

REACHING YOUR INNER REDEMPTION

A photograph of a railway track curving through a tunnel. The track is illuminated by a bright light at the end of the tunnel, creating a strong perspective. The walls of the tunnel are rough and textured, and the floor is covered in gravel. The overall atmosphere is one of a journey or a path leading to a bright future.

**12 Part Series from the author of
Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh
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Editor's Preface

As this PDF goes to print, the world faces an epidemic that many of our *Gedolim* are calling the final stage before *Moshiach's* arrival. As we prepare for the final *Geulah*, the Redemption, accompanied by miracles and wonders, each person now has the opportunity, more than ever, to reach deep into his soul and connect with oneself and with the Creator.

“Reaching Your Inner Redemption,” an English adaptation of the series *Da Es Geulasecha* from the author of the *Bilvavi sefarim* and the “Getting To Know Your Self” series, is the ultimate manual to prepare for the redemption. As opposed to focusing on the historical aspects and events of the Redemption, such as the war of Gog and Magog, the resurrection of the dead, etc., this book focuses on how we can prepare inwardly for the coming Redemption. By redeeming our own souls, we can experience more fully the Redemption which will soon come to the world.

This book is a companion volume to *Da Es Nafshecha* (Getting To Know Your Soul), where the author explained the 13 primary faculties of the soul. In this book, the author explains how to “redeem” the 13 primary faculties in our soul from their “exile.” When we learn how to “redeem” our actions, emotions, thoughts, will, and our pleasure from exile, we are gradually releasing more and more layers of our soul from their state of inner exile and captivity, so that our soul is no longer being stifled and we can become who we truly are.

How fitting is it that this book is being released directly before the festival of redemption, Pesach, and in the month of Nissan where the light of *Moshiach* shines.

Included in this book is a special section of questions and answers with the Rav on preparing for the *geulah* and our *avodas* Hashem during the current period we are in where the world is gripped with the coronavirus.

May we all be *zoche* to see the *Geulah*, both the *Geulah* as we know it, as well as the *Geulah* we can all experience within ourselves. And may we come truly closer to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, completely, returning to Him and to His will, with our entire heart and soul.

01 | *Introduction To Personal Redemption*

Public And Personal Redemption

With the help of Hashem, let us begin a new series, of how we can learn to have a personal redemption of our own souls, which is accessible to each and every person. Let us first pray to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* that this series should be of benefit to all of you, and that all of us together should merit to grow.

Our Sages have taught that just as there is a general redemption that will come to the masses, which we await for every day, so can a person experience redemption on a private level, in the soul.¹

We *daven* every day for the general redemption and the coming of Moshiach, in the blessing in *Shemoneh Esrei* of **גאָל אַרְתָּנוּ**, and we *daven* every day for a personal redemption, in the blessing in *Shemoneh Esrei* of **גאָל אַרְתָּנוּ**, “Redeem us”. The commentaries on the Siddur explain that the words **גאָל אַרְתָּנוּ** (“Redeem us”) is referring to a private *geulah* (redemption) in one’s own soul.

Thus, every day, we *daven* both for a general redemption and a personal redemption. In order to embark on our own private redemption, we must first learn about what personal exile is, on a conceptual level, so that we can know what leaving it is. We know what the general exile is - there are the exiles of Mitzrayim (Egypt), Bavel (Babylonia), Madai-Peras (Media-Persia), Yishmael (the Arab exile)², and Esav [Edom\Rome\Western society]. But what is the “exile” of the soul? Let us try to understand what it is, so that we can then know what a personal redemption is.

Two Kinds Of Personal Exile

There are two kinds of “exile” in the soul.

One exile of the soul is the fact that it has been placed into the body. The soul comes from Heaven, from a spiritual source, and it is confined on this world to be inside a physical body. It is therefore “exiled” to the body. The soul leaves this “exile” when it leaves the body, at death, where it returns to its source in Heaven.

A second “exile” of the soul, within the first exile, is when a person is not living life in the right way. When a person lives incorrectly, he is living in an exile within another exile.

Here we will not deal that much with the first kind of exile in the soul, and we will deal mainly with how we can come out of the second kind of exile in the soul: when a person is not living in the right way.

¹ The concept of “inner redemption” or “redemption of the soul” (or “personal redemption”) is first mentioned in *sefer Chessed L’Avraham* (parshas Lech Lecha) in the name of the Baal Shem Tov. It also mentioned in the *sefarim* of the Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, author of the famed *Mesillas Yeshtarim, Path of the Just*), such as in *sefer Shaarei Ramchal*. It is based on the verse in *Tehillim* (Psalms) 69: 19, **קָרְבָה אֵל נַפְשִׁי גֹאֲלִיהָ** (“My soul is close to her redemption”). The Rav has also spoken about “inner redemption” in the *derashah* of *Tefillah_0166_Leaving The Disparate View*

² Editor’s Note: According to the view of the Ramban, the exile of Yishmael is an extension of the Persian-Median exile

1- Actions In Exile: Doing Things That Are Not “You”

Every person performs certain actions, feels certain emotions, says certain words, thinks about certain thoughts, and wants certain desires. If one does actions that are in sync with who he is, if he talks in a way that is “him”, if his feelings and thoughts and desires are his own, then his soul is in a state of personal redemption. By contrast, if one’s actions, emotions, speech, thoughts and desires are not true to who he is, one’s soul is in a personal exile.

In Egypt, there was *avodas perach*, “cruel labor”, where the men were given women’s labor, and the women were given men’s labor. They were doing actions that were not suitable for them, and this was the personification of the exile of Egypt. The same is true for the personal exile of our souls. If a person performs actions that are in line with who he is, his soul’s potential is actualized. But if one is doing things that are not “who he is”, his soul is confined in a prison-like state in the body. These actions are an “exile” to the soul.

Therefore [in order to leave this stage of personal exile], one needs to make sure he is doing actions that are in sync with his true character, and to avoid actions that are not true to who he is. Here are some important examples that can help us understand this concept.

Part of the curse given to Adam, and all of mankind after him, was “*In the sweat of your brow, you shall eat bread*”. There is a curse upon man that he must work to make a living. The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that a person must choose to work in a job that will be aligned with his true character. Although work is a curse for man, man must still choose to work in a job which suits his personal character, according to his own unique nature. If he chooses to work at a job that does not suit his character, not only is he enduring the curse of work placed upon mankind, but he is also in a personal exile, because he is doing things that are not “him”.

In summary, the first part of personal exile pertains to the area of action in our lives. Therefore, when one realizes what kind of work is suitable to his character, and he refrains from doing things that are not suitable for him, he is leaving the soul’s exile with regards to the realm of “action”.

Let us now continue to the next step, with *siyata d’shmaya*, although the concepts here may still seem obscure and unclear to us at this point. This was but an introduction of what is to come here, and we will explain this more clearly in the coming chapters, with Hashem’s help.

2- Emotions In Exile: When Your Feelings Are Not Your Own

Let’s now continue to briefly explaining the second part of personal exile and its redemption: with regards to our world of emotion.

This has special applications to the time we are currently in, with Rosh HaShanah soon approaching, for on Rosh HaShanah, our feelings are more activated.

There are two kinds of feelings: One kind of awareness to our feelings is when we learn to become aware of the stimuli coming into us from the outside: what we have read, heard, learned, which all tell us how we are supposed to feel, and then we can try to feel [this information]. There is also another kind of feeling: to feel from within - from your inside, which is uniquely yours – and these are feelings that are for “you” to feel, uniquely tailored to your own personal soul. For example, you can have your own personal feelings, from within yourself, of how *you* approach Rosh HaShanah.

2a) Two Approaches Towards Rosh Hashanah: Feelings Of Fear, Or Feelings Of Closeness

We will explain this further, so that we can understand it better, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

Concerning Rosh HaShanah in general, there are two different fundamental approaches, of how to feel about it.

The approach of the *baalei mussar* towards Rosh HaShanah is that it is a time of *yirah* (awe, fear, or dread). On Rosh HaShanah, there is judgment over all of mankind. We recite the prayer of *U'Nesaneh Tokef*, which describes the great, awesome fear of this judgment. The approach of *Chassidus* towards Rosh HaShanah, however, is to view it as a time of closeness to Hashem, a time of exaltedness, and revelation, of Hashem's Presence.

So there are two different ways to feel about Rosh HaShanah – it is a time of *yirah* (fear and trepidation), or it is a time of *ahavah* (love and closeness).

On a personal level, one should sit with himself and reflect: How do I, personally, feel about Rosh HaShanah? Which is the way that is more appropriate for me, personally – to view Rosh HaShanah with *yirah*, or with *ahavah*?

Of course, we need to approach it with both *yirah*\fear and *ahavah*\love.³ But what is the **main** feeling you need to have about it? That is the area which applies to you, personally.

A person may have grown up in a certain kind of atmosphere or surroundings, or he may have heard, that Rosh HaShanah is a time of *yirah*. But in reality, it could be that he personally needs to have the approach of *ahavah* towards Rosh HaShanah. Or, vice versa: he may have grown up with a different attitude - or he may have heard - that Rosh HaShanah is a time of *ahavah*; but it may actually be the approach of *yirah* which he mainly needs.

If he really needs the approach of *ahavah* towards Rosh HaShanah, whether it's because this is his soul root⁴, or whether it's because this is the personal spiritual level⁵ he is on, and instead he approaches it with *yirah*, because that's how he grew up, or because that's what he heard about it - then he has 'trained' himself to mainly feel *yirah* towards Rosh HaShanah, when in reality, he really needs to approach it with **mainly** *ahavah*. His feelings are in a personal exile when Rosh HaShanah comes, because he is not feeling his own, personal feelings.

And the same is true for the opposite case: if someone's **main** feeling towards Rosh HaShanah is really *yirah*, but he was always told to approach it with *ahavah*, or he read about Rosh HaShanah that it is a time of *ahavah*, and *yirah* was never the focus – he has been training himself to mainly feel *ahavah* towards Rosh HaShanah, when in reality, it is *yirah* which is supposed to be his **main** feeling towards it. This is also a personal "exile" to his soul's feelings.

Therefore, Rosh HaShanah might either be a redemption to one's soul, or it might be the opposite of this, *chas v'shalom*. The *Gemara* says that Yosef got out of jail on Rosh HaShanah.⁶ For Yosef, Rosh HaShanah was a time of redemption. But a person on Rosh HaShanah might just be in a prisonlike state inside himself, if he is not feeling his true feelings about Rosh HaShanah. But he can also merit, with *siyata d'shmaya*, a resemblance of what it was like for Yosef to leave prison on Rosh HaShanah.⁷

3 See *Rosh HaShanah_047_Fear and Closeness of Rosh HaShanah*

4 *shoresh haneshamah* – root of one's personal soul

5 *madreigah* – personal spiritual level

6 *Rosh HaShanah 10b*

7 *Imrei HaRim*

When one **mainly** has the feelings towards Rosh HaShanah which are appropriate for his own soul root (*shoresh haneshamah*) and which are aligned with his personal spiritual level (*madreigah*), one can reach a redemption of the soul on Rosh HaShanah [with regards to his soul's feelings].

Let's continue now to the next step, with *siyata d'shmaya*. We will once again emphasize that all of this is just an introduction of what is to come, and later we will try to go through each of these stages again and explain them in more detail.

3- Speech In Exile: When You Aren't Speaking From Within Yourself

Our speech is a vast area to understand. A very large part of our day is spent on utilizing our speech.

Upon reflection, we can discover that there are generally three kinds of speech: Speaking about what's necessary to take care of, speaking about current topics that society likes to discuss, and speaking from one's own essence.

The third kind of speech, speaking from one's essence, is described in the many *Mishnayos* in *Pirkei Avos*, which begin with "*Hu Hayah Omer*", "He would say"...The words came from the very essence of the sage. He would speak from words that came from within him. Similarly, it is written, "*My soul leaves, when I speak with him*", which refers to a person who speaks words that are coming from his true essence.

Concerning the first kind of speech – speaking about what's necessary to take care of – regarding this, our Sages said that we have no choice but to speak about what we need to care of. So we cannot avoid this kind of speech. As for speaking about what society is talking about, sometimes this is also necessary, so that we can have what to discuss with others and be respectful towards others who want to speak with us. This is fine, as long as it does not contain any words that are in the category of forbidden speech, such as *lashon hora*, *rechilus*, etc.

But the main kind of speech we need to be utilizing is the third kind of speech mentioned: to speak from our own essence. Our words should be coming from our true self, from who we are, from our own thoughts, from our own personality. If we speak in such a way, then our soul's speech is in a state of redemption.

If we reflect deeply about the kind of speech that takes place in our world, we can see that most speech is either about taking care of things, or about what society is discussing. A very little amount of speech in the world is coming from a person's true self. Therefore, in almost all people, their soul's speech is in exile.

4 – Thoughts In Exile: When Your Thoughts Are Not Your Own

Now that we have discussed the area of speech, let us continue with *siyata d'shmaya* to the next stage, which is the area of thought. As mentioned before, we are only briefly describing the roots of these concepts, and their details will be explained later, G-d willing.

A person is always thinking. There are many thoughts taking place in one's mind - an infinite amount of thoughts. What is the root of all these many thoughts? Where are these many thoughts coming from?

To give a general description, there are two kinds of thought: inner thought, and outer thought. There are thoughts that come into us from the outside, and there are thoughts which come from inside us.

Most of the thoughts we are thinking about are coming from the outside. For example, we see something, and then we think about it. We hear something, and then we think about it. Most thoughts are a result of something we have physically sensed. We sense something, the brain receives information, and then slowly brain thinks about it, more and more. Or, the brain will think about a physical act that we need to take care of and do. Therefore, most thinking revolves around outside stimuli. These are called “outer” thoughts, because these thoughts are based on information coming from the outside of a person.

There is a completely different kind of thought, in contrast to the above: a person can think about something from within himself. In most people, this kind of thought is not accessed that much, due to heavy involvement with the physical world, which makes us think more about outside stimuli, giving us less of a chance to think from within. Many people therefore do not know of the thoughts that come from their inner essence, which is the *neshamah*. However, it is an existing area of thought, in which a person can think about things from his very essence.

4a) Thinking Originally About Matters Of Hashkafah (Torah Ideals)

Even more so, besides for this general ability to think from the inside, there is also a deeper use of this power: to have our own beliefs and opinions, concerning our worldview on important matters. This refers to what is called “*hilchos de’os*” (the “laws” of Jewish beliefs), or “*hashkafah*” (Jewish ideology).

Every person has certain ways of thinking, concerning matters of religion, faith, beliefs, and worldview, of how one should behave and live. This is not about *halachah* (external observance of laws of the Torah), but about the inner perspectives in the Jewish religion, which is called “*hilchos de’os*”, or “*hashkafah*”.

Our *hilchos de’os*, our *hashkafah*, must first come from the knowledge that we have received from our [religious, G-d fearing] parents and teachers. But as a person becomes a more internal kind of person, these *hilchos de’os* and *hashkafos* are transformed into a part of his being. This refers specifically to the development of our pure *neshamah*, and not, *chas v’shalom*, from the erroneous beliefs contained in the “foreskin of the heart” which is our *yetzer hora* (evil inclination). Our true beliefs about life stem from the depths of our *neshamah*. That is where we can find our true, deep, and unique beliefs, thoughts, and ideals.

In most people, their thoughts, beliefs, and ideals are not their own. Rather, they have learned these thoughts and beliefs from their outside surroundings. But these thoughts are not who they really are.

Only very great people merit thoughts that come from their inner essence. Some people do have original thinking, but it usually stems from conceitedness (*gaavah*) [from a belief that one thinks he is the smartest and that he knows best], etc. But in order for a person to reach a complete redemption of the soul, he must reach an original kind thinking concerning his ideals and beliefs, which are tailored to his own soul [in a non-conceited way].

Although this is a high level to reach, we are describing it so that we can at least have some understanding of it, with *siyata d’shmaya*.

5 - The Will In Exile: When You Only Want What Others Want

Let us now describe the next step of personal redemption, which is to redeem the *ratzon* (will) of the soul. As with the previous steps, we will only give a brief description of it, and later we will explain it more, with the help of Hashem.

We all have many *retzonos* (desires). What causes us to want certain things, as opposed to other things that we don't want? When we want something, we strive to attain what we want. But what causes us to want certain things in the first place?

Most of a person's desires are based on what others want. If others want something, a person may be influenced to also want it. A person is influenced by his peers to want certain things, and he may convince himself that he really wants those things, but in truth, those things are not what he truly desires. Those desires come from his *yetzer hora* (evil inclination).

The *Gemara* says that one of the names of the *yetzer hora* is called “*Tzefuni*”, “hidden one”, for it hides in the heart of a person.⁸ The word “*yetzer*” (inclination, which usually refers to the evil inclination) is from the word *ratzon* (will), another hint that the *yetzer hora* is often the cause of a person's *retzonos*. Therefore, many *retzonos* of a person are not coming from his true self, but from his *yetzer hora*. The *yetzer hora* causes a person to imagine and fool himself that he really wants certain things.

In contrast to this, there are desires in a person which come from a deeper source – from the *ratzon* of his *neshamah*. These desires can eventually influence a person to act upon them in the physical world. These desires are referred to as “*Retzonenu Laasos Retzoncha*”, “It is our will to do Your will”, and also as “We only have one heart, to our Father in Heaven.” The desire to do Hashem's will is the true desire of a person, which comes from his *neshamah*. All other desires stem from the personal “exile” of the soul.

The area of *retzonos* (desires) is vast. The *Nefesh HaChaim* explained that ever since Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V'Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), the *yetzer hora* entered into the soul, and it has mainly been controlling him ever since – particularly, in the area of the person's desires. It makes a person think that these outer desires are really what he wants. Thus, since the *ratzon*/will is the main controlling force in man, the area of *ratzon* is the main part of the soul that is in exile. The will is the motivating factor and the moving force that is behind all of a person's thoughts, speech, emotions, and actions. When the will of a person is not his own, his soul is almost entirely and for the most part in a personal exile.

The Ultimate Redemption Of The Soul: Redeeming The Will

Therefore, the depth of redeeming the soul is largely about redeeming the soul's inner will from its exile.⁹ The main part of the soul's exile is due to the fact that the area of the *ratzon*/will is in an exile, and therefore, redeeming the *ratzon*/will from the desires of the *yetzer hora* is the root of redeeming the soul from its personal exile.

If one merits redeeming his own will, the *Ramchal* writes of such a person that he merits a “personal coming of Moshiach” in his own soul. There is the general coming of Moshiach which we pray for every day, who will come to

⁸ *Succah 52a, Kiddushin 40a*

⁹ *This will be discussed in Chapter 9 – Redeeming The Will*

the masses, and there is a private coming of Moshiach, which one can reach in his own soul. Just like the general coming of Moshiach will mean the general redemption, so is a personal coming of Moshiach the meaning of a personal, private redemption in the soul.

One who frees himself from the desires of the *yetzer hora* and who reveals his inner will, which is the will to do only Hashem's will (as written in the verse, **לעשות רצונך הפצתי**, "*To do Your will, I desired*"), merits a personal coming of Moshiach in his own soul. This level is the goal of all that we will be describing in the coming chapters, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

In Conclusion

We have merited here, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to open this discussion, which is but a general introduction. It described the map of the general areas of the soul, which [from lowest to highest] is: action, feeling, speech, thought, and will.¹⁰ We described here how each of these areas in the soul is exiled, and the understanding of how coming out each of these personal exiles is the root of one's own personal redemption.



Q&A

Q1: *Regarding what the Rav has said at the end of the lesson, is this referring to a redemption of the soul through the "garments" of the soul?*

A: When the garments of the soul become rectified, the soul's potential is able to be actualized from its dormant state, and when it reaches this actualization, it is freed from all of the desires of the evil inclination, and this is the redemption of the soul. When the garments of the soul do not become rectified, the soul is blocked from its actualization, and this itself turns the garments of the soul into an "exile" for the soul. But when the garments of the soul become rectified, the soul is then allowed to shine its light.... The light of the *neshamah* receives its light from the light of the Torah, which receives its light from the light of Hashem.

