize reality as it is.

On a deep level, everything in this world is like one big fantasy that obscures a person from recognizing the reality of Hashem. The more that the soul of a person becomes in touch with reality and distant from fantasy, the sharper level of recognition of Hashem it can come to. This concept, of becoming in touch with reality and distancing oneself from fantasy, is the very depth of all our *avodah*, for Reb Yisrael Salanter said that the power of imagination is the main force which obscures a person from recognizing the Creator.

***In Conclusion***

Here we did not speak about the general power of imagination<sup>285</sup>, but about a heavenly power that manifests on this world (honor), which is the most subtle kind of fantasy that exists. Concerning this particular kind of fantasy (imagined honor), we have explained here that this stems from **wind-of-wind-of-fire**, and how this force can be rectified, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

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<sup>285</sup> *The ways to rectify the power of imagination in general are discussed in the Rav's series Getting To Know Your Imagination*