Q2: *How can a person know if he should approach Rosh HaShanah mainly with feelings of yirah (as taught by the baalei mussar), or if he should approach Rosh HaShanah mainly with feelings of ahavah\love (as explained in Chassidus)?*

A: This is a fundamental question about all of a person's *avodah*. It depends on one's *shoresh* (soul root) and one's *madreigah* (personal spiritual level). This question does not only affect Rosh HaShanah, if one should approach it with *ahavah* or *yirah*. Rather, it is a general question about all of one's *avodah*. The more than one attain self-

¹⁰ In the later chapters, the Rav explains how one can "redeem" three more inner levels to the soul (which are deeper than the will): *taanug* (pleasure), *emunah* (belief), and *havayah* (innermost essence).

recognition of his own soul, the better one will know which particular emotion is suited to his unique personality, and when Rosh HaShanah approaches, he will better recognize if his main approach should be *yirah* or *ahavah*.

As mentioned earlier, this is either a result of better recognizing one's *shoresh* (soul root), or recognizing one's current *madreigah* (personal spiritual level) that he is on, in his current situation. So this is a question about a person's entire *avodah*, not only a question about how to feel about Rosh Hashanah. It is a question of how a person should live his entire life.

Q3: Does this (how a person should approach his entire life) include the integration of *yirah* and *ahavah*, as opposed to mainly choosing *yirah* or mainly choosing *ahavah*...?

A: There is always a need to integrate *yirah* and *ahavah* together, but each person is mainly drawn towards one of these root emotions. In some people, *ahavah* is their root emotion, as opposed to *yirah*. In others, *yirah* is the root emotion, and not *ahavah*. It is never balanced equally in each person. Rather, some people are mainly rooted in *ahavah*, and others are mainly rooted in *yirah*.

If a person is drawn towards *ahavah* as opposed to *yirah*, this may either come from the inner truth in his soul, or, it may be because he is fooling himself, because he would rather skip the stage of *yirah*. The same can be true vice versa: A person may feel drawn towards *yirah* either because this is where the truth in his soul is drawing him towards, or it may just be because he is fooling himself, because he prefers *yirah* over *ahavah* – for example, if he is easily stressed, nervous, and anxious¹¹, he may be easily drawn towards *yirah*, but not because this is his actual soul root. This concept requires individual guidance and it cannot be addressed in a general forum.

Q4: Should a person mainly do what is difficult for him to do, or should a person mainly do things that better suit his personality?

A: Excellent question. Generally speaking, in the beginning stages of a person's improvement, one must make sure that he is doing whatever he is obligated and responsible to do, and that is clear. When it comes to doing things that he is not obligated to do, he should mainly do things that suit his personality. One should also try to do at least one thing that doesn't suit his personality, which is difficult for him to do, and to force himself to do it.

So, generally speaking, a person needs to do mainly what suits his personality [besides for his obligations and responsibilities in life, which he must do anyhow], along with doing at least one thing that is hard for him to do, so that he is balanced. Often a person thinks that a certain undertaking is suitable for his personality to do, when it is really not, because he has never learned how to go against his own personality, and therefore he has never left his comfort zone. But if a person forces himself to do at least one thing that is hard for him to, he has trained himself to leave his comfort zone sometimes, and this will slowly show him what his true personality is and what he should mainly pursue. In fact, the very idea of forcing yourself to do something that doesn't suit your character is what lies at the core of nullifying yourself to do Hashem's will.

Q5: Is there a way for a person to know where his feelings are coming from - if they are coming from his "exiled" feelings that aren't his, or if they are coming from "redeemed" feelings, which are his own?

A: Generally, if a person has not done inner work on himself, the quality of his feelings will be superficial and external. Generally speaking, a person must first identify his strongest positive emotion, and mainly work on strengthening this positive emotion. Along with this, one should also try to identify his most negative emotion and

¹¹ Editor's Note: The Rav added that stresses, nervousness, and anxieties stem from the "nefesh habehaimis", the "animal" level of the soul.

then gradually try to weaken it. As his most negative emotion weakens, he will become clearer about what his true feelings are, and he will also become clearer about his soul in general.

As long as one has not yet weakened his most negative emotion, the negative emotion will obscure him from clarity about his own soul, and it will prevent him from awareness of his own feelings and he won't be able to identify where his feelings are coming from. But when one persists with strengthening his most positive emotion, this gradually weakens the most negative emotion, which allows for clarity of the soul. This is a general description. For a greater understanding, you may refer to **דע אט הרגשותיך** ("Getting To Know Your Feelings").

Q6: *Should one begin to work on his emotions by strengthening his most positive emotion, or by weakening his most negative emotion?*

A: One must also try to weaken his most negative emotion, along with trying to strengthen his most positive emotion. But it is not recommended at all to only work on weakening the worst emotion, without trying to develop the most positive emotion.

There are some people who have a hard time weakening their worst emotion and therefore they only work with strengthening their most positive emotion, and they do not work on their most negative emotion at all, and they may do so if they find this effective. But if a person only works on trying to weaken his worst emotion, without trying to strengthen his most positive emotion, this will not work at all.

Q7: *When I begin to identify where my feelings are coming from, I feel fear, either because I am afraid of change, a fear of changing, or because I am afraid of how others will react to me if I would begin to change. How can I deal with this fear?*

A: Instead of thinking that you will have to make big changes, think that you will only be making small changes, and try to make small changes only. You can only be afraid of change when it is big change. Big change feels scary to the soul. So instead, think that you will only be making small changes. Change is like water dripping on a rock; the rock only withers after many drops of water on it. It happens slowly and in very small amounts, not in one shot. When you have this attitude towards change, then there is no reason to change.

Usually, when you think about change, you wonder how you will get all the way to the end, and you become overwhelmed, because you see how much change you will have to undergo, in order to arrive at the goal. Instead, think that you will be taking small steps and that you are only going to get there slowly and over time.

Q8: *Is there a way to get a child to want the true will of the soul (the desire to do Hashem's will) and to act in a more mature way?*

A: A child contains two parts. One part of a child is that his/her *yetzer hora* dominates, for it is written, "*The inclination of man is evil from his youth.*" The Sages use an expression, "Like a child running away from school". There are many other such statements in our Sages which describe the natural immaturity and rebelliousness of children. Children do not have *daas* (mature understanding), and they are easily overcome by a *ruach shtus* (spirit of folly). On the other hand, the Sages state that the world stands on the merit of the "frivolous chatter" of children – since they are pure from sin, their Torah learning is purer.

A child contains contradictory aspects. On one hand, a child is pure and innocent. This is the quality of *temimus* (earnestness). On the other hand, children lack *daas*, which hampers their ability of self-control. Therefore, the natural evil inclination of man is more dominant in children, because it is unfettered. But because they haven't yet sinned, they resemble the level of Adam before the sin, which was the level of the *Eitz HaChaim*. The inner essence

of a child is close to the level of the *Eitz HaChaim*, but in their external behavior, they do not have that much control over their evil inclination, and that is why they are usually more rebellious by nature. This is a very complex matter.



May you all be written and sealed for a good year, and may all of us merit the general redemption, as well as a personal redemption, and speedily. *Kesivah v'chasima tovah, l'kulam.*

02 | *Redeeming Your Actions*

Redeeming The Soul's Actions

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we will begin to learn about the redemption of the soul. With the help of Hashem, we will begin with the lower stages and then work our way upwards to the higher stages.¹²

This world is called “*olam hamaaseh*”, “the world of actions.” Therefore, a major part of being here on this world involves physical action. There are also additional, higher abilities in the soul, such as speech, emotion, thought, and will. But a large part of our soul is involved with the area of action, being that we live in a “world of action”.

When it comes redeeming the soul in the area of action, we need to consider how the soul is in exile when it comes to action. There are two parts to this: The amount of actions we are doing, as well as the quality of the actions we are doing.

The Amount Of Actions That We Are Doing

Let's analyze the first aspect of actions: the amount of actions we do.

It's possible that a person is performing all that he should, doing the actions he should be doing and which he needs to be doing. But it's also possible that a person is overdoing what he needs to do, or less than what the amount that he needs to be doing. Every person needs to be doing a certain amount of actions that are in line with his unique inner characteristics – some people need to do more, and some people need to do less, but all people need to do a certain amount of action in accordance with their soul's needs.

The amount of action that each person needs to do differs with each person, because it is determined based on one's own soul, so different souls have different needs for action. Some people have a nature to be more active, so they have more of a need to do more action. Others need less action, because they do not have a nature to be that active, and therefore their soul does not need to engage as much in action.

Each person's soul contains the areas of action, speech, emotion, thought, and will, and other forces. But in addition to this, each person also has one area where his uniqueness is more apparent, and which his soul is more rooted in: the area which he or she is mainly meant to pursue.

Some people shine mainly in the area of action. They are very active and they have more of a need to do action, and that is where they excel. Others mainly excel in the area of emotion, or in speech, or in thought, or in their willpower. Since not all souls are equal, not every soul has the same need for action.

Although all people need to be active, not everyone needs to do the same amount. Only those who are meant to mainly pursue action are those who need to put their main energies into how much they are “doing”. Those whose

12 Editor's Note: As mentioned in the previous chapter, the order of stages of inner redemption, in order of ascending order are: action, speech, emotion, thought, will, and desire.

souls are not rooted in action are not meant to pursue action as much. Their main power may lie in their power of speech, or emotion, or thought, or will. Certainly they also need action, but it won't be their main strength.

Knowing If You Are More Of “Action” Person

Therefore, a person must know: “Does my main power lie in the area of doing action? Or does my main power lie in other areas, such as speech, emotion, thought, or will?”

If a person's main power lies in action, and he is instead investing most of his energies into his powers of speech, emotion, thought or will, that means that his power of action is in exile! He has a soul whose main ability is action, and instead he is investing most of his energy into other areas. What will happen? He is not using his main potential, so his main power will remain dormant and it will not be actualized.

The same is true vice versa: If a person is not mainly an “action” person and his main strengths lie in other areas, and he tries to mainly be more of an “action” kind of person, his power of action is also in exile, because action is not supposed to become his main power, and he has “exiled” his power of action by ‘forcing’ it into being his main power. Therefore, one should know if action is his main strength, or if it is not.

Determining If Your Main Strength Is In The Area Of Action

When trying to discover this, here are some subtle points that one needs to pay attention to, in order to determine this.

There are people whose main strength lies in action, but they aren't very active, because they may have a dominant element of earth in their souls which causes them to be drawn towards laziness. They might think that because they have a lazier nature, it must be a sign that action isn't their main area to excel in. But the truth may be just the opposite. Action may be their main strength, and it is just that their laziness is preventing them from revealing their true potential!

The same is true vice versa: A person may be the type whose main strength does not lie in action, yet the circumstances of his life have made him very active, so he thinks that he is mainly an “action” kind of person. In reality, though, his main strengths lie in the areas of emotion, or thought, or will, but he never gets to use these parts of his soul, because he is so busy getting things done. He will do much action, but all of this action stifles his true potential. His ability to perform so much may seem to be an indicator to him that he is meant to be more of an “action” person, but in truth, this does not come from his soul's true potential. Rather, he is running away from himself all the time, by always doing action, when in reality he is meant to mainly pursue other areas, which may be emotion, thought, or will.

Learning About The Soul

For this reason, it is necessary for one to learn about one's own soul. If one does not try to learn about one's own soul, one may never even realize which part of his soul is in exile. If he doesn't know which part of his soul is in

exile, one will not seek its redemption. In order to attain personal redemption, one needs to see which parts of himself are in exile. In order to know that, one has to learn about his own soul [his own unique personality, etc.]

Without this basic self-recognition, a person will never reach inner redemption. The gateway to inner redemption is to recognize how the soul is in exile, and in order to see how the soul is in exile, one must learn about his soul, its general forces and its details.

This particular point, understandably, contains a difficulty, because it is a vast and all-encompassing matter which cannot be covered here extensively.¹³ All I can do here is emphasize how important this knowledge is, and that it is absolutely necessary if a person wants to redeem the soul. The soul must be learned about, on a general level and then on a more detailed level, and then a person can know if his main strength lies in action or in the other areas of the soul.

In fact, from a deeper understanding, a lack of knowledge about one's personal soul is the very depth of being in a personal exile. The Maharal writes that the word *galus* (exile) and *geulah* (redemption) are from the same root letters, *gal*, "reveal"; when something is in a state of concealment, it is exiled, and when it is revealed, it has been redeemed. Therefore, when one doesn't know what the main power of his own soul is, this is the very epitome of a soul in exile. The beginning of redeeming the soul, then, is to get to know one's own soul [by first knowing its main area of strength].

Knowing How Much You Need To Do

We are all in a "world of action", and therefore a big part of life consists of doing action. However, as we have just explained, action is not always the primary aspect in all people.

One needs to figure out if he is the kind of person who mainly belongs to the area of action, or not. As a result, he can then know *how much* action he needs to do, and if it should be his main area of involvement, as opposed to his powers of speech, emotion, thought, and will. If one doesn't know how much action he needs to do, the ratio of actions that he is doing will not be in sync with the amount of energy that he needs to be spending on his speech, emotion, thought or will.

That is all one aspect of action: how much action one needs to do. However, there is also another area of personal exile when it comes to action which we need to explain about.

Avoiding Over-Involvement In Actions

Since we are in a world of action, life brings all kinds of responsibilities with it, such as running a home and being busy all day taking care of the home and the children. Often a person has to do many things which are really above his actual capacity to do. When it comes to responsibilities of life which need to be taken care of, we have no choice, and we must do those actions. But many actions are not necessary to do, and when people do such actions, they are placing their soul in personal exile - even if action is their main strength.

¹³ Editor's Note: The Rav explains the general powers of the soul in "Getting To Know Your Soul" (*Da Es Nafshecha*)

The first part of personal exile when it comes to action is that a person doesn't know how much action he really needs to be doing, which causes him to either be too active or not as active as he should be, which we explained about earlier. But the second aspect of personal exile when it comes to action is, that even after a person knows his limitations when it comes to how much he needs to do, he may be doing many actions that are not true to who he is, and this happens due to the many responsibilities of life which brings so much action with it. This problem, of doing so many things that are not true to one's own soul, is very common.

Knowing Your Limitations, And Minimizing The Amount Of Action You Are Doing

Firstly, however, it still helps to recognize oneself and one's limitations when it comes to action, and this is the already the beginning of personal redemption, as we explained earlier. If it is clear to a person what his main area of strength is, and as a result of this he becomes clear about how much or how little action he needs to do, he is already somewhat clear about himself, and this is the beginning of redeeming the soul. It is not the complete state of redemption of course, because one may still be doing much action that he doesn't really need to do, but one certainly has a degree of personal redemption, by having some knowledge about his own limitations.

Practically speaking, sometimes there is a difficulty in knowing how much action one needs to do. But often, when one acquires a bit of wisdom about life, one can assess this. Sometimes one will notice that he is doing a lot of action simply because he doesn't make a calculation about it, or because he is disorganized. When he discovers this, he will immediately recognize the cause of his over-involvement in so many actions, and naturally, he will cut down on how much he is doing.

For example, sometimes a woman needs cleaning help to come to the house because she is doing so much and therefore she needs more help in the home as a result, so there is a need to hire cleaning help. But once she realizes that she is doing too much in her life and she begins cutting down on all that the activities she is doing, she will have more time for her home and then she will realize that she doesn't need the cleaning help. (One should go about this idea sensibly, of course.)

Taking Breaks While Working

Taking this further, even when a person is doing too much and above his normal capacity, there is a way to minimize this stress, albeit the fact that it is not the best situation to be in. The advice is that a person should not be constantly involved with physical activity. There should be breaks every so often, amidst taking care of all these actions. This applies to both men and women when they are working in the home. In this way, there is at least a bit of space for the soul to "breathe" in between action, and this is somewhat of a redemption for the soul, to some level.

Therefore, a person should make sure not go into action overdrive, by taking breaks every so often. This is also a general course of action to take whenever a person needs to unwind from all of the stresses of life. By taking breaks every so often, one can quiet things down and reach his own internal quieting, and reconnect to his own inner world.

Here we have explained how this idea is necessary as well for anyone who has too much action in his or her life. It applies to men in general, but it is especially applicable to women, who are very involved in the "world of action".

Since women have much more physical activities to take care of, they must be especially careful not to do too action much without stopping in between, by making sure to take breaks every so often, and to find some quiet and temporary serenity.

This can be accomplished either through sitting down and having a drink, or listening to a song, or to chat with a friend (assuming that there is no forbidden speech involved). The point is to unwind from all of the actions that a person is doing. After some time, either a half hour or an hour later (depending on the particular circumstances), she can return to what she's doing, refreshed after the break.

Avoiding Actions That Are Not In Sync With Your Personality

Until now we have explained how the soul can be in exile with regards to *how much* actions one is doing. Now we will explain how the soul may be exiled with regards to the *quality* of the actions one is doing, and how to come out of this exile. Every person has certain actions which are closer to his soul, and some actions which are further. The classic example of this was in the exile of Egypt, where there was "*avodas perach*", "cruel labor" – where the men were given women's labor, and the women were given men's labor. This is a personification of the "cruel labor" of the Egyptian exile. This exile was in Egypt, but in our own generation, is also exists!

It is especially common amongst those who are far from observing Torah and *mitzvos*, who consider men and women to be "equal" in the home: the women are doing tasks of men, and vice versa. They deny the human nature of the different natural capabilities between men and women, which Hashem has created as part of the design of Creation. In reality, there are some tasks which are more designed for men to do, and other tasks which are more designed for women to do. But when people are ignorant of this reality, it is "exile" within the home.

This also applies on a more subtle level whenever a person is doing anything that doesn't suit his or her nature. For example, one type of woman may have a talent for sewing or knitting, while another woman has less talent in this area. Another kind of woman enjoys drawing, whereas other women do not. Another type of woman is good at accounting, whereas other women stay far from anything having to do with calculations and accounting. Each person enjoys different actions, and each person has other actions which aren't enjoyable to them to do. All people are different when it comes to what they enjoy doing, and what they don't enjoy doing.

Gradually, a person needs to get to know himself/herself, as mentioned earlier. In our generation especially, where there all kinds of activities that people pursue, one must know which particular actions are closer to his/her own soul, and which particular actions are not as suitable. One needs to know which actions "fit me", and which actions "do not fit me".

The better a person gets to know which actions are more appropriate for him to do, the better he can better which activities are mainly meant for him to do.

Choosing A Profession That Is In Sync With Your Personality

This point is especially important and fundamental to know before choosing which profession to work in. The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that when one chooses a profession in order to pursue a livelihood (this mainly applies to men who work for a living, but it is also applicable to women), he needs to choose a livelihood that suits his nature.

It would seem that when a person chooses a livelihood, he should choose whichever job will bring in the most money. After all, the point of going to work is to be able to support one's family, so shouldn't it mainly be a job which will bring in the best money? But the *Chovos HaLevovos* says that the attitude should be totally different than this. It is an inner perspective: One has to choose a job that will suit his own unique personality.

If a person cannot find a job that suits his nature, he must not choose that job, says the *Chovos HaLevovos*. If he chooses that job and it's not "for him" to do, he is not only enduring the curse of having to go to work to earn livelihood – he is entering into an entirely new "cursed" kind of labor. He is doing something that is not for him to do, and this is like "exile" upon the soul, with regards to the soul's actions - because he is stifling his area of action.

When a person chooses a job solely because it will bring in more money, or because it's more socially acceptable to choose such a job, or because it's considered more prestigious, most of the time, he will become a workaholic, from morning until night. If he has chosen a job that does not really suit his personality, he has placed most of his life into an exile, and deliberately so, and the curse upon mankind of having to earn livelihood becomes increased so much more.

This idea does not only apply to working and earning livelihood, which is a major area of life, for it takes up much time of a person's day. It is also applicable to any of the actions that a person does. Here is a fundamental example of this. If a woman in the home needs help with something and she has a few daughters that are around, she needs to use some of her wisdom about life to know which activities are suitable for each of her daughters to do. If one of her daughters is not good at doing a certain chore in the home, she should not ask that daughter to do it, and she should instead ask the daughter who is better at doing this chore. Through this, she avoids the problem of placing another "exile" upon the souls of her daughters, by not making them do things that don't fit their personality.

And in a case where a woman does not have any daughters home to help her, she should have a cleaning lady to all the tasks in the home which she is not naturally good at, so that she doesn't do things that don't fit her nature (and she thereby avoids placing her soul's actions into exile).

Where To Draw The Line

The following point must be clarified, though. We are not saying that a person should only do things that fit his personality and to avoid doing things that a person finds uncomfortable. This is simply not possible, because in the reality of life that Hashem has created, a person must take care of many different actions and responsibilities, which are not always suitable to his nature.

We have said that the main activity a person is involved with, his or her profession, should be a job that fits the person's nature. This is not always possible, but one should try, as long as it is possible, to choose a job that is suitable to his or her personality.

But when it comes to various activities that are performed in the home and elsewhere, it is impossible to only do the activities and errands that will suit your nature, and to avoid things that don't. In spite of this, it is still possible for one to lessen the amount of activities that don't suit his or her nature, such as through hiring cleaning help, and by making sure not to give chores to any of the children that they aren't good at doing.

Finding Your Favorite Activity

Even more so, in order to utilize the potential of our soul's true power of action, which is the light of the soul's redemption, every person needs to know of a particular activity that is closest to his or her soul, and to make sure to regularly do that activity.

This kind of activity, whatever it may be [you will know what it is only after getting to know yourself very well], is your soul's power of true power of action. It is this activity that can bring out your potential to its fullest. It is always an action that you have a particular enjoyment in doing.

For example, some people have a pleasure in carpentry, in taking pieces of wood and then building structures from it. Even if such a person cannot actually become a carpenter, the fact is that he enjoys cutting pieces of wood and building things from it. Such a person, every so often, should get hold of some pieces of wood, cut them, and build things from it. Since he enjoys doing it, and this is his favorite activity, he should fill this need every so often.

Understandably, this is an outlet which must be pursued sensibly. One should not waste all of his day on such activities just because he enjoys doing them. He should just make sure to give it some outlet and expression, by doing this activity every so often, in order to fill his soul's need for this action.

When a person makes sure to practice all of the above, he reveals the root of his soul's power of action, and this is the light of the redemption of the soul, with regards to the power of action. Without doing this, one never utilizes the true potential of his power of action, and it remains exiled.

A person should try to discover what his "primary activity is", which is meant for him or her to pursue, and one should then make sure to do those activities. One may have a list of three or four specific activities that he or she enjoys doing, and one should discover which action is he enjoys doing the most, which is meant to become his "primary action". After figuring out what it is, one should make sure to regularly do that action.

In Conclusion

In summary, the exile of the soul with regards to action is when a person is either doing too much or too little action, and when a person is doing things that do not fit his personality. The soul's power of action is "redeemed" "from its exile when a person makes sure to do the main activity which his soul is meant to pursue.

We cannot completely come out of the exile of the soul, being that we are all still within the general exile. But what is possible is for us to lessen the degree of the exile on our souls.

The complete redemption will come in its time in the future, and we pray that it should come already today, with the help of Hashem. But until the complete Redemption arrives, when we are still in exile, we cannot reach our own inner redemption completely, since we are still within the general exile. However, we can certainly lessen the exile upon ourselves, and to that degree, we can experience inner redemption. That is the perspective behind all that we are explaining here, with *siyata d'shmaya*.



Q&A

Q1: Which factor determines what kind of actions a person needs to do that will be uniquely tailored to his own soul? Is the source of this the neshamah, or does it come from the physical experiences a person has went through, such as how he grew up, environmental factors, etc.?

A: Good question. Any behavior of a person can be influenced either by internal factors within the person, or from external factors in one's life. A person may act a certain way because of external factors that shaped his personality, because that is how he grew up, that is what he saw, and etc. Or, he may be acting based on internal factors, his inside. When he is acting in a way that comes from his inside, this is coming from his own *nefesh* (lower soul).

The *nefesh* is rooted in a higher source, the *neshamah* (Divine soul), but the actions mainly come from the area of the soul that is called "*nefesh*", which is the root of a person's power of action. Each person needs to do actions that are in accordance with his unique personality, and accordingly, that is how he can redeem his soul [in the area of action].

...So it is possible for this [a person's main area of activity that he is meant to pursue] to be influenced either from external factors, or from internal factors. To say this in subtler terms, it may not always come from the *neshamah*, and it can instead be coming from the *nefesh*, because the "world of action" is rooted in the *nefesh*.

Q2: Is it possible to know whether this [the main activity that a person needs to pursue] is coming from the nefesh, or from the neshamah? Also, is there a practical difference of where it's coming from?

A: There is certainly a difference, because if a person's main area of activity in life is stemming from external/environmental factors, it is not coming from the person himself, and this is the antithesis to a primary part of one's *avodah*, which is to reveal one's own unique potential. Sometimes, anything a person does which is influenced by external/environment factors can have nothing to do with the person's unique essence, yet the person is mainly doing this particular action anyway. In either case, though, a primary part of one's *avodah* to reveal one's true, unique potential. That answers the question of if there is a difference or not.

How does one know it, though? By attaining internal quiet, one can better recognize if he's doing something that suits his personality or not.

Q3: How can a person know if action is his primary power, as opposed to the powers of speech, emotion, thought, or will?

A: The more a person gets used to acting from within himself, and from getting used to internal quieting, the more that his actions will become deeper, and then he will feel more connected to his inner being. From that, one will slowly be able to identify where the main strength of his soul lies in.

Q4: Can a person fluctuate between what his primary power is, depending on his current stage on life? Can it change, based on the current circumstances in one's life?

A: Yes, it can definitely change. For example, a child's main strengths may change by the time he is a teenager or adolescent, and a teenager or adolescent may change entirely by the time he is an adult. The changes happen due to maturation in general, and they are also influenced due to various events and periods in a person's life, which move the soul in different directions. So there can be always be changes in whatever stage of life a person is up to (which are usually subtler kinds of changes), and certainly there are changes of orientation when different stages of maturation are reached, such as going from childhood to adolescence, or from adolescence to adulthood (which are more dramatic kinds of changes). But the root primary power of the person will always remain as it is.

Q5: *I used to do a certain action because I thought that this action was my primary action to do in life, and then I had to give it up because I realized that it wasn't really for me to do, because it felt pressurizing for me to do, and I also that it was making me conceited. Is there a way for me to know how certain actions are meant for me to do?*

A: Feeling conceited while doing a certain action is not a sign that the action isn't for you to do. It is merely a sign that the action isn't being done with totally pure intentions. As for how a person can know if a certain action is meant for him to pursue or not, that is related to an earlier question, and the answer to that was that the more a person is acting from within himself and from having internal quiet, he can slowly become more connected to his inner being and then he will know better which actions he should mainly pursue or not.

Q6: *What does it mean exactly to act more from within oneself? Does it mean that a person feels sippuk (fulfillment) when doing it? What does it mean exactly to act more from within?*

A: Feeling fulfillment from what you do is the result. The more a person gets used to doing things not because of what others are thinking and not because of what they are doing, and instead he does things because he feels this is the right thing for him to do, he is acting more from within himself. This is the beginning of inner redemption. Slowly with time, as a person continues like this, he will act from a much more inner place in himself, and then he will feel great *sipuk* (fulfillment) from what he does, but that is a much later stage, and it is but the result of the entire process. The first step, then, is to make sure that you are doing things not because of what others are thinking, what everyone else does, what is socially acceptable, what others will think about me, etc. Instead, do what you feel is right for you to do. Slowly as a person gets used to this, he enters further [into the path towards inner redemption]. Then he will be able to slowly awaken his own inner potential, and then he is closer to feeling a personal sense of fulfillment from what he does.

Q7: *Are all the components of inner redemption mentioned [action, speech, emotion, thought and will] regarding the level of "nefesh" alone, or are they also applicable to the higher levels, such as "ruach" and "neshamah"?*

A: In general, action is a power of the "nefesh", emotion comes from the "ruach", and thought comes from the "neshamah". But, to be more specific, when a person is living life at the level of "nefesh", he may either be on the level of *nefesh d'nefesh* (a "nefesh" within "nefesh"), or *ruach d'nefesh* (a "ruach" within "nefesh") or *neshamah d'nefesh* (a "neshamah" that is within "nefesh"), etc.

Q8: *Is there a way to identify if something is stemming from my nefesh, or from my ruach, or from my neshamah?*

A: This is a deep point to know. Most people have not reached beyond the general level that is called "nefesh". In order to be on the level of "ruach" [the level of the soul higher than "nefesh", which is emotion], a person would have to be in a constant state of feeling emotions. In order for a person to be on the level of "neshamah" [which is

deep thought], he would have to be constantly connected to deep thought. There are some people who can live on this level, but they are few and rare. All other people live at the level of “*nefesh*”, and they can move up and down within the “*nefesh*” itself, but they do not reach the general levels that are called “*ruach*” and “*neshamah*”.

Q9: *The Rav in previous times has used the word “neshamah”, such as reflecting into the fact that we are a “neshamah”, etc. and now the Rav is using the word “nefesh”. When the Rav said “neshamah”, did the Rav mean the general neshamah, or the neshamah that is within “nefesh”?*

A: The soul has five names: *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*. However, the soul is generally called by either of these two names – “*Nefesh*” or “*Neshamah*”. Sometimes when I speak about *nefesh* or *neshamah*, I am speaking in more specific terms, either about the *nefesh* or the *neshamah*, and sometimes I am speaking in general terms. When I spoke about “*neshamah*” I was speaking in general terms and not in specific terms, so I did not mean the *neshamah* specifically, but even the *nefesh*. Generally, when I speak about *neshamah*, I am speaking about the level of *neshamah* that is within the experience of *nefesh*.

Q10: *If a person was used to doing a certain action which he or she got satisfaction from, and then he or she gave it up because he realized it wasn't appropriate according to halachah to do – how can one replace that action or talent that was given up?*

A: This is a very delicate question. Maybe if you can give more details of what you mean I can then understand what you are asking about.

Q11 (Continuation of Q10): *I used to figure-skate in public and then I gave it up because I realized it was not appropriate. Perhaps I can do it in a private setting and in such a way I can give expression to this talent of mine...?*

A: This is not your main talent in your life, it is just an aspect of childhood fun which is seeking to express itself. It is enjoyable for you to do, but that doesn't make it your primary action in life. It feels good for you only because it is a youthful experience which you enjoy. I am confident that this is not your main action in life.

There is a verse, “*For the inclination of man is evil from his youth*” – at first a person thinks that what he “wants” is who “he” truly is, but when one comes to know himself better and he reaches is true “I”, he then realizes what that those actions are not really meant for him to pursue and want, and instead he is led to discover which actions he really needs to pursue.

Q12: *The Rav said that one should take breaks in between working, so as not to do too much action. Why didn't the Rav suggest that part of taking a break is to use our power of ratzon (will) to connect to what we are doing, and in that way it will make it easier for us to do?*

A: That is a very good suggestion in concept, but in the beginning of one's improvement, this is not practical to implement. In most cases, a person's *ratzon* to do a certain action is not that strong. It is certainly a worthy point in one's *avodah*, but it is an advanced stage and it will only work for one who is very in touch with his or her internal world. So it is not the advice for those who are beginning to improve.

Q13: *What can we say to a person in order to help him take a different course of action, when the person thinks he is doing the right thing and really he is not?*

A: First we need to get the person to open up his inner world and to help him become aware that not all actions which people do are true to who they are. First we would need to get the person to simply become aware of this concept, and only after that can we work further with the person.

03 | *Redeeming Your Feelings*

Emotions In Exile

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we shall continue explaining how to attain “redemption of the soul”. Previously, we dealt with redeeming the “actions” of the soul. Now we will explain, with *siyata d'shmaya*, how to redeem the emotions of the soul. We will see how the emotions are in exile, as well as how as we can redeem them from their exile.

The first aspect of how the emotions are in exile is when one's emotions are not being activated from their potential state, and they remain dormant and hidden. This may be true about a person's emotions in general, or they may affect only some of one's emotions.

There are verses and statements of *Chazal* which compare the Egyptian exile to a fetus in its mother, and the redemption from Egypt to the birth of the fetus. In the same vein, when one's emotions are either generally or partially in exile, they are not being actualized from their potential state, and this is one kind of exile to the emotions.

The second aspect of exile to the emotions is because a person has many different kinds of emotions that come from the soul, when the emotions are not given order, they mix with each other, and this creates a form of exile to the emotions. This is like an “*Erev Rav*” (Mixed Multitude) within our own emotions – a detrimental mixture of many forces within us.

In summary, there are two kinds of exile to our emotions. The first kind of exile to our emotions is when our emotions are not being actualized and they remain in their potential, unutilized state. A second kind of exile to our emotions is that even when our emotions are being utilized, they are an unsorted mixture of many dispersed forces, taking place all at once.

Three Factors That Contribute To Emotional Development: Nature, Environment, And Experiences

Let us first deal with the first kind of “exile” to our emotions: where the emotions of a person remain dormant and they aren't being actualized.

There are some people who have been born with a more emotional personality, and there are others who are born with a personality in which their emotions are more covered over and concealed. When it comes to those who are born with more revealed emotion, there may be some people within this type who are born with an extremely emotional personality.

Besides for the nature a person is born with, though, there are also experiences in life a person may go through, which will either reveal his emotions more, or, just the opposite – the experiences one has gone through may cause him to become emotionally hardened.

A person may have been more with a personality that shows less emotion, but he has grown up in a home where he was raised by very emotional parents, and therefore he may gain a more emotional side to his personality as he grows up, even though this is not the nature he was born with. He has grown up in an environment where emotions

are revealed, and this can cause him to gain a more emotional personality, enabling him to reveal the power of emotion from its potential state. The same is true vice versa – a person may have been born with a more emotional personality, but one grew up in a home where the parents did not show that much emotion, and this may cause one's own emotional personality to close up and go into hiding. Or, if the environment around one does not express that much emotion, one may want to please the environment around him and try to make himself less emotional, teaching himself to have less emotion, in order to fit in with his direct surroundings. This is especially the case if one's parents were less emotional, where one will try to be more like his parents' unemotional nature so that one can feel more accepted by them.

Even more so, a person may have grown up in an environment or home which not only shows less emotion than he does, but which belittles those who express their emotions. In most of these cases, the children coming from such homes will [subconsciously] train themselves to close off their emotions, even if they were born with a more emotional kind of personality, because they cannot handle being shamed by others for their emotional personality.

Besides for environmental factors, there are also certain events and experiences we go through in life which may either reveal, or close off, our emotions. Any experience we go through has some effect on our emotions – for better, or for worse. In particular, major events of a person's life will especially shape a person's emotions, either revealing them more, or hardening them. If a person goes through an especially painful event in his life, or an extremely joyous event in his life, this can open his heart to have more powerful feelings. But if an event was so painful that a person could not process the pain, he may teach himself to close off from his feelings altogether.

Choosing To Develop Our Emotions

We have so far explained three factors which contribute to the development of one's emotions: the nature a person is born with, the environment a person grows up in, and the major events a person goes through in life.

However, in spite of these three factors which contribute greatly to the shaping of our feelings, we have the power of *bechirah* (free will), though, to choose how much we will reveal our emotions, or how much we will keep them concealed. Although Hashem has placed us into situations which may have either developed our emotions or hardened them, He has also given us the power to choose to develop our emotions and reveal them more.

We cannot, *chas v'shalom*, blame everything on the nature we were born with, or on the environment we grew up in, or on the events we have gone through in life. That is a superficial way of thinking, which comes from the beliefs of gentiles. We, as Jews, are "believers, sons of believers", and we believe that Hashem has given us the power to choose. There are definitely factors that contribute to the shaping of our emotions, as we have explained, but Hashem has given us the choice right now to either reveal our emotions... or keep them closed.

How indeed can we choose to develop our emotions and reveal them more, if they have been stifled in our childhood or because of what we have gone through in life?

Becoming Aware Of Your Active Emotions

Some people show less emotion, but they are still very sensitive to insults, and they can feel easily slighted if someone attacks their honor or doesn't treat them in a way that is sensitive to their feelings. However, this is the

downside to being more emotional – the aspect of being sensitive to insults. Our aim here is not to develop our emotions in a way that will make us more sensitive to insults. Rather, we are referring to basic emotional experiences, such as joy, sadness, etc. One must ask himself: How much emotion is revealed in my life? Which emotions are normally expressed?

Again, this is not a question about how sensitive you are, like if you are easily insulted or not. As we have explained, there are people who do not express that much emotion, but they may still be very sensitive. Clearly, then, emotion and sensitivity are not the same thing. Here we are dealing with the power of emotion, not sensitivity. The question one needs to ask himself is: “How much emotion is revealed in my life? What are the emotions that I experience?”

In some people, the emotions are active, and in others, the emotions are closed off. There are also people who show too much emotion, and they are overly reactive when they get emotional. Whatever your personality type is, you need to know how emotional you are: Fairly emotional, non-emotional, or very emotional.

When There Is Too Much Emotion: How To Attain Emotional Balance

There are generally three levels in the soul (in order of highest power to lowest power): thought, emotion, and action. When there is too much emotion, a person needs to balance himself out with thought and action. Sometimes emotional balance will need to be attained through thought, and sometimes a person needs to make use of some action in order to attain balance in his emotions. A person may get involved with heavy thinking, or a very focused kind of action, which can each balance out his strong amount of feeling.¹⁴

That concerns one who has a strong, heavy amount of emotion.

When There Is Too Little Emotion: How To Open Your Emotions

However, in this lesson, we are mainly discussing one who shows less amount of emotion [whose emotions are in exile and who needs to ‘redeem’ his emotions from exile]. The *avodah* for this will be as follows.

Step 1 – Writing Down Your Feelings Each Day

If one doesn’t show that much emotion, he needs to open his emotions by taking a paper and pen and writing down his feelings each day. That is the first step.

Then, one should take this further and write down which feelings are positive, and which feelings are negative, on two different columns on the paper. On the right column, write down any positive feelings you feel. On the left column, write down any negative feelings. There should also be a middle column, for any feelings you’re not sure about. On top of the columns, write down your strongest feelings, in order of intensity. Do this for both the positive and negative feelings.

¹⁴ Editor’s Note: This is explained further by the Rav in *Getting To Know Your Feelings: Part II: Chapter 6: Balanced Feelings*.

This may sound new to many people, and since people often are not used to doing this, it may be difficult to write down these lists, perhaps even very difficult. But it is all a matter of habit. It helps a person simply become aware of his feelings.

The point of this is not to be able to release the emotions from their potential state. Rather, the point is to set aside time for writing down your feelings, with concentration, investing your time and thoughts into it - and this itself will help you become more truthful about your own feelings and to get in touch with them.

This exercise is not just a recommendation, but a way of living life and to attain organization of your inner world. It helps build a person's entire inner world: the world of the soul.

Getting used to this will not take a day or two. It can take time until a person reaches more clarity about his emotions. Eventually, after getting used to this practice of making these lists, after having done much thinking, a person can eventually discover what his strongest positive emotion is.

Step 2 - Finding Your Strongest Positive Emotion

When a person's emotions are concealed, how can he discover it? He needs to find some emotion that is somewhat revealed in his life. He may have very little emotion in his personality, but he surely has a little bit that is consciously revealed. He should try to discover what that emotion is.

Again, the point here is not to try to release your emotions from their concealed state. Rather, the point here is more basic. It is to simply find the little amount of positive emotion that is revealed in your life and to just be aware of it.

You should try to find the strongest positive emotion that you recognize in your life, as opposed to a weaker positive emotion. That way, you will have an easier time releasing this positive emotion further. If you try to work with a positive emotion in your life which isn't that strong, it will be too difficult for you to try to bring it out more. So instead, find your strongest positive emotion, and that way, you will have a much easier time with releasing your emotion from its hidden state into a more revealed state.

(This should only be done with a strong positive emotion, not with a strong negative emotion.)

Through becoming aware of your strongest positive emotion, you will be closer to releasing it from its potential state, which will in turn open all of your emotions.

Example – Revealing Your Love More

It is hard to give examples of how to do this, because each person is different when it comes to this. But we will give some examples so that we can have some idea of this.

A person can think: "How can I reveal my love more? If I love someone, what are the things I can do that will make the love greater? Can I give him something that expresses my love? Can I say something or write something to the person that expresses my love? Can I think deeply about my love to the person (which can cause the love to become greater)?"

Make sure to focus on the emotion of love. See how love is present in your emotions, and think how you can expand this love further.

We have used the example of love, but the same is true for all of the other emotions as well. Identify a positive emotion in yourself and think of how you can expand it further. Become aware of it, deeply, not just as an intellectual fact, but by being aware that there is an emotion here. That emotion may be love, joy, or some other positive emotion.

So, practically speaking, identify your strongest positive emotion and then expand it further, by being aware that this emotion is now becoming revealed more from its potential state.

In Conclusion

We have described here the first part of leaving the “exile” of the emotions, which is to go from a state of locked feelings to a state of revealed feelings. The second part of leaving the exile of the emotions, leaving behind the confusion within our own emotions, requires a separate lesson to explain.



Q&A

Q1: *I always thought that releasing your emotions is not a good thing, but the Rav has explained here that it's a good thing to do. What is the proper perspective about releasing emotions? Is it a good thing or not?*

A: There is a *mitzvah* of the Torah of *ahavas Hashem* (to love Hashem) and *yiras Hashem* (to fear Hashem). This is a release of positive emotion. However, because there are also negative emotions, people are often cautious about releasing their emotions in general, out of concern that this will cause them to release their negative emotions. But this is a mistake. If a person tries to keep his negative emotions inside, he will stifle them, and at a certain point, they will explode outward. The proper perspective is to deal with these feelings, in the proper way. We should never completely release all of our negative feelings at once. Rather, we must deal with each of these negative feelings, slowly, one by one. But we should never let negative emotions fester inside ourselves, because usually they will explode outward some time later.

Q2: *I have learned about the concept of the trait of hishtavus (lit. “state of equilibrium”), and I understand it to mean that since every situation is equal, it doesn't matter if a person has strong emotion or weak emotion towards you, such as if someone gives you a compliment or he doesn't; it doesn't make a difference, since every situation is equal to another. How does this concept fit in with what the Rav has taught here about freeing the emotions? Why should one become aware of his\her feelings, since there is a viewpoint of hishtavus which makes all situations equal to one another....?*

A: *Hishtavus* is an extremely high spiritual level mentioned in *Chovos HaLevovos*. It only comes after one has richly developed his emotions. If one tries to reach *hishtavus* before developing and clarifying his emotions, he is trying to skip levels, and he will instead stifle his emotions, rather than reaching *hishtavus*. Only after one is clear about one's emotions can one work on acquiring the level of *hishtavus*.

Q3: *The Rav has explained here a method of revealing the emotions by way of using one's thoughts, which makes use of our intellect. But we also know that it is also possible to reveal the emotions by way of the emotions themselves. Is the approach explained here by the Rav the only way in which the emotions can be revealed from their potential state?*

A: There is never any one way in a person's *avodah*, whether it concerns the work one must do with his own personal soul, or whether it comes to man's general task in serving his Creator. There is certainly a way to reveal the emotions by way of the emotions themselves.

However, to clarify, the way that was explained in this lesson is not just a way to reveal the emotions by way of the mind. It is rather a way to reveal the emotions from the existing emotions themselves, by way of the mind. So it is not just using the mind, and it is rather like a 'middle path' that runs between our mind and emotions.

There is certainly a way to reveal the emotions by way of the emotions themselves, and there is an advantage as well as a disadvantage to that method. The advantage is that it is a more direct approach, dealing directly with the emotions, as opposed to dealing with the issues on an external and superficial level. It is a more inner approach. But the disadvantage of this method is that usually the person who reveals his emotions through "becoming more emotional" will become emotionally dysfunctional. The emotions will be off-base. A person will then have to make use of his mind and direct his thoughts in order to stabilize his emotions, and indeed, this can work.

However, here we have presented an opposite approach: Instead of exposing the emotions in a way that will lead to problems and then taking care of them with the mind, the approach we explained here is to use the mind and emotions together: to release the emotions, through the mind and emotions together. In this way, the emotions are being opened through the mind.

Practically speaking, however, if a person feels however that the approach of working with the emotions directly will work better - which is often the case with women, who have a stronger amount of emotion – then the way to go about this is as follows (briefly): Identify an emotion, and keep your focus on it. This further reveals that emotion, with the more you concentrate and focus on it. However, even when using this approach, which uses the emotions directly, you will still need use your minds to carefully scrutinize your emotion, to make sure that the emotion isn't going too far, to make sure the emotion doesn't get thrown out of whack, and to maintain clear awareness to the emotion.

Q4: *If one has emotions that are very strong, it probably won't help to use the mind to maintain emotional regularity, since this kind of person has an intense experience of emotion, and he has only a superficial experience of his intellectual mind. Will such a person be helped by using his mind to direct his emotions (since this kind of person can only use his mind to deal with the external surface of his feelings, and not the depth of his feelings)?*

A: This is a subtle question and I will try to answer it as precisely as possible. If someone has a strongly emotional personality, he identifies his emotions as his "I", whereas his intellectual abilities are deemed by him as external and superficial. When he uses his intellect to deal with his feelings, he will feel as if he is using an external, superficial ability to deal with his "I", and therefore he will find his intellectual abilities of little value, when he tries to deal with his emotions. He will feel that he is not getting through to the depth of his emotions. But he can become deeper than this, and he can learn to identify his power of intellect as his "I". When one has that self-perception towards himself, he will feel that using his intellect to deal with his emotions really does get to the depth of his emotions.

Q5: *If a person has two different kinds of strong emotions and he wants to reveal these emotions, should he deliberately place himself into an emotionally charged situation which would reveal those emotions more?*

A: Certainly a person can have more than one strong emotion, but there is always one particular emotion that is stronger, so he has less awareness of his other emotions, and more awareness to his particularly strong emotion. But there certainly exist other strong emotions in a person.

As for the question if a person should deliberately place himself into situations that would reveal his other emotions, it depends. If it is an extreme situation, the general response to this would be, no. If it is not an extreme situation, then sometimes, one may place himself into such situations. That is one way of *avodah*.

Another way of *avodah* is to begin to work with the strongest positive emotion that is already revealed, and then a person will become more aware of his emotions, and this will make him aware of his other emotions as well.

These are two options to take. To repeat, one should only place himself in normal situations which can reveal his emotions, and he should not place himself into abnormal, complicated situations in order to reveal his emotional side, because that is a dangerous path to take.

Q6: *Can a person place himself into a situation which is not extreme, in order to reveal his emotions more?*

A: Anything which causes you to have a strong emotional experience is not something that is recommended. If Hashem has placed you into that situation, then you need to utilize that situation to its fullest, but in most cases (with some rare exceptions) it is not recommended to place one's soul into a situation which would cause him to become strongly emotional. Only situations which cause you to have a subtle experience of your emotions, is recommended.

Q7: *Why did the Rav say earlier that a person can identify his "I" as his thoughts, if the thoughts are only a garment of the "I", and not the "I" itself?*

A: There is the "I" itself, and there are the garments of the "I". The soul's garments are action, speech, and thought. When we discussed identifying your "I" as either the thoughts or the emotions, we did not mean the actual "I" itself, but the garments that are closer to the "I". If a person identifies his feelings as being closer to his actual "I" and his thoughts as being further from his "I", we explained that he will have a difficulty using his power of thought to deal with his emotions. But if a person identifies both his emotions and thoughts as being close to his "I", he can easily use his thoughts to deal with his feelings.

With most people, the emotions are stronger than the thoughts, and this is especially the case with women. They will perceive their emotions as being closer to their actual "I", whereas they perceive their thoughts as being further than their "I". This does not necessarily mean that they will perceive their feelings as their very "I". It just means that they identify their feelings as being closer to their actual "I". Therefore, when a person learns to identify that really it is his thoughts which are closer to his "I" than his feelings are, he will have an easier time dealing with his feelings, using his power of thought.

04 | *Redeeming Your Speech*

The Exile And Redemption Of Our Speech

We have so far discussed the exile and redemption of our actions and emotions. We will now progress to discuss the exile and redemption of our power of speech.

In our speech, there are three factors: 1) The **amount** of speech we talk. 2) The **content** of the speech we are talking. 3) The **manner** in which we are talking.

The Amount of Our Speech

With men, speech is mainly meant to be used in learning Torah, and *Chazal* state that the main part of exertion in Torah is through verbalizing it.¹⁵ Regarding women, *Chazal* state that “ten measurements of speech descended onto the world, and nine of them were taken by the women (the other ten percent went to the men).¹⁶

That is true in the general sense. In the individual sense, regarding the amount of speech that we talk, *Chazal* revealed that every soul has a certain amount of words it will say when it comes to down onto This World.

If we would know the allotted mount of words on this world for each of our souls, it would be easier for us to utilize our speech correctly. But since we do not, we either speak too much, or too little. Either of these situations is an “exile” to our speech.

No one can tell us how much we need to speak, and how much we don't. But we can be aided by the words of the Ramban, who wrote: “Think before you talk, about what you will say.”¹⁷ When people don't think before they talk, they can talk endlessly and without restraint. This is especially true since speech moves very freely, as the *Chovos HaLevovos* says, that “the tongue is the lightest part of the body”.

Thinking Before You Talk, About What You Are About To Say.

Therefore, the truthful way to go about speaking is to first think about what you will say, as the Ramban says. In addition, you should also think before you talk if it will be forbidden speech or not. And even if it is not forbidden speech, it may just be extraneous talk which you don't need to speak.

Before talking, ask yourself: “Am I speaking something permitted, or forbidden? Also, am I speaking about something necessary, or something that is not necessary?” If it is necessary for you to talk right now, it is usually also the will of Hashem that you speak those words, but if you do not need to talk, it is an indicator that Hashem must does want you to say those words.

However, this is difficult to do if you get a phone call and the like, when you can get into a long conversation and you weren't prepared beforehand to think about what you want to say. Women can find this especially hard, because women naturally do a lot more talking, and if they would always have to think about what they are about to say before talking, they would find that this makes their conversations boring and tedious.

¹⁵ *Eruvin 54a*

¹⁶ *Kiddushin 49a*

¹⁷ *Iggeres HaRamban*

Long conversations between most people, which usually contains forbidden speech such as *lashon hora* and other evil speech (*Rachmana litzlan*- may Hashem save us from this) can basically be labeled as the “exile” to our speech. Let us then learn about how to redeem our speech from its state of exile.

Setting Amounts Of Time For Your Conversations.

The first thing we can try doing for this is to set a time for the conversation. Make boundaries for the conversation, and in this way, the speech will be somewhat controlled.

Allowing Another Person To Talk.

Secondly, as you are talking to another, try to also listen better to the other person, by pausing your words every so often, giving the other some “space” in the conversation, so that the other can respond back to you.

Most people, when talking, will talk continuously, and they don't give the other person a chance to say what he or she wants to say. This is an obvious lack of *derech eretz* (basic manners), but here we are addressing an additional point. We are recommending here that one should try to listen better to the other in his conversations, not only for the purposes of maintaining *derech eretz*, but because when you listen to another, you have your own quiet time to think about what you want to say, and then you gain the advantage of thinking before you talk.

The more you practice listening and giving another person a chance to speak, the more you strengthen your power of thought, and then you will find yourself able to think before you talk about what you should say.

Lessen The Pace Of Your Talking.

In addition, we should also speak at a slower pace, and not so quickly. When people talk quickly, they can't think as much about what they are saying. When you talk at a drop of a slower pace, you are calmer and you can think better about what you are saying.

Some people talk too slow, some people talk at an average pace, and some people talk so fast that you can't process what they are saying. Every person needs to slow down his speech a bit, so that he can be able to think about what he wants to say before he says it.

Take Breaks While Talking.

Besides for this, a person should also give ‘spaces’ in his talking, deliberately stopping his speech every so often, so that he can allow himself to think while talking. And when another person talks to you, before answering him back right away, take a few moments to think about what you want to say.

Understandably, we need to go about all of this in a way that is not extreme. If we talk too slowly, our speech may lack vitality to it, and this will be unpleasant to others. We need to use this idea sensibly and we need *siyata*

d'shmaya to utilize it properly, to be able to talk slowly to others, and to think before we talk and when we talk, but in a way that is not causing discomfort to others.

The Content And Manner Of Our Speech

The second factor of our speech is **what** we speak about: the content of our speech.

a) Learn The Laws of Speech. Jews all over the world learn two *halachos* a day of *sefer Chofetz Chaim*, the laws of forbidden speech. This is the first thing a person should do (in order to rectify the area of speech): to learn the *sefarim* that discuss the laws of speech, what kind of conversation is permitted, and what kind of conversation is not permitted, etc.

Our Sages state that *lashon hora* means to “speak evil”. The exile of Egypt was under the wicked rule of Pharaoh, from the words “*peh ra*”, “evil mouth”,¹⁸ for Pharaoh’s mouth spoke evil. (In contrast to this, our redeemer, Moshe, was the mouth who spoke holiness, and which took us out of the exile involving evil speech, *peh ra*, Pharaoh). Speaking evil is thus the personification of the exile of Egypt, and on a personal level, when one speaks evil words, this is an exile to his power of speech. Thus when one leaves behind evil speech, he has a “redemption” to his speech.

b) Avoid Negative Talk. Even more so, even when a person is not saying *lashon hora*, but he is simply being negative in his speech, such as by talking about problems, this is also a subtle form of “*lashon ra*”. It is ‘evil’ speech in the sense that it is negative kind of speech. We should try to keep our speech positive. Sometimes we also need to speak about things that are negative, but we need to train ourselves that most of our speech should be about positive and happy things.

Many times people meet each other and they are conversing, and even if the conversations do not contain *lashon hora* (gossip), *motzi shem ra* (falsely slandering others), and words about *machlokes* (strife and dissension), people will tend to speak about their various problems and issues. People often speak about their problems with their financial situation, their health, their marriage, their children, the bad weather, etc. This is the usual tone of the conversation: it is about problems in their personal lives. Most speech that people speak with others is about the problems, issues, and stresses that they are facing. When a person mainly speaks about his problems, this is also a form of “*peh ra*”, a mouth that speaks negativity.

Sometimes a person needs to unload to another person about his problems, and indeed, *Chazal* advise this. “A worry in the heart of man, speak it over to others.”¹⁹ Speaking to another person about our problems may help solve the issue, but we know that even simply unburdening oneself to another about our problems feels relieving and helpful to us, even when we don’t find a solution to our issue.

But in spite of this, this should not become the main form of our speech. Often when people start talking about their problems, it is all that they will talk about all day. It is as if the person is stuck in the mud and he keeps rolling it in all day, without pulling himself out of the mud. We need to train ourselves as much we can to avoid speaking about our problems and issues, and to focus our speech on things that are positive.

¹⁸ Zohar: Parshas Va'eria: 25b

¹⁹ Yoma 75a

c) Avoid Talking About Other People. Additionally, *Chazal* state that one should not praise other people to others, because this leads to speaking about his faults.²⁰ Simply talking about another often leads to saying something negative about him. Therefore, we also need to avoid speaking about other people in general. Just like you don't want others to speak about you, don't speak about others. If you do need to talk about what another person did, try not to mention the name of the person. It's unnecessary. Say what happened, but don't say the name of the person who was involved.

There is a story told about the *Pnei Menachem*, one of the previous Chassidic rabbis of the Gerrer dynasty. Someone came to him and said that there are many surgeries taking place in his family, and he would like a blessing from the Rabbi. The *Pnei Menachem* said to him, "By the Shabbos table, do you ever discuss other people?"

The person replied, "Yes..."

The *Pnei Menachem* responded, "Do you take apart other people in your discussions, dissecting everything they do and say?"

The person responded, "Yes."

The *Pnei Menachem* said, "Because you take apart other people and dissect every aspect of them in your conversations, Hashem is causing your own family to become dissected as well, through surgeries. If you stop 'dissecting' other people in your conversations about them, the surgical problems in your family will stop."

So let us train ourselves, as much as we can, to avoid speaking about other people. This is especially true about Torah scholars and *Gedolim* and *tzaddikim* of the generation – you must avoid speaking about them in a way of trying to 'take them apart' and dissecting them. Do not discuss anything about a *gadol* or *tzaddik* unless you are saying a positive story about them which can inspire someone.

d) Don't Talk About Things You Don't Know About. Another form of exile to our speech is when people talk for long amounts of time and they speak about many different topics, and they will speak about things that they do not really understand. They will give opinions on all kinds of matters which they are not that familiar with.

This is not only gross immaturity (*katnus*), it is also a great form of exile to our speech. Often if we examine many conversations, we will see that people often state their opinions about topics they are not familiar with. Even when speaking about topics they know about, they are often missing details. For example, when saying over a story, there were details about the story that they didn't know about, yet the person will say the story as if he knows it well, even though he knows he is lacking much information about the story.

e) Avoid Meaningless Talk. Another point about the exile to our speech is that in many conversations, even when they are permissible and even when the conversations are not about people, the conversation is simply senseless talk, with no real content to it.

For example: "I got up at this time of the day", "I left at this time of the day", "My child woke me up, and then such-and-such happened", "I bought this and this item in the store", "I need to do this and this", "For Shabbos this is what I am cooking", etc. Often these conversations contain nothing important. Most speech of people is about things that happened, and sometimes there is something interesting to hear about, but usually it is about 'this' and 'that' - empty from any real content.

²⁰ As explained extensively in *sefer Chofetz Chaim*

Understandably, there is a basic emotional need we all have to speak with others about different things that happened in our day, whether between spouses or between close friends. But this should be kept to a minimum, so that we should avoid nonstop senseless talk. It is healthy for couples or close friends to speak with each other about a general outline of what transpired that day, but all of the details are not necessary to speak about.

This is surely the case when people talk all day about politics and the news. They are wasting their days and lives on meaningless things, which are of no gain to them. When people sit and talk about all the news that happened that week in every country, it does not help anyone by knowing a particular person's opinion about something in the news. Any time that a person speaks about these things, there is almost nothing to be gained from such speech. To be connected to the news through various forms of social media and to hear what happens in every country, taking apart every word the president of this country and another country, and what he meant and what he didn't mean and what he should have said – this is all empty, meaningless talk which we gain nothing from.

The Rambam says that a Jew who wants to live truthfully should ideally speak only words of *chochmah* (wisdom).²¹ This is a high level, but every person can at least try to bring some words of intelligent, genuine wisdom into his speech. In any of the conversations we have, we can try bringing some novel insight into the conversation, or something wise, and to try to bring some content into the conversation, so that the conversation isn't totally empty and devoid of inner content. We can do this by trying to add an inner kind of thought or an inner kind of feeling about the topic into the conversation, and in this way, the conversation will at least receive some inner content to it and be somewhat meaningful.

Understandably, the words here will apply differently with men and women. Women speak more than men do, but even though that is true, women also need to bring more content into their conversations, and not speak all day about meaningless things. As mentioned, it is a very high level for a person to only speak words of wisdom, but anyone on any level can try bringing in some inner content and meaning into her conversations. We should strive to slowly bring in more and more inner content into our conversations.

In Conclusion

We have described here the exile of speech, and its redemption. In summary, the 'exile' of our speech is when our speech lacks inner content to it, and with the more we add real, inner content into our speech, the more we redeem our speech and the more we become a "*bar geulah*", one who is connected to the redemption.

In the next lesson, if we merit it, we hope to continue, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to explain more about this subject of redemption to our speech.

²¹ *Rambam Hilchos De'os*



Q&A

Q1: *Does all of this include speech in writing as well?*

A: Yes, the same concept can apply to expressing our speech through writing. We didn't speak about it here, but a person can also write a letter full of inner content, or a letter with no real content to it. So there can also be an "exile" or "redemption" as well, when it comes to our speech through writing. Most of what we said here in this class can therefore also be applied to one who is expressing his or her speech in the form of writing, but some of the lesson does not apply in this case. For example, the problem of talking very quickly does not apply to expressing oneself through writing.

Q2: *Can negative talking cause those negative things to happen?*

A: Speech can sometimes have effects on reality. The *Gemara* says that a dream can come true only according to how it is verbally interpreted. Besides for dreams, there is also a concept that speech can have effects on the reality on This World, for it is written, "*Life and death are in the hands of the tongue*" – therefore, speech can cause things to happen in the reality of the "world of action" we dwell on. This is only to some extent, though, so it does not have a complete, total effect.

Q3: *If someone was born with a special gift for speech and communication with others, how should the person use it?*

A: This question is a bit complicated, because every person's life contains many factors. A person needs to be concerned for his external and internal needs, for the needs of his family, and for the needs of the community. Within helping out communally, one may have to do things for others, as well as use his speech in order to help others, according to the abilities that Hashem has given him. There is no general answer to this question, so this question needs to include some more details about the individual, in order for this question to be answered.

Q4: *If you have a job where you work with children, which requires you to speak a lot to them in order to give them attention, often you need to speak about random things which are not that meaningful – how should one approach this with the right perspective?*

A: A very good question. When one thinks before she is about to talk about what she wants to say, and how to make the other person happy with her words - thinking of what the other person's needs are and what words the others person needs [in this case, the children you are working with] in order to feel good and be happy, that is putting content into your words. If you are focused on what you are about to say and then you talk, and your mind is fully present when you talk, you have put some inner content and thought into the words. Although this is not the highest level of speech, in which one is only speaking words of wisdom, it is still a more inner and focused way of talking, and this is a great form of redemption to one's speech.

05 | *Redeeming Your Speech – Part 2*

The “Exile” On Our Speech: When Our Talking Is “Scattered”

With *siyata d’shmaya*, we are continuing to explain how we attain the “redemption” to our soul. In the previous chapter, we began to explain how we “redeem” our power of speech from its state of exile. In this chapter, we will continue that discussion.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that the lightest part of the body is the tongue, and therefore, it is easy for a person to speak a lot. This applies universally, but it is especially applicable to women, for the Sages said that “The women took nine out of ten measurements of speech that came to the world”.²²

The power of speech, besides for being the words we speak, is also an expression of our soul. When we speak, our soul is being expressed outward. It is written, “*My soul leaves, when I speak*”.²³, and it is said that “The tongue [speech] is the ink of the heart”²⁴. When one speaks, he is revealing his inner thoughts and feelings.

If a person’s possessions are scattered all over the world and not concentrated in any one place, this is a form of exile, for the Sages state that “Praiseworthy is one whose possessions are close to his city.” It is the same with speech. Since our speech is the expression of our inner psyche, when our words are released outward, they can become spread out and scattered, and this is a form of exile to our speech.

Speaking Exhausts The Soul

The more one is speaking from within, the more one’s inner thoughts and emotions are being released outward. For example, sometimes a person thinks about something he is fond about, and he talks about it enthusiastically, with all of his emotion and energy. Afterwards, he feels drained. This is because the inner abilities of his soul have been released outward, through his speech. If we are speaking words of wisdom or inspiration and the words hit their mark, the words find their place, and such speech is purposeful. But if our speech is idle and pointless, our words scatter and spread out, and such speech is in exile.

The more a person lives superficially, he will think that sometimes he speaks and sometimes he is silent. But the more a person lives internally, the more he can feel how speech causes his inner forces to be released outward.

In most cases, people do not feel this process. They talk a lot and this takes its toll on their energy, and they aren’t aware why they are exhausted from talking. When a person is physically in exile, he is aware that he is not in his right place. And if one’s money is taken away, one is aware that the money is taken away and not in its right place. But when it comes to speech, a person is usually not aware how his speech is in exile.

The difficulty is that a person is not aware of the exile of his speech. One can understand well that any of the forms of evil speech, such as *lashon hora*, etc. are an “exile” to the soul’s true power of speech, but one is often not

²² *Shir HaShirim* 5:6

²³ *Kiddushin* 49b

²⁴ *Chovos HaLevovos* chapter II (*Shaar HaBechinah*): 5

aware that excessive talking is also a form of exile to speech. When one becomes aware of the very concept of the “exile” of our power of speech, he is beginning of the process of redemption on his power of speech. When one is aware of the exile of speech, first of all, he will be speaking a lot less, and he will also be speaking from a more inner and truthful place in himself. We will soon explain more about this, with *siyata d’sbmaya*.

In summary, one needs to become aware that speech uses the soul’s abilities, which exhausts the soul, and in addition, any excessive or unnecessary talking is a form of “exile” to our speech.

Step 1 – Awareness Of The Exile On Our Speech

The word “*Moshiach*” is from the word *masiach*, which means to “converse”, because Moshiach will redeem our power speech from its exile. Thus, the entire name of “Moshiach” hints to the concept of redemption of speech.

The first step of redeeming our speech is to be aware that our speech is in exile, and this very awareness is the beginning of the redemption of speech. This is the “light of Moshiach”: The beginning stage of the redemption [of our speech].

Step 2 – Speaking From Our Heart

The second step pertains to when a person is talking.

When a person is talking, sometimes he will talk more from the heart, and sometimes less from the heart. Sometimes a person is talking more from a logical, intellectual or thinking place in himself, and other times a person is talking less from his intellect or logic. Sometimes a person is saying something more internal or emotional, such as when one is *davening* from his heart, or talking about an experience with a lot of emotion.

When one talks on an external level, he does not become as exhausted from talking, because he is barely making use of his soul when he talks. In contrast, when one talks on an internal level, his speech is using up more internal energy, so he will be more exhausted from such speech.

The second step, therefore, is to train ourselves that whenever we talk, we should talk more from our heart: From our feelings. This is not only true about *davening*, which is called the “service of the heart”²⁵, but it is also true about when we talk in general with other people: We should be talking to others with more feeling in our words.

Even our ordinary conversations need to become infused with more heart and emotion. The Ramban says²⁶ that one should think before he talks about what he will say, and this means that one should become emotionally connected to what he is about to say, before he says the words. When telling another about an experience we had, we need both intellectual awareness and emotion when we talk, so that we can essentially live and experience what we are saying, as opposed to just talking on a very superficial level.

²⁵ Berachos 30a

²⁶ Iggeres HaRamban

How Speaking Internally Redeems The Soul's Speech From Exile

When we train ourselves to speak this way, this will release our true power of speech, as we are talking. However, won't this only serve to further the exile on our speech, being that speaking on a more internal level will use up our soul's energy, making us feel more drained afterward?

The depth of the idea here is that when a person is used to speaking on a more internal level, from his feelings, he will naturally be minimizing what he says, because he won't want to say anything that exhausts his energy. That is the first step of redeeming the speech, minimizing one's speech.

But even more so, it is because the Sages taught that "Words that come from the heart enter the heart."²⁷ Simply speaking, this means that when one speaks from his heart, his words will enter the heart of the listener. But there is also a deeper meaning. When we talk from our heart, our speech is not simply being released from us, but it is actually returning to us. The words leave the speaker and then re-enter the speaker. This is because the words become a "returning light" (*ohr choizer*), which returns to the source that it emitted from.

Thus, when are talking only on an external and superficial level, although we are not using that much of our soul's energy, this still keeps our true power of speech in exile. Therefore, superficial talking keeps our speech in a state of exile. But when we train ourselves to talk on a more internal level, by talking with more feeling, this will redeem our speech from its exile, because we will find ourselves speaking less, and even the words that we are speaking will re-enter us after we speak them, since "Words that come from the heart, enter the heart."

In summary, the first step of redeeming our speech is to by having the very awareness that speech uses up our soul's energy, because speech releases our inner energy (our emotions and thoughts) outward. The second step of redeeming our speech is to get used to talking from our heart, by having intellectual awareness of our words and by putting our heart into the words we are saying, so that we are talking from a more inner place in ourselves.

Slowing Down The Pace Of Our Speech

Now let us try to explain, with *siyata d'shmaya*, how we can practically actualize this concept.

One way is as follows. Some people talk quickly, some people talk a bit slower, and some people talk very slowly. One who talks very quickly will say a lot of words, and he will talk very excitedly, but the problem with this is that the person will say a lot of things that are not accurate. The person who talks very quickly will also be using up a lot of energy when he talks, because speech exhausts the soul's energy. Therefore, a person who talks very quickly needs to train himself not to talk so quickly, and to practice slowing down his speech a bit when he talks. (Of course, one should not talk too slow, because this is a lack of *derech erez* for others.)

The more a person is getting used to talking slower, one will gain the space to become intellectually aware of what he is saying, and he will also allow himself to emotionally connect to his words before he says them, so that he will speak from a more internal place in himself.

How exactly can one train himself to slow down his talking? One way is that before talking, don't begin talking right away. One should first pause a bit, and only after that should he start talking. As soon as you want to start

²⁷ *Sefer HaYashar 13, Shelah HaKadosh shaar HaOsiyos: 3*

talking, quickly hold yourself back a bit, allowing yourself a slight pause, and after that you can allow yourself begin talking.

When one is having a longer conversation, his awareness of his speech will naturally weaken as the conversation continues, because it is difficult to maintain awareness of so many words. Therefore, in order to counter this problem, one should keep making interruptions in his speech.

It is also recommended, as a general rule, a person should try to avoid conversing for a long amount of time with others. If this cannot be avoided, one should at least practice pausing every so often as he is talking.

Pausing Our Conversations

Let us list some examples on how we can pause our conversations, and each person should figure out which particular advice will work for them personally.

When speaking in front of the public, where a person must speak for a long time, such as a Rav speaking to his *shul*, one should take small pauses every so often, such as by looking at the *sefer* or papers one is reading from, or by thinking to himself a little. It should just be a short interruption and not more than that.

Whenever one is speaking with another person, one should allow a space of time for the other person to talk, so that he can listen to what the other has to say. Speak a little, then let your friend talk, then resume talking, etc. One should not be talking the entire time, firstly, because this is a lack of *derech erez* for the other, and also, because it is an exile to one's power of speech. One should get used to pausing while talking to another, letting the other person talk and state his views.

Additionally, while talking, a person should say brief sentences, as opposed to long sentences which go on and on. One should convey an idea in a fewer amount of words.

Also, one should train himself to break up his sentences with pauses. It is said of Rav Yehuda Tzadka zt"l that when he would *daven*, he would pause after every three words, so that he could concentrate better. This should be done wisely and sensibly, so that it sounds natural, and it should not be done in a way that makes one look like he has a speech disorder, which makes others comfortable.

The Cycle Of Speech, Silence, And Speech

Gradually as one gets used to this, one becomes aware of what he is saying and he will be able to put his feelings and heart into what he says. Then one will also come to realize how speech weighs heavily on a person and takes energy from him, and one will be able to appreciate the serenity that can be gained from pausing one's speech.

With most people, the "lightest part of the body is the tongue", as the *Chovos HaLevovos* says. For most people, it is natural to talk freely and continuously without pause. This is because most people do not put that much heart into what they say, and therefore they never experience the "heaviness" of speech. But when one gets used to pausing his words every so often, he experiences serenity within his speech, and then he is able to realize that speech is actually heavy on the tongue.

The Chazon Ish said, “Although the *Chovos HaLevovos* said that the tongue is the lightest part of the body, [it is natural for people to talk], for me personally, the tongue is the heaviest part of the body”. The Chazon Ish found it difficult to talk. This wasn’t because he was afraid to say *lashon hora* or any other evil speech, but because he was aware, both intellectually and emotionally, of the “heavy” nature of the power of speech. Therefore, he found it hard to talk.

When one gets used to pausing his speech every so often, this small break gives one the opportunity to enter into a place of serenity. One can speak words that come from his heart, and then he returns to serenity (by pausing his speech), then he resumes, talking, etc. This cycle is the redemption process of speech.

There is “external” redemption of speech, and there is an “internal” redemption of our speech. “External” redemption of speech is when a person doesn’t speak *lashon hora* and other forbidden speech. The “internal” redemption of speech is when a person trains himself to speak less, to take breaks as he talks, and to experience serenity within his speech.

The depth of redeeming our speech is when one is able to “move” from the “movement” of speech, to a space of “non-movement”, a serenity within his speech: the ability to silence his speech as he is talking. When one talks, he should be talking from his heart, and then he returns to serenity, by pausing from speaking, then returning to speaking from his heart.

When one trains himself to this cycle of talking and taking breaks from talking, he will be talking from a more inner place. He will speak words from his heart, and each time he will speak from a deeper place in his heart, until he reaches a deep place in the *neshamah* where the depth of his speech can emanate from. That is where the depth of the redemption of our speech lays.

In Conclusion

When one does not speak with emotion, his speech is in exile. He will be speaking from a place of speech that is in “exile”. In contrast to this, when one is speaking words from his heart, from the depths of his soul, his speech becomes more genuine, and this is how one redeems his speech from its exile.



Q&A

Q1: *What is the way by which a person can know if his speech is coming from a genuine place in himself?*

A: Most of our speech is not proper. The point of this lesson was to help us attain a proper power of speech.

Q2: *Is our desire for honor or for love preventing us from speaking properly?*

A: Very good question. The Sages state that jealousy, lustful desire, and seeking honor remove a person from the world, which means “his” inner world. This is the exile to the soul, when one is not found in his true place. When one’s speech is being influenced by jealousy, or lustful desire, or honor, his speech is in a state of exile.

06 | *Redeeming Your Thoughts – Part 1 (Action-Oriented Thinking)*

Redeeming Our Abilities Of Thought

We are continuing to discuss, with *siyata d'shamaya*, the redemption of the soul. Previously we dealt with the redemption of our speech. In this lesson we will explain about the redemption of the soul's power of thought.

The *Vilna Gaon*²⁸ lists three different powers of thought: *Seichel ha-maasi* (action-oriented thought), *Seichel ha-divri* (speech-oriented thought) and *Seichel Ha-Iyuni* (analytical thought). The *Raavad* lists more thinking abilities, but these are the three general, root thinking abilities: Action-oriented thinking, Speech-oriented thinking, and analytical thinking.

“Action-oriented thought” is when we think about what we are to do: What we will do, how we will do it. We think about this before we act, as well as while we are acting.

“Speech-oriented thought”, on its most complete level, is when one thinks about what he will say, as the Ramban writes to do, in *Igeres HaRamban*. Most people cannot be on this level of thinking about all the words they are about to say, and but most people will be thinking about what they are saying as they are talking. There is verse, “Iyov spoke without *daas*”, implying that there is also a kind of speech where a person speaks without any *daas* (awareness). Most people will think about what they are talking as they are in middle of talking, but not before they begin talking, but there are some people who are not thinking at all about what they are saying.

“Analytical thought” is the very power of thinking itself. On a superficial level, a person uses this ability when he thinks of mathematical calculations, accounting, etc. On a spiritual level, one uses this ability when he tries to understand what he is Torah learning.

All people have these three thinking abilities, but the percentages of each ability vary in each person. Therefore, there are those who are better at action-oriented thought, those who are better at speech-oriented thought, and those who are better at analytical thought. In addition, the particular circumstances of the individual can affect how well a person is making use of any of these abilities.

Redeeming Our Action-Oriented Thinking

We will first deal with the first kind of thinking ability, action-oriented thought. What is the “exile” of action-oriented thought? And how do we redeem it?

When one does something, sometimes he does not think what he is about to do. A person will generally put very little thought into what he is doing. The person is not thinking, either totally or for the most part, of what he is about to. The “exile” of the power of thought is when a person is missing thought in what he does, because he is not connecting his power of thought with his actions. When one does things without thinking beforehand, his actions “take over” his thinking and “covering” over his thinking, placing an exile on his power of thought.

²⁸ *Gra Yeschayahu 11:1*

General Thinking And Specific Thinking

“*Sof maaseh, b’machshavah techilah*”²⁹, “The end of actions, is preceded with thought.” This means that thought must precede what we do. Therefore, one should train himself to think about what he is about to do, on a general level. After that one should think about what is about to do on a more specific level.

We shall explain what general thought is, and what specific thought is. An example of “general thinking” is when a person is sitting and thinking with himself on Erev Rosh HaShanah, and he is thinking about the coming year in general terms, which direction he would like to go in and what the coming year should be like. At the beginning of each month and week as well, and each day, a person should think what he would generally like to accomplish this month, this week, and during each day.

Of course, a person should also be prepared for any changes that may come up which will affect his plans, and be flexible to the changes, since ultimately, Hashem is running the world, and not us. Without this flexibility, a person will fall apart whenever his plans go wrong and his goals don’t happen. So, while general thinking about our goals is necessary, it is only constructive when it is on condition that a person is prepared to handle any changes to his plans.

We also need “specific thought”: To think exactly what we are about to do something, before doing it. One should take apart the action he is about to do, in his thoughts: “What will this action entail?” One can take a general action he needs to do, and think about it in more specific terms. One should take a small action and think about what he generally needs to do, and then he should think of the details that this action will entail.

Redeeming Our “General Thinking” And “Specific Thinking” From Exile

Some people are better at general thinking, and others are better at specific thinking. Usually, men are better at general thinking (and less with detailed, specific thinking), whereas women are better at detailed, specific thinking (and less so with general thinking). Although this is the “general” rule, there do exist exceptions to this rule. Some men are better at detailed, specific thinking, and some women are better at general thinking). If one can only think in general terms but cannot think in more specific terms, his “specific thinking” is in exile, and if one can think in specific terms but cannot think in general terms, his “general thinking” is in exile.

It is therefore recommended that a person should try to think about some things he does, first in general terms and then in more specific terms, so that one is making use of both of these thinking abilities. It is too difficult at first to think about our whole day like this. So at first, one should take one or two small actions of the day and first think of it in general terms, and then in specific terms.

Those who are better at specific thinking and less with general thinking will usually run into problems. They become very focused on certain details and they lose sight of the big picture, and then they run into issues which they didn’t think of, because they did not think about the bigger picture. The same goes for those who don’t think about details and instead they are focused on the bigger picture. They overlooked details and they run into problems that they didn’t foresee.

²⁹ Recited in *Kaballas Shabbos*

Therefore, every person should identify if he tends to better think in more general terms, or if he tends to think more about specifics. One who is better at general thinking should try to think of more details to something, and one who is better at specific thinking should try to see the bigger picture of something.

For example, if one tends to think more about specifics and he doesn't think that much about the bigger picture of something, he should train himself to not get caught up in any details. He will need to understand that when he gets involved with a certain detail, it takes over his focus and then he is prevented from getting to his goals, because he is becoming stuck on a detail. He needs to be able to go forward even though he is unsettled by a certain detail that bothers him. He should ignore his need to work out every last detail, and instead he should progress forward, placing trust in Hashem that he can get to his goals even if he doesn't understand every detail.

There are people who will not enter into anything unless they know every detail. They have a problem of only seeing details without seeing the bigger picture. They are interested in various details, but they don't know what the bigger picture of it all is. The more a person is only seeing details and never the bigger picture, he will need to train himself to think about the goal of something before he enters it. In this way he won't only see details and he will see the general picture of it, and he will view the details as part of a greater whole. One should think: "Why I am doing this, and what is the purpose of it?" This trains a person to see the bigger picture of things, instead of focusing solely on the details.

Others have the opposite problem. They focus on the general purpose of something but they never think about details. Such a person will need to take a pen and paper and write down all the possible details that he may encounter in something. One should write down: "What will be involved in this situation? What are the details that this situation can entail?" One should also try to write down which details he may encounter first, and which details he may encounter later. One cannot predict what will happen, of course, but one should try as best as he can to write down the details that may occur, in order of their possible occurrence.

As stated before, one should always have the flexibility to deal with any changes that may come up in any situation, so that he will avoid the frustration of unexpected challenges.

Here is an example of how we can "redeem" our power of action-oriented thought. One needs to make use of two thinking abilities: General thinking, and specific thinking. One should first think about generalities: The purpose of life, what he would like to accomplish this year, this month, this week, and each day of the year. One should think about what he is about to do in general terms. Then one should think in more specific terms: "What exactly will I do today, in order to accomplish my goals? How exactly will I do it?"

(As we pointed out before, remember to have the flexibility to be prepared for any setbacks that may prevent you from reaching your goals).

Thinking From The Outside

Until now, we discussed thinking before we do something. Now we will discuss about thinking while we are in the middle of doing something.

Whenever we are doing something, we are thinking about what we are doing specifically, and we also have an awareness that we are doing it. When we think about what we are doing, this is inner thought, because our thoughts

are in the action, and when we are aware of what we are thinking as we do something, this is called “outer” thought, or “enveloping” thought, and it is more of an awareness than a thought.

The ability to think about what we are doing, as we are doing it, is more recognizable to us. However, the ability to be aware of our thinking as we are in middle of doing something (thinking about our thoughts), is a concept that is not that known to most people.

To illustrate, when a person looks at another person, or he is viewing himself or another through a mirror, he is seeing himself or the other person “from the outside”, as an observer. This is a power of thought that comes from “outside” of the person. Just like the eyes can see around you, and the eyes are connected with the power of thought, so is the root of the eyes, the thoughts, able to surround a person and see from outside of the person.

Our thoughts can see ourselves from “outside” of ourselves. The imagination can vividly picture something, and then we can draw it on paper after we have imagined it. So can the power of thought see our actions from the outside, where we can observe ourselves from “outside” of ourselves.

This is the redemption of our action-oriented thought. If we can only think about what we are doing as we are doing something, our thoughts are in exile. If we can go above our thoughts and think of our thoughts, this redeems the thoughts from their exile. These “surrounding” thoughts, our “thinking from above”, is the ability that we can use to redeem our power of thought.

Most people cannot relate to this concept. For those who do understand this concept, even before actualizing this concept, they have begun to access the redemption of thought. Finally, those who actually merit to live and experience this concept (of thinking from the outside) are accessing the complete redemption of the power of thought.



Q&A

Q1: *How do we actually graduate from unconscious thought (exiled thought) to conscious thought (redemption of thought)?*

A: By thinking from a quiet place in yourself about what is taking place around you. Gradually your soul gets used to thinking from “above” your regular thinking. The more a person gets used to thinking about what’s going on around him, he acquires the ability of conscious thought, to see things from above. But this ability requires inner calm. From a place of inner calm, one is able to acquire this ability of higher thinking, of thinking from the outside.

Q2: *Is there a way by which one can minimize the overwhelming amount of information that enters one’s mind, when one is thinking about all the details of what he needs to do?*

A: Very good question. At first when one is beginning to get used to this, one should not try to write down every possible detail he is aware of. Instead, one should first write down the most important details of something, and gradually one can increase his thinking (and writing down) to becoming aware of the lesser important details.

Q3: In a previous lesson the Rav explained about the ability to think from the outside, such as by watching a video of oneself. I have difficulty with this ability. Is there an alternative approach to acquire this ability?

A: We emphasized in the beginning of the lesson that most people have difficulty with this ability, because it is very subtle. It requires two abilities: Inner calm, and also the ability to temporarily let go of oneself. But it is a very subtle ability and not everyone will be able to do it.

Q4: How does a person let go of himself?

A: One way is through the emotions: By thinking a little about others and tending to others' needs, awakening *ahavas Yisrael* towards them. This helps one leave the ego: by becoming focused on others. A deeper way, as explained in this lesson, is through the power of thought. But if one cannot do the first way, one will not be able to do the second way, which is deeper.

Q5: Is this ability (thinking about details from the outside) the same as the ability of binah? And if it is, does this mean that women in particular are more prone to become stuck in details, since women have more binah?

A: Extra "binah" was given to women, and *binah* is the power to notice details (whereas *chochmah* focuses on the general picture), and most women excel to *binah* over *chochmah*. However, in a woman's ability of *binah*, there are two uses: *Hisbonenus* (reflection) and *hispaalus* (quick reactions of emotion). Women have quicker reactions of emotion, and this causes them to see a general picture without seeing the finer details, but their ability of *hisbonenus* makes them see the details more without seeing the general picture. To explain this a bit more, a woman's more emotional nature causes her to think that a detail is the whole picture.

07 | *Redeeming Your Thoughts – Part 2 (Speech-Oriented Thinking)*

Speech-Oriented Thought

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to discuss the exile and the redemption of our soul. In the previous lesson we explained the three thinking abilities, which are: *seichel ha-maasi* (action-oriented thought), *seichel ha-dibri* (speech-oriented thought) and *seichel ha-iyuni* (analytical thought). These abilities are written about by the Vilna Gaon. In the previous lesson we discussed *seichel ha-maasi*, action-oriented thought, and in this lesson we will explain about *seichel ha-dibri*, speech-oriented thought.

Seichel hadibri, speech-oriented thought, is the function of the intellect with regards to our speech. A baby isn't able to speak, and this is not simply because the baby cannot speak yet, but because the baby hasn't yet developed the part of the brain that is used for speaking. When a child matures, he begins to speak. At first it seems that the child is simply mimicking what he hears. But with the more that a child starts to talk, the more the child is developing the intellectual function in the brain for speaking. The child gradually develops the ability of *seichel ha-dibri*, to use his thinking in order to speak.

The Exile Of Our Speech: The Exile Of Our Daas (Mind)

This is also relevant to the current month of Nissan, where we experienced the redemption from Egypt. The exile of Egypt was also called the “exile of speech”.³⁰ As a hint, we were redeemed from the exile of Pharaoh, and the word “Pharaoh” is from the words *peh ra*, “evil mouth”.³¹

On a deeper level, the Egyptian exile is also called the “exile of *daas* (mind)”.³² As a hint, the *gematria* of the words “*Erev Rav*” (the non-Jewish souls who left Egypt with the Jewish people) is equal in value to the word “*daas*”.

Thus there were two exiles: An exile of our speech, and an exile of our *daas*. It seems that these are two separate exiles, but they are really the same root. The inner essence of speech is *daas*, for the Sages teach that “*Daas* is hidden in the mouth.”³³ Therefore, since our speech was in exile when we were in Egypt, and our speech is the expression of our *daas*, our *daas* was therefore also in exile.

Our Sages teach, according to one opinion, that the *Eitz HaDaas* which Adam ate from was a *chitah*, a stalk of wheat.³⁴ The word *chitah* is from the word *cheit* (sin). Thus, there is a connection between *cheit* (sin) and *daas*. The less developed one's *daas* is, the more his speech is in exile, and the more one develops his *daas*, to that degree, his speech will not be in exile.

³⁰ *sefer Likutei Moharan*

³¹ *sefer Toras Moshe (Chasam Sofer) parshas Mikeitz, sefer Degel Machneh Ephraim parshas Mikeitz*

³² *Zohar II 161a*

³³ *Zohar II 123a*

³⁴ *Talmud Bavli: Berachos 40a*

On a subtler level, evil speech comes from *daas ra* (the evil use of *daas*), while good speech comes from *daas tov* (the good, holy use of *daas*). The Torah says that Esav trapped Yitzchok with the words of his mouth. This was Esav's ability of *daas ra*, using *daas* for evil, by means of the power of speech.

“The Child Who Cannot Ask” – Those Who Speak Without Daas

Corresponding to the exile to our *daas* and the exile to our speech are the four sons of the *Hagaddab*: The *chochom* (wise son), the *rasha* (wicked son), the *tam* (simple son), and the *she'aino yodeia lish'ol* (the child who does not know how to ask). We shall explain.

Generally, it is explained that the “wise son” and the “simple son” are closer to the side of holiness, and that the “wicked son” and the “child who doesn't know how to ask” are easily swayed by the side of evil. What is the concept of the “wicked son” and the “child who does not know how to ask”? The child who does not know how to ask is missing the ability of proper speech, because he is missing *daas*. The wicked son has a different problem: He does have *daas*, but his *daas* is being used for evil. He may have a lot of *daas* - he is very intelligent - but he is using his *daas* for evil. His *daas* is essentially *daas ra*. That is why the wicked son denies the main tenets of the Torah.

Thus, there were two aspects to our exile of *daas* in Egypt: There was an absence of *daas*, and there was also an impaired, evil form of *daas*. With regards to our discussion here – the redemption of our speech - we need to redeem our speech from both of these two problems. We need to redeem our speech the absence of *daas*, and we also need to redeem our speech from impaired *daas*.

When people do not speak because they are missing *daas*, this is like “the child who to ask”. It is an actual exile to the power of *daas*, and this is the state of young childhood. Generally, all of us leave this kind of “exile” as we get older and mature, when we begin to speak.

Exile Of The Speech/Daas: When People Talk Thoughtlessly

However, even adults may not be speaking from their *daas*, when they don't think before they talk about what they will say. A person may speak a lot, but there is very little *daas* contained in his speech. This problem begins in childhood, when a child speaks a lot without using his *daas*, and it can extend into adulthood, where the person may continue to speak a lot with very little *daas* in his words, because he doesn't think before he talks. This happens to most people.

In particular, women, who are generally more talkative than men, may find that they often say things without having thought that much beforehand. Often, women are mature in the area of *seichel hamaasi*, of thinking in order to do action, because they are more involved in the practical world of action. Men, who learn Torah, are better at the ability of *seichel ha-iyuni*, thinking for the sake of analyzing. But both men and women often have an underdeveloped ability of *seichel hadibri* (speaking for the purpose of talking): Most people talk without that much *daas* involved in their words.

Therefore, both men and women have the problem of speaking often without thinking that much beforehand, and this is an “exile” to their power of speech.

The Ramban's Exhortation To Think Before Talking

The Ramban writes (in *Iggeres HaRamban*): “Think about the words you will say, before you say them.”

Not only must a person avoid speaking words of *lashon hora* or any other harmful kinds of speech, but one also needs to think before he talks, about what he will say. Such speech comes from *daas*. This is a redemption of our power of speech.

Just as a person may have the habit of doing things without thinking and he isn't aware that he just touched something, so may a person have the habit of thoughtless speech, where he talks and talks and he doesn't think about what he is saying. That is exile of our speech, and therefore, the redemption of our speech is therefore to think before we talk.

The Ramban's words, that one should think before he talks about what he will say, includes two parts: To think before you talk, and to think about what you will say.

Firstly, we need to acquire a general awareness before speaking, that we are about to speak. When one isn't aware that he is speaking, such as when he interjects into others' conversations, this is the depth of the exile of speech.

After a person has gotten used to developing an awareness about his speech, he should think about what he will say: What kind of direction he wants his words to take. He should think to himself: “What do I want to accomplish now through my words?” This is how we can gain *daas* before we speak, and this is also how we can have *daas* while we are speaking.

Redeeming Our Evil Speech

Until now we discussed the problem of speaking without *daas*. Now we shall discuss the second form of exile to our speech: When people speak from evil *daas*, using the power of intelligence for evil.

The mouth is called *kolmos halev*, the “ink of the heart”.³⁵ When a person speaks, there are two factors involved: The intellect, and his heart. Our speech is therefore an expression of our mind and emotions. When our intellect and emotions are combined together, this is called *daas*.

Therefore, the “exile” to our speech is either when we speak from cold intellect that is detached from any emotion, or when we speak entirely from emotion, such as from extreme joy or from extreme pain, but devoid of an objective understanding of our intellect. This is also the exile of our *daas*, because it is *daas ra*, meaning that it is a speech which comes from an evil source. It is a kind of speech that does not come from a combination of intellect and emotion.

Evil speech doesn't only mean speaking *lashon hora* and other harmful speech. Evil *daas* doesn't only mean when one thinks wicked or negative thoughts, and an evil heart doesn't only mean the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination). Rather, evil speech, which stems from *daas ra* – evil *daas*, or a *lev ra*, an evil heart – is whenever we are speaking from a place of emotion that isn't attached with our intellect, or when we speak only from intellect with no emotion.

³⁵ *Chovos HaLevovos Shaar HaBechinah 5 (Duties of The Heart: Gate of Reflection: Chapter 5)*

Simply speaking, the way to fix evil thoughts and evil feelings is to focus on the positive, which thereby makes our speech positive and not negative. However, from a deeper understanding, evil speech is whenever our speech stems from a lack of connection between the intellect and heart. Therefore, as long as we are speaking from either intellect or emotion alone, we are speaking from a place of *daas ra*, and such speech will be evil speech. *Daas ra* is whenever the intellect and emotions aren't that connected, and this results in evil speech.

Daas tov, therefore, is to speak from a combination of deep emotion and deep intellectual understanding. There should be depth of emotion, along with a precise intellect, when we speak. When we speak from this place of *daas tov* in ourselves, our speech is *lashon tov*, good speech. This is the redemption to our speech.

Practically Actualizing This Concept

Let us now make these matters practical.

Each day, we speak many words. The Chofetz Chaim said that a person can say 200 words in one minutes, which means that in 20 minutes we may be speaking up to 20,000 words! We cannot try to make such big changes in our speech and change so fast, so let's instead see how we can change in small ways.

One should therefore try the following. Each day, one should try to say just one thing to someone which comes from a combination of feeling and intellect. One should think before he talks about what he will say, and then when he says it, he should say it with both feeling and understanding.

One can also try this once a week when talking to Hashem. Before talking to Hashem or asking Him for your needs, first think beforehand about what you want to say. Then, when you are talking to Hashem or you are *davening* to Him, state your words to Him from with intellectual awareness and emotional awareness.

At first, one should try this every day with other people, and when talking to Hashem, it should be done once or twice a week. It is recommended that one should not try to make too many big changes at once. Instead, just try to make small improvements, such as with the above exercises.

In Conclusion

In the month of Nissan we were redeemed, and in the month of Nissan we will be redeemed, in the future.³⁶ May we merit with the help of Hashem in this year, in this month, on this day, the general Redemption of the Jewish people, as well as the individual redemption of each person – now, and in the actual sense.

³⁶ *Talmud Bavli: Rosh HaShanah 11a*



Q&A

Q1: *If I am in a very emotional situation and I need to talk to Hashem right now and there is no time for me to gather my thoughts about what I want to say, what should I do?*

A: In the beginning of this lesson we explained that one should first begin speaking to Hashem once a week at the end of davening. That is the first step. This gives us the time to prepare in advance what we want to talk to Hashem about. Only after that will one gain the ability to speak to Hashem even when he is in turmoil. As a general recommendation, though, it is always better to pause a bit and wait until you calm down somewhat, before talking to Hashem, so that you will be talking to Hashem amidst a state of calmness, from your inner world.

Q2: *If a person is in a situation where he can't think properly and he is very emotional, is it better to hold off speaking to Hashem until one has calmed down, or can he speak to Hashem even though he is in emotional turmoil?*

A: It is written, “*A worry in the heart of man should be told over*”. Sometimes, a person should speak to another even when he is full of emotion. It is necessary to speak about what’s on our heart, and part of the reason that Hashem gave us speech is so that we can pour out our heart to Him when we are in turmoil. However at a later point a person should try to become aware of where his speech is coming from (from his emotion or intellect), and at a later point one should also add some intellect to his speech, by thinking beforehand what he will say.

Q3: *What is the difference between seichel and daas?*

A: We mentioned it in the beginning and we will explain it now again. *Seichel* is *haskalah*: the ability to intellectualize something. A person also has the ability of *daas*, which is the connection of emotion and intellect. There is *seichel*-intellect, *hargashah*-emotion, and *daas* (the combination of intellect with emotion together).

Q4: *Daas without emotion is a good intellect or evil intellect?*

A: There are two kinds of *daas*. On a subtler level there are more kinds of *daas*, but generally there are two kinds of *daas*. There is “higher *daas*” and “lower *daas*”. The “higher *daas*” is the *daas* within the mind (the intellectual abilities), and the “lower *daas*” is when *daas* which connects to the emotions.

The mental abilities of the mind include *chochmah*, *binah*, and *daas*. The *chochmah* is the understanding based on the general picture of the information, the *binah* is the understanding based on the details, and *daas* is the combination of *chochmah* and *binah*: the combination of general understanding with specific understanding.

Q5: *What is seichel without daas?*

A: When either the details are not connected to the general picture, or vice versa.

Q6: *In a different lesson the Rav said that a person should talk to Hashem from the heart, from temimus (simple earnestness), which is the opposite of the intellect. This ability of temimus is referred to as “masiach l’fi tumo”, speaking naturally. But in this lesson the Rav is saying that one should combine intellect with his speech when talking to Hashem.*

A: There are two kinds of *masiach l'fi tumo*, to speak to Hashem from *temimus* (simple earnestness). There is the incomplete level of *temimus*, represented by one of the “Four Sons” mentioned in the *Hagaddah*, the “*tam*” (simple child), who is not as complete as the *chochom* (the wise child). There is also the repaired, completed level of *temimus*, and with this kind of *temimus*, the *tam* is on a higher spiritual level than the *chochom*. This is the implication of the term *tam v'nishlam*, “whole and complete.”

When one's *temimus* is repaired and complete, one's *haskalah* (intellect) comes from *peshitus* (simplicity), and when this is combined with the ability of a “simple heart”, one speaks to Hashem from the combination of “simple” heart and a “simple” intellect. When one is not a *tam*, he does not possess “simple” intellect. If one is truly a *tam*, his intellect becomes “simple”, and then his intellect and emotions will combine together (as *daas*). This is the meaning of “*Be wholesome with Hashem your G-d.*”

Q7: *So when one talks to Hashem simply from his heart, masiach l'fi tumo, is this the impaired level of talking to Hashem?*

A: If one is talking to Hashem simply from his heart, this is the beginning step of building one's heart. However, it is not yet the complete level. The complete level is when one gains “simple intellect” which combines with his “simple heart”, and this is the meaning of the term *chochmas lev*, the wisdom of the heart.

Q8: *When one is in a situation of emotion without intellect, how can one increase his intellect?*

A: By training oneself once a month to prepare one's prayers to Hashem before talking to Him. This trains one to add some thinking into his emotions.

Q9: *Does one need to have intellect and emotion every time he talks to Hashem?*

A: If one attempts to do this all at once he will fail. One needs to develop his intellect separately and his emotions separately. At first, one needs to know how to think of what he will say to Hashem, and one also has to be able to speak to Hashem out of emotion. As explained in this lesson, once a month a person should combine intellect and emotion in his speech, but one cannot combine intellect and emotion in all of his speech, at the beginning of his way.

Q10: *How can a person know which topic he should be combining intellect and emotion with?*

A: Each person should pick the topic that is closest to his or her heart to work on.

08 | *Redeeming Your Thoughts – Part 3 (Analytical Thinking)*

Analytical Thinking

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we are continuing to learn about the redemption of the soul's power of thought.

In the previous lessons we explained that there are three thinking abilities: 1) *Seichel ha-maasi*, action-oriented thinking. 2) *Seichel ha-iyuni*, analytical thinking. 3) *Seichel ha-dibri*, speech-oriented thinking. In the previous lesson, we explained about the abilities of action-oriented thinking (*seichel ha-maasi*) and speech-oriented thinking (*seichel ha-dibri*), and how we can “redeem” these thinking abilities from their “exile. In this lesson, we will explain about how to “redeem” the ability of analytical thinking (*seichel iyuni*) from its exile.

How Women Can Use Analytical Thinking

Men have the *mitzvah* to learn Torah, and they are especially charged to learn Torah by exerting the mind. This is the ability of *seichel iyuni*, analytical thinking, when it comes to studying Torah, and it is meant to be used only by men, not by women. In this lesson, we will be explaining how women can also use the ability of *seichel iyuni*, the ability to think analytically. Women, who are not commanded to learn Torah with analytical thinking, are certainly able to use the ability to think analytically. The only question is how, and in what. That is what we will try to explain in this lesson, with the help of Hashem.

How can women use the ability of *seichel iyuni*, analytical thinking? When it comes to learning *halachah*, a woman must know what to do and how to act, but this does not require analytical thinking. However, when it comes to thinking about the purpose of life, that definitely requires some thinking, and this is an area which women need to think a lot about. Women also need to think a lot about the ways of *avodah*, of serving the Creator, and how to reach the depth and the purpose of life.

Three Ways How Our Thoughts Are In Exile

Let us now consider what the “exile” of our analytical thinking is, and what its “redemption” is. There are several ways how our analytical thinking is in a state of exile: 1) When one thinks about forbidden thoughts, 2) When one thinks about idle thoughts, which are pointless and a waste of time, and 3) When one's thinking is scattered.

These three forms of exile on our thoughts are not particularly applicable to our power of analytical thought, and they are rather an exile on our power of thought in general.

Redeeming Our Evil Thoughts

Let us first tackle the first kind of “exile” on our thoughts: When one thinks forbidden thoughts.

One is not allowed to deliberately think about areas that are forbidden for him to think about. However, if one's thoughts did wander to think about such things, as soon as one becomes aware that he has started to have forbidden thoughts, he should immediately try to steer his mind elsewhere, by thinking of something else.

Even if one is not having a forbidden thought and he is simply thinking about something negative, such as by having negative thoughts about another person, it is also recommended that a person should avoid such thoughts to begin with. If one finds himself amidst a negative thought about someone else, one should steer his mind away from such thoughts, by thinking about something else.

This is the external way to solve the issue. The internal way is to uproot the source of the negative or evil thoughts. Negative or evil thoughts stem from unrefined *middos* (character traits). Therefore, if one finds himself having a negative thought, he should try to see which particular impaired character trait it may be coming from. The more one purifies this character trait, the less one will be experiencing the negative thoughts that were coming from the impaired character trait.

Here is an example, to make the concept more tangible. A person finds himself having thoughts of jealousy towards someone, or thoughts about taking revenge on someone. As stated before, one is not allowed to deliberately bring up these thoughts. However, when one finds himself having such thoughts, he should identify the impaired character trait which is motivating his thoughts right now. If he feels jealous towards someone, he should identify the jealousy in his thoughts, and then he needs to work on uprooting his jealousy. With the more that he works on uprooting his jealousy, the more that he will stop having jealous thoughts about the other person.

In this series, we are not explaining how to work on our *middos*. That is a very expansive topic, which requires its own series. The general idea of it, however, is that the more a person purifies his *middos*, the more one will purify his thoughts. By working on one's *middos*, one purifies his thoughts. In order to explain how to do this, though, we would need another series to explain it.

Redeeming Our Idle Thoughts – By Living More Internally

The second form of “exile” to our thoughts is when one has idle thoughts.

Just as a person can talk words that are idle and pointless, so is a person able to have idle, pointless thoughts. This includes two parts: Fantasies, and thoughts. When a person goes to sleep, the imagination takes over his mind, and he fantasizes. When one is awake, he may also be imagining and fantasizing, which means that his imagination dominates his power of thought. On a subtler level, though, a person also has idle thoughts during the day, which are not imagination, but thoughts. These thoughts are also an exile upon our thoughts.

There is an inner work to clarify the imagination. We explained about this in the series “*Getting To Know Your Imagination*”. There is also a separate work to clarify one's thinking abilities, and this is explained in the series “*Getting To Know Your Thoughts*”. To explain it briefly, when a person lives superficially, one's mind wanders into all kinds of idle thoughts. The more meaningful life a person lives, the less he will experience idle thoughts.

Generally, idle thoughts are influenced by external stimuli. One hears, sees, and thinks about events that take place outside of him, and this causes his mind to wander into all kinds of idle thoughts. But there is also a more inner source of idle thoughts. When one has certain desires and wishes, these desires and wishes will also cause him to have certain thoughts about those desires and wishes. The stronger the desire, the more one will think about it.

When one lives superficially, her thoughts will be about things that are external, superficial, and meaningless. When one lives more inwardly, her thoughts become more meaningful and more inner. When that is the case, one's mind will naturally avoid any idle thoughts, because she doesn't have the superficial desires that motivate the idle thoughts.

Meaningful Thinking And Uprooting Materialistic Desires

In order to come out of this particular exile of thought – the exile of idle, meaningless thoughts – there are two parts.

The first part, is that one should think about things that are more meaningful, such as what the purpose of life is, what we were created for, and other such thoughts. The second part is that one should also uproot any unnecessary, material desires. By knocking out the unnecessary desires which are about superficiality, one will not think about these superficial things.

The Need For A Jewish Woman To Learn Sefarim About Pnimityus (The Inner World)

Therefore, in order to attain this, practically speaking, it is recommended for *bas Yisrael*³⁷ to get used to learning the *sefarim* which discuss the “inner world” (*pnimityus*).

We are not referring to learning about the “secrets” of Torah, but to learn the *sefarim* which *Klal Yisrael* is familiar with and which have received acclaim, which help a person enter into the inner world. Examples of this include: (1) *sefer Michtav M'Elياهو* of Rav Dessler³⁸, (2) *sefer Nesivos Shalom* of the Slominer Rebbe³⁹, (3) the *sefarim* of Rav Shimshon Pincus zt"l⁴⁰.

There are many other *sefarim* as well which bring a person into the “inner world”. Every *bas Yisrael* should have set times of learning and studying such *sefarim*, and to think and reflect on what one learns in these *sefarim*.

Throughout the generations, there has always been a debate regarding how much a *bas Yisrael* should become involved with matters of inner *avodah*. But in the latter generations, in which we are drowning in the external world of superficiality, there is almost no chance for any woman to survive spiritually, because she will never have any time to think about *avodas Hashem* at all.

It won't be enough today for a woman to learn even the classic *sefarim* such as *sefer Shevet Mussar*, or *sefer Orchos Tzaddikim*. Those are certainly holy *sefarim*, but besides for these *sefarim*, any *bas Yisrael* in our times today, without exception, needs to think a lot about the inner world of *avodah* (serving the Creator). The reality has proven that in our times, if a person doesn't enter the inner world, it is almost certain that he will become entrenched in the external world and all of its desires. In order to go against the force of the churning flow of the materialistic,

³⁷ *bas Yisrael* – lit. daughter of the Jewish people (a Jewish girl or woman)

³⁸ *Michtav M'Elياهو* volumes 1-5 (adapted into English as “Strive For Truth!”)

³⁹ adapted into English as the “Nesivos Shalom” series (on the Festivals and Pirkei Avos)

⁴⁰ The *sefarim* of Rav Shimshon Pincus are “Nefesh Shimshon”, “Sichos HaGaon Rav Shimshon Pincus”, “She'arim B'Tefillah”. The “Nefesh Shimshon” series and “She'arim B'Tefillah” have been adapted into English.

superficial world around us, we need to create a flow in the opposite direction. The only way to do that is by setting aside regular time each day to learn the *sefarim* that enter us into the inner world of *avodas Hashem*.

It is very recommended that a *bas Yisrael* should not delay learning these *sefarim* until after marriage. Instead, these *sefarim* should be learned by our girls before they get married, when they are still young. A girl should already become familiar with concepts about the world of *avodah*, so that it becomes natural to her to think about these concepts.

As a practical example, when saying a *dvar Torah* at the Shabbos table, don't just say a *vort* or a story, but something that is meaningful, something about *avodah*, which causes us to think about life and about what's important. It does not have to be something heavy. It can be light, but it should be something that makes us think about life.

It would be a good if a father or mother learns any of these *sefarim* with their daughter. Certainly this requires sensitivity, and it should only be done in a pleasant manner, and not in a pressurized way. Sometimes it is better to learn from a *sefer*, and in other situations it is better to just have a heart-to-heart conversation. But in any case, parents should set aside time with their daughter to discuss matters which causes them to think about *avodah*, the inner world.

When this is done right, it can transform the home into a home where matters of *avodah* are naturally discussed, and they are not deemed as anything novel, strange, or weird. The children will then grow up in a home where matters of *avodah* are familiar to them, and not strange to them. They will grow up knowing that life has a purpose and meaning to it. When the children see us learning such *sefarim* and discussing them, the children will become familiar with terms of *avodas Hashem* and the inner world, and they will find the world of *avodah* to become natural to them.

To do this, one should get used to thinking about what she learns, as opposed to just reading. One should read a few words or sentences, and then she should think about what she has just read. If one is used to reading many *sefarim* without thinking about what she is learning, her knowledge of these matters will be superficial, and the matters will certainly not penetrate to her heart or have any effect on her.

The “exile” on our analytical thought is essentially when we don't think about important matters that we read about, and instead we read about these things superficially, and we are satisfied with a superficial thinking about matters that really require more thinking. The “redemption” to our analytical thinking, then, is when we get used to thinking and reflecting into what we read and learn.

Practically Speaking

Practically speaking, whenever we read a statement in a *sefer* that we learn, we should review it a few times. After that, the second step is to write down what you have personally understood from what you have learned. This is not just to make a summary of what you learn, but to write down what you have actually understood based upon what you have read and learned.

After reviewing what you learn and writing down what you learned, there is a third step: Close the *sefer* and think about what we have just read. The Alter of Kelm taught an approach of how to develop our power of thinking. He said: “After you read something, think: What did I think before I read this, and what do I think now?” Whenever

you learn something new, you should think: “What was my understanding before I learned about this, and what do I understand now? What did I just gain from this new piece of knowledge?”

Finally, one should also write down any insights that she has about the topic she has just learned. She should wonder if there is only way to explain the topic, or if she has any other insights or other ways of understanding the topic. Write down all of your thoughts about a topic, statement, or lesson you learn in a *sefer*.

At first, these exercises are difficult. But gradually when you get used to it, you will develop the power of analytical thinking, and you will be activating this power. This is the redemption of the power of analytical thinking.

Certainly, these exercises cannot take up an entire day of a woman’s schedule. Any of these exercises should only take up a small amount of time. It should be practiced once a week, or a few times a week, or several times a month, or once a month, depending on whatever one can do.

A man is obligated to learn Torah for every second that he is able to, and he certainly cannot do this for more than a small part of his day. A woman doesn’t either have enough that much time for all of this, but she should still spend part of her day with these exercises. A woman needs to set aside some time each day or at least once a week to think about matters of *avodah*.

Going further, besides for a woman’s need to set aside to learn *sefarim*, every so often a woman should also think (throughout the course of the day) about matters pertaining the inner world, such as: “What is the purpose of life? Why was I created? What are the ways of *avodah* which we need to do?” A woman needs to spend some time of the day thinking like this, so that her thinking isn’t limited to when she’s actually learning a *sefer*.

Of course, this should be done sensibly, so that one doesn’t end up living too much in her thoughts and ignoring her husband and children’s needs. A woman will need to figure out the right balance of how much time she need to spends on thinking of these things, but she definitely needs some of it. She needs to reach a point where she is naturally thinking about inner matters, where she doesn’t feel forced to do so. We need to get to the point where we can naturally think about matters of our *avodah* just as naturally as we think about our family.

When we merit to think naturally about the world of *avodah*, this is the beginning of redeeming our power of thought from exile. Gradually as we progress with this, by thinking inner thoughts each day, from amidst a search for truth, there will eventually be a breakthrough, like water slowly dripping on a rock until it breaks. Our desires and thoughts will become purified as we desire and think about the inner world, and this will eventually bring us into the world of *avodah*, to think deeply about the world of *avodah*. This is the ideal way for the true *bas Yisrael*.

Something important to point out is that we also need to actualize somewhat our deep thinking. If we just have deep thoughts but we don’t act upon them, our thoughts won’t affect us. In addition to thinking about important topics, we also need to do bring those thoughts into the realm of action, by acting upon our thinking and learning.

In Conclusion

With the help of Hashem, we hope in the next lesson to discuss how we can give inner order to our power of thought, so that we can complete the discussion about how we can redeem our power of thought.



Q&A

Q1: Can the Rav recommend a point which we can work on to actualize this lesson?

A: Listen to the previous lessons of this series.

Q2: How do we re-focus after going through an intense emotion? How can we return to our world of avodah, after going through emotional turbulence?

A: Ask yourself what Hashem wants from you in this situation. The difficulty itself can become a part of your actual *avodah*. For example, if you are having difficulty with certain people, you can see which point you need to work on, and that will become your *avodah*. Or if you are dealing with anger problems, you can make working on anger into your current *avodah*. May Hashem help you come out of the difficult situation.

Q3: The Rav mentioned that our negative thoughts can come from bad middos. How can we go about fixing our bad middos?

A: When someone recognizes that he has a lustful desire, he should first recognize that it is holy at its root, and then see how he uses it negatively. Then, one should seek how he can minimize the negative desire. Then he should see how the lustful desire can be overpowered, by using the different elements of the soul. In the case of desire, which comes from the element of water, one needs to counter it with the opposite element, which is fire. In this way, one creates an internal war in his soul, in order to overpower his negative traits.

Q4: What is the difference between our inner world and our avodah (inner work)? Where should we place our emphasis?

A: The emphasis, when developing our inner world, should be that Hashem created us for a reason, and we each must be clear of the purpose of why we are living. After that, we need to see how we can actualize our inner potential. In order to do that, we need to recognize what is in our soul. Therefore we need to understand ourselves well. In addition, we also need to be aware of the conceptual definitions of different aspects of the soul. In addition to our inner world, we have our world of *avodah*, which means that there is a Creator and His creations, and all that have in this creation are tools to reach and serve Hashem. Some of the physicality of this world can be used to calm us so that we can be calm and settled in order to serve the Creator.

Q5: Is there a way to take a bad middah and counter it with the opposite of that bad middah?

A: Yes. We mentioned above three ways to counter the trait of lustful desire (which comes from an impaired element of “water” in the soul): Either by using the power of desires for holiness, or by minimizing our desires, or by countering desire with its opposite trait. We can use the “fire” in our animal soul in order to counter the “water” in our animal soul. There is also a higher method, of awakening the higher element of fire, which would vaporize the water. However, that is a lofty level.

Q6: Is there a connection between this lesson and with the mitzvah to reveal the traits of Hashem upon the world?

A: Certainly there is. By reflecting on how to bring Hashem’s kindness and glory into the world, one is using the power of thought.

09 | *Redeeming Your Will*

Our Inner Will Is To Do The Will of Hashem

With *siyata d'shmaya* we have the merit to continue to discuss the redemption of the soul. Previously we explained about redemption of the soul's power of thought. In this lesson we will progress to discuss the redemption of the soul's power of will (*ratzon*). We will explain what the “exile” of the will is, and accordingly, what the “redemption” of the will is, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

The inner *ratzon* (will) in every Jew is holy and pure. *Chazal* state, “*Retzonenu laasos Retzoncha*” – It is our will to do Your will.”⁴¹ This is the inner will in every Jew's soul: to do the will of Hashem. However, most of the time, our inner will remains concealed. *Chazal* state “It is our will to do Your will, but the “yeast of the sourdough” (the evil inclination) and the jurisdiction to the nations prevents us.”

Simply speaking, we have a will to do the Creator's will, and there are other factors which prevent us from actualizing this will. Our inner becomes covered over in the process.

The Exile Of Our Will

How does our inner will become concealed? It becomes concealed by the many other *retzonos* (desires) that we want. The more things that we want, and especially if these things are the opposite of Hashem's will, the more that our inner *ratzon* becomes covered over. At our core, we all want to do the Creator's will, but this is covered over by many “garments” which conceal it. These “garments” are essentially all of the various desires that we want.

Ever since Adam sinned by listening to the Serpent, who is really the evil inclination, the inner will of the soul became covered over, and now we want things other than what Hashem wants. It can get to the point that a person wants so many different things that he isn't even aware of the fact that deep down he really wants to do Hashem's will. Instead, he only wants to take care of his own wishes, desires and wants. When we do not very recognize that deep down we possess an inner will to do Hashem's will, this is an “exile” to our soul's inner will.

Upon deeper examination, there are essentially two different aspects of how our inner will is exiled. One level of exile to our inner will is because we want other than things and we don't consciously desire the will of Hashem. The exile on our inner will becomes deepened when we aren't even aware at all of our desire to do Hashem's will, and we think that we don't even have such a will.

The root of redeeming our will from its “exile”, then, is by knowing and being aware that deep down, we really want to do the will of Hashem.

However, if this fact merely remains on a level of intellectual knowledge alone to us, and we don't feel how it is true, then our will is still in exile. It is not enough to know about it. After knowing about it and learning about it,

⁴¹ *Berachos 17a*

we then need to get ourselves to be able to feel how it is true – as follows. The depth of redeeming our soul's inner will is not just by knowing that we really want to do Hashem's will, but by feeling how this is true: to actually feel that we really want to do Hashem's will.

How can we get ourselves to feel how it's true?

Discovering Our Desire To Do Hashem's Will

Since all Jewish souls have a will deep down to do Hashem's will, there are definitely some areas in our life where our various other desires are not covering over this inner will. We need to discover those areas. A person should sit down with himself and reflect, and to try to discover any of these areas. Each person should reflect to himself and think: "Are there any areas in my life where I clearly want to do Hashem's will?"

This kind of thinking is the beginning of the redemption of the soul's will. Every person should try to discover his pure will to do Hashem's will. In most cases a person will find several areas in his life in which he wants to do Hashem's will. These are sparks of spiritual illumination, which we can use to enter into the soul's redemption of our will.

After that stage, the next stage is, if possible, that a person should try to do one thing a day with conscious intention that he wants to do Hashem's will. One should choose either an action, or a word, or a thought, in which one either does, speaks about, or thinks about, what Hashem wants. One should do this because one wants to do Hashem's will.

This is a "spark" of redeeming the soul's will, which can be practically accessed each day.

Taking this further, it is proper not only to do something each day out of a will to the Creator's will, but to increase this will further, so that one is accessing it more often throughout the day. Actively doing Hashem's will each day starts out as a small "spark" – doing or thinking of the will of Hashem once a day – and gradually, one should keep increasing this "spark" by practicing this exercise of doing Hashem's will on a more steady basis, to the point that the "spark" has turned into a "fire".

Although, for the most part our inner will to do Hashem's will is concealed, we can try actualizing our inner will once a day, even if only a little, and we can slowly increase it, so that we are accessing it more often throughout the day.

Self-Focused Desires Block Us From Revealing Our Inner Will

There are generally two paths when it comes to any point in serving the Creator: "*Remove yourself from evil, and do good*".⁴² We need to do positive actions that reinforce holiness, and we need to negate evil. Until now, we were discussing the path of how to "do good": By increasing the good within us, the inner will to do what Hashem wants. But we also need to do the part of "*remove yourself from evil*": By removing our other *retzonos* (desires) which are not holy. Now let us explain this part, with *siyata d'shmaya*, and how it contributes to the redemption of our soul's will from exile.

⁴² *Tehillim 34:15*

Every person has many different *retzonos*/desires. We have the inner *ratzon*/will to do the Creator's will, and this inner will is covered over by many other "lower", external *retzonos*, which include our various desires. These external *retzonos* divide into two parts: Spiritual desires, and material desires. We are able to have many different spiritual desires, and many different material desires.

Spiritual desires are not always focused on the Creator. Even when a person desires something spiritual, if he is being self-focused, these *retzonos* are not necessarily about doing the will of Hashem, though they may be holy desires in essence. For example, if a person wants to *daven* for something he needs, he is not always doing this in order to become closer to Hashem. He is being more spiritual when he *davens*, but he is still being self-focused.

The same goes for doing *chessed*. A person is not always doing *chessed* because he wants to become closer to Hashem, and instead he is doing it because he gets some personal gain out of it. Or, consider a person who wants to have more *simchah* (joy). A person doesn't always want *simchah* because he wants to serve Hashem better, but simply because he is concerned for himself and therefore he wants to be happy. When a spiritual act or a spiritual desire is self-serving or otherwise self-focused, it is also known as *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motives, and not for the sake of Heaven). If one wants to do something for Hashem's sake, this is called *lishmah*.

Thus, whenever a person wants to do something for his own own self-gain, even it is something spiritual, it is in the category of *shelo lishmah*. When we do something or we aspire for something because we want *Gan Eden*, because we want to bask in spiritual bliss, or because we want to gain more *zechusim* (merits) so that we will gain more reward in the future, these are spiritual desires which are all in the category of *shelo lishmah*, because they are self-focused. And certainly when we want physical or mundane things for the sake of our own comfort, and because we want to experience pleasure, or even because we have certain physical needs, all of these desires are in the category of *shelo lishmah*.

Uprooting Our Self-Focused Desires

Let's now provide a path on how to go about uprooting our self-focused desires (whether they are material or spiritual), so that we can reveal forth from ourselves our inner will to do the Creator's will. One should sit with himself and ask himself: "What kinds of desires do I have?" One should make two lists, a list of all his existing spiritual desires and a list of all his existing material desires, which he is aware of in himself.

It is recommended not do this all in one day but to keep adding on to the list over a period of a few weeks, until one has a list of most of the desires that he recognizes in himself. These desires exist, but most people are not conscious of them and they are not aware of which desires they want most and which desires that want less.

Making this list will help a person gain a great amount of self-awareness about the many different things that you want. That is the first gain of this. It helps a person become gradually aware of what he wants and how powerfully he wants certain things, which builds up a person's self-awareness.

After one has made these two lists, one should try to give priority to them, seeing which desire he wants most, which desire he wants second-to-most, which desire he wants third-to-most, etc. One should do this for both his material desires and spiritual desires.

To summarize, the first step is to write down the different desires one has, and the second step is to give order to them.

Pitting Our Strongest Physical Desire Against Our Inner Will

At the depth of our being, we always want to do Hashem's will, and it is just that we have many different desires covering it over, both spiritual and material, which are preventing our inner will from being revealed.

We can see that the stronger a particular desire is, the more it conceals our inner will to do what Hashem wants. On a general level, our many different desires are preventing our inner will. But, getting more specific, the stronger the desire, the more it will conceal our inner will. One should therefore become aware of how his strongest desires are preventing him from revealing his inner will to do Hashem's will.

It was explained earlier that we need to do good by increasing the occurrences of our inner will, and to remove ourselves from evil by ridding ourselves from other desires. Now let's explain with *siyata d'shmaya* how we can remove ourselves from evil, how to rid ourselves from other desires.

After we have become aware of our many different desires, we should then try to minimize our desires. We should mainly try to minimize our strongest physical desires (as opposed to mainly minimizing our spiritual desires). This will slowly reveal our inner will to do Hashem's will.

One needs to pit two desires against each other and create an internal war, by being aware of the desire to do Hashem's will and by being aware that one has other desires which oppose this inner will. (We are not speaking here of a different kind of internal struggle, where one knows that Hashem's will is to do A and he feels that he wants to do B. This is a different kind of internal battle and we are not dealing with that here). One should become aware, at least on an intellectual level, of this internal war.

After gaining this intellectual awareness, one should then pit the two opposing internal forces against each other. After we have increased our will to Hashem's will, we now have to create a war between our inner will with our other desires. This is how we can reach our true power of *bechirah* (free will), of choosing to listen to our good inclination over our evil inclination.

The first step, then, is to become aware and to feel that there are opposing forces within us: our will to do Hashem's will, and our many other desires.

Next comes the second step. After gaining the above awareness, one should actively enter into this internal battle. One should take out his list and choose the easiest material desire to overcome, by awakening his inner will to do the Creator's will. We will find that in this area, we have an easier time overcoming our evil inclination.

This is the depth of redeeming our will.

Summary

In summary, first we need to identify our will to do Hashem's will, and then we need to gradually weaken our material desires, by pitting them against our desire to do Hashem's will. We can slowly overcome one of our material desires after the other, not simply because we are aiming at weakening our material desires, but out of our deep desire to do Hashem's will. The more a person keeps up this process, doing Hashem's will and weakening his small material desires, he removes the barrier atop his will to do Hashem's will and it becomes easier for him to reveal his will to do Hashem's will.

This is how a person can ascend on the spiritual ladder towards Hashem, not just by weakening the material desires, but increasing his desire to do Hashem's will. This is the depth of redeeming the soul's inner will.

Preparing To Receive The Torah: Through Revealing Our Inner Will

This concept is especially relevant to the days in which we are directly before Shavuos. At the giving of the Torah, we revealed our will to do Hashem's will. At that time, when we stood at Sinai, there was no evil inclination present. Our will to do Hashem's will was in full force, with nothing holding us back. We had our pure and true will to do Hashem's will. During this time of the year, we can especially reach this level, of our will to do Hashem's will, the true redemption to our soul's will.



Q&A

Q1: *Why do our physical desires go against Hashem's will? Isn't our body also supposed to want to do Hashem's will, since it is a vessel for the soul which wants to do Hashem's will?*

A: Good question. There is the will to do the Creator's will and the will to take care of one's own desires, whether physical or spiritual. A spiritual will is to do something for Hashem, and our physical will is to do something for ourselves. Getting subtler, the will to do the Creator's will can also be expressed in physicality. The will to do the Creator's will when it comes to physical matters [i.e. eating because it is the will of the Creator that I should take care of myself] is linked with the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal level of the soul), and it is not as complete of a level as the will to do the Creator's will when it comes to spirituality.

Q2: *Is there a difference between a need and a want? When a person wants something doesn't that mean he feels a need for it?*

A: There is certainly a difference, but sometimes a person thinks he needs something and he really doesn't need it, he just wants it. But he becomes dependent on it and then he makes himself needy of it. A person may also want something that he really needs, so it can be both a want and a need. On a deeper level, every need that we feel really stems from the Creator.

Q3: *I always understood that a person was created for pleasure, for spiritual pleasure, but here the Rav is saying that one should not do things for himself, for his own pleasure.*

A: That is a very good question. It depends why a person wants to have pleasure. A person was created for the spiritual pleasure of connecting to Hashem. But there are elements of *shelo lishmah* and *lishmah* within this pleasure. One can use pleasure to connect to the spiritual and this is called *lishmah*, this is proper pleasure, and when one uses pleasure for its own sake and not for the sake of connection, this is called *shelo lishmah*, and this is self-serving pleasure.

Q4: When Adam sinned he only wanted to do Hashem's will, so how did he come to sin?

A: Many answers are given to this. One answer is because there are two ways to reveal Hashem: By way of “light” [spiritual light], or by way of “darkness” [absence of spiritual light]. Adam’s error was that he wanted to reveal Hashem by way of “darkness”, through sin, by opposing Hashem’s will. He chose to sin *lishmah*, because he thought this would reveal greater spiritual light and that he would thereby become closer to Hashem.

Q5: How can a person become closer to Hashem through doing a sin...?

A: When a person does something easily, there is less spiritual revelation, and when a person exerts himself, there is greater spiritual revelation. Adam chose to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* because he wanted to experience the evil inclination so that he could overcome it and thereby reveal a greater level of spiritual revelation. He wanted to make it harder for himself, so that he could overcome the challenge and become closer to Hashem.

Q6: If our true will is to do Hashem's will then what is our opposing will, if it is not really our will? Is our will to do evil our will or is not our will?

A: The *Nefesh HaChaim* says that before the sin, man only wanted to do Hashem’s will, and the evil inclination was “outside” of him. After the sin, the evil inclination entered man, and it now appears as if it is the person’s will. The *Gemara* says that the wicked are ruled by their evil inclination, whereas the righteous rule their evil inclination.⁴³ The depth of this is because the wicked think that their very essence is their will to oppose the Creator, and that is why they are ruled by their evil inclination, while the *tzaddikim* are aware that their evil inclination is only an outer voice and it is not their actual voice. Our desire to do evil is not really part of us, it just pretends to be us. The true me only wants to do what Hashem wants, while our *yetzer hora* is not really part of us. It lives in you and it makes us think that it is who “you” are.

Q7: Chazal said that if a person says he will sin he is not given opportunity to sin, so how come by Adam he wanted to eat from the Eitz HaDaas to come closer to Hashem through sin, if he was not allowed to deliberately sin? What was he thinking?

A: *Chazal* state that even after Adam sinned, he said “I ate, and I will continue to eat.”⁴⁴ His plan was to keep eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*. When *Chazal* state that a person is not given the opportunity to repent when he says “I will sin and repent later”, *Chazal* are saying that a person is not given help to sin after he sins and plans to repent, but that does not mean he cannot do *teshuvah*. He can still do *teshuvah* from “within” himself, without any aid from Heaven, which is more difficult, but he still can do *teshuvah* even in this case where he said “I will sin and repent later.”⁴⁵

Q8: Chazal state that “Our will is to do Hashem's will, but the yeast in the sourdough (yetzer hora) and jurisdiction of the government prevents us.” If so, how does a person have bechirah (free will) not to sin, if he is being prevented by these two factors?

A: The *yetzer hora* and the jurisdiction of the government are two different forces which prevent a person from doing Hashem’s will. The *yetzer hora* convinces a person to go against Hashem, while the jurisdiction of the government forces a person to go against Hashem.

⁴³ *Berachos 61b*

⁴⁴ *Beraishis Rabbah 19:12*

⁴⁵ *Mishnayos Tractate Yoma 8:9*

Q9: *So does a person still have bechirah, when he cannot do Hashem's will due to the government's jurisdiction?*

A: Generally when a person is prevented because of the jurisdiction of the government, the person is in the category of *ones* (forced), so he is not choosing to sin, but there is still a part of the person which still has *bechirah* (free will) which is choosing.

Choosing against Hashem, the improper use of our power of *bechirah*, is the *yetzer hora*, whereas the jurisdiction of the government forces a person to go against Hashem. Being in an impure environment limits our *bechirah* because it places bad influences on us and affects our choice, but we still have some *bechirah*, and that is where our point of *bechirah* lies.

Q10: *How can we subjugate our desire for evil and get ourselves to want Hashem's will more consistently?*

A: A simple way is fear of punishment. Another way is by increasing our will for Hashem's will, as explained in this lesson, along with davening and crying to Hashem for help.

10 | *Redeeming Your Pleasure*

Man Was Created To Experience Spiritual Pleasure

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing in this lesson to discuss the “redemption” of the soul. In this lesson we will progress to discussing the stage of how we can “redeem” the power of *taanug* (pleasure) in the soul from its “exile”.

The *Ramchal*, in the beginning of *Mesillas Yescharim*, states that a person was created to enjoy this world, which is to enjoy the spiritual bliss that comes from being attached with Hashem. Man was created for pleasure, so it is not possible for a person to live without pleasure. The only issue is what kind of pleasure a person will pursue.

The Root Of Shelo Lishmah (Ultrior Motives) Is Taanug (Pleasure)

Whenever a person serves Hashem, either he is doing it *lishmah* (with pure motives) or *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motives). The root of acting *shelo lishmah* is whenever a person acts for the sake of his own pleasure. Most of the time, we are serving Hashem *shelo lishmah*, meaning that we are serving Hashem for the spiritual pleasure that we get out of it.

The Proper Use Of Taanug: Pleasure As A Means Of Connection

Chazal teach, “A person must always learn Torah and do the *mitzvos shelo lishmah*, because from *shelo lishmah* a person comes to *lishmah*.”⁴⁶ Rav Chaim Volozhiner noted that *Chazal* are saying that a person must “always” begin with *shelo lishmah*, and he must not attempt to begin with *lishmah*, for it is simply impossible to begin serving Hashem *lishmah*. *Chazal* are saying that a person must begin with *shelo lishmah* - which means that he must first experience pleasure in serving Hashem - and only after experiencing pleasure in serving Hashem, can a person begin to serve Hashem *lishmah*.

We can see that whenever a person has pleasure from something, he becomes connected to it. This is the purpose of pleasure: to use the pleasure as a means of connecting to what I am getting pleasure out of. If a person does the *mitzvos* only because he wants to receive pleasure from it, this is an improper motivation. Although the Sages said that a person should always begin with *shelo lishmah*, the Sages did not mean that a person should act solely for the sake of experiencing pleasure. Rather, one may begin serving Hashem out of a pleasure to do so, but only because he needs the pleasure to connect to Hashem. The pleasure is not meant to become a means for itself, but as a means to achieve a connection with Hashem.

In summation, if we are getting pleasure from a good source, such as learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*, and we are also using this pleasure as a means to become more connected to our Torah learning and our performance of *mitzvos*, then we are using the power of pleasure in the proper and holy way.

⁴⁶ *Pesachim 50b*

Our Pleasure In Exile

So far, we have explained the “redemption” of our soul’s power to have pleasure: when we use pleasure for the right purpose, for the sake of connecting to the spiritual. Now let us explain the “exile” of pleasure: when pleasure is used for the wrong purposes. This happens when a person wants to have pleasure for its own sake, and with no other greater goal in mind.

Firstly, when a person is seeking physical pleasures for the sake of experiencing the pleasure alone, this is an “exile” to the soul’s true power of pleasure. Secondly, it makes a person more dependent on the pleasure, and this places the soul’s pleasure in further exile. Finally, even if a person is getting pleasure from the spiritual, if he is only doing it for the sake of the pleasure, that is also a subtle “exile” to the soul’s pleasure, even though the pleasure is coming from a spiritual source.

When most people pursue pleasure, it is usually because they want the pleasure for its own sake. Also, most of the time, when people are seeking pleasure, they are seeking physical pleasure, not spiritual pleasure, and this makes them even more attached and dependent on the physical pleasures.

How Even Spiritual Pleasure Places Exile On The Soul’s Pleasure

When one is getting pleasure from the spiritual [i.e. *avodas Hashem*, learning Torah and doing the *mitzvos*] but it’s not because he wants to have a greater connection to the spiritual – and it’s simply because he wants to experience this pleasure for its own sake – such a person is serving Hashem *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motives).

The *Ramchal* explains in *Mesillas Yesharim*, in the chapter which explains the level of “piety” (*chassidus*), that a person who serves Hashem for the sake of spiritual pleasure alone is at the level of *shelo lishmah*, and although he is not acting evil, he is still not having the proper intentions. This is all a subtle kind of “exile” on the pleasure of the soul.

How Physical Pleasure Places The Soul’s Pleasure In Exile

However, the main aspect of “exile” of the soul’s pleasure is when people seek physical pleasure. There are two aspects to this.

The first aspect of it is when people want to experience physical pleasure for the sake of experiencing the pleasure. *Chazal* teach that the word *oneg* (pleasure) has the same letters as the word *nega* (affliction)⁴⁷, meaning that when people take physical pleasure for the sake of the pleasure, this pleasure becomes faulty and it becomes spiritually harmful to them. This is the root kind of “exile” of the soul’s pleasure.

The second part of the “exile” of the soul’s pleasure is that whenever people take physical pleasure, they will also come to depend on the pleasure, and they will want more and more of it. This furthers the exile of the soul’s

⁴⁷ *Sefer Yetzira* 2:4

pleasure. Not only is the person seeking the wrong kind of pleasure, but he becomes attached with it. *Chazal* call this, “Attached to it like a dog.”⁴⁸

There is a big difference between one who gets pleasure out of something he needs to take care of, which is inevitable, versus someone who is doing an act purely for the sake of the pleasure involved. The first kind person doesn’t become attached to the pleasure. The second kind of person becomes attached to the pleasure, becoming further attached to the material desires of the physical body, which is rooted in the element of earth (materialism).

Thus, with most people, there is an exile of the soul’s pleasure, both when it comes to spiritual pleasure as well as material pleasure. Most people are getting pleasure from the physical, not from the spiritual. Their pleasure is in exile, because they are seeking physical pleasure for its own sake, and they also become more and more dependent on these physical pleasures. Even the small amount of people who do get pleasure from the spiritual are not using this pleasure as a means to become more connected with the spiritual, and they are seeking spiritual pleasure for the sake of experiencing pleasure alone.

The Abundance Of Physical Pleasure Today Is An Exile To Our Soul’s Pleasure

This issue was always relevant, but in recent generations, anyone can recognize that the possibilities of material pleasures have grown astronomically. We are born with the five senses of seeing, hearing, smell, taste and touch. In previous times, a person could not see that far. Today, a person can see from one end of the world to another, through technology, and he can keep giving himself pleasure from these sights. This resembles the original ability of vision given to Adam *HaRishon*, which enabled him to see from one end of the world to another.⁴⁹, only that in our generation, this power is being used for evil.

In previous times, a person could only hear things in his direct vicinity, but today with technology a person can hear sounds and conversations that are taking place at the other end of the world. He can even hear people who are already dead, by listening to a recording. Smell is also not what it used to be. Today a person can smell a countless array of scents.

The sense of taste today has changed dramatically. In our times, the variety of food available today is overwhelming. There are an endless amount today of different kinds of flavors, foods, sweets, and nosh. There are a myriad amount of restaurants and eateries today. This all provides a person with millions of different kinds of taste. In previous times a person could also try several different kinds of food, but in our generation the amount of different foods that are available is endless. This is all the more so when people fly to other countries, where they can try a Chinese menu, another time an Italian menu, and another time a French menu. Even in one’s own country, one can try different menus from all over the world.

The sense of touch is also different today. Today a person can feel any kind of texture he wants, whether a hard or soft texture, with varying degrees. In our generation it is common for people to have swimming pools in their homes, and this also comes from a desire to experience touch. When people are in the water, they enjoy frolicking around in the water, and they are essentially experiencing the sense of touch when they do this. That is also why people love to go on vacations.

⁴⁸ *Sotah 3b*

⁴⁹ *Chagigah 12a*

Today, the amount of physical pleasures in our world is so abundant that we are flooded by them, like a *Mabul*, and it can remove a person entirely from being focused on developing his inner, spiritual world. Our power of pleasure is really in exile. A person was really created for pleasure, for the pleasure of connecting to Hashem, which is the true pleasure, but in the world today, there is so much material pleasure being pursued which distracts a person from finding the true pleasure that we were created to seek. If a person today doesn't try to develop his inner world, it is almost certain that he will become engulfed by all of the material pleasure that surrounds him, and he will be swept away with them.

Summary

To summarize, the purpose of pleasure is to use pleasure in order to connect to the spiritual, to Torah and to *mitzvos*. This is a proper kind of pleasure, and it is the positive use of the soul's ability of *shelo lishmah*, which eventually leads to *lishmah*. When it comes to physical pleasure, a person seeks the pleasure for its own sake, and this is one aspect of the "exile" on the soul's pleasure. A person also becomes dependent on the physical pleasures with the more that he experiences them, and this is a second aspect to the "exile" on the soul's pleasure. A subtler form of exile on the soul's pleasure is when a person seeks spiritual pleasure for the sake of the pleasure alone.

Proper Use Of Physical Pleasure

Now we shall explain the proper boundaries of how and when to make use of physical pleasure.

Pleasure was created so that we will use it to get pleasure from the spiritual, from Torah and from *mitzvos* and all that is spiritual, and, as explained, a person needs to use this pleasure as a tool to become more connected to the spiritual world. However, a person also has a physical body, which wants to take this pleasure for itself, so the body therefore wants to get pleasure from the physical. The *Mesillas Yescharim* says that physical pleasures are a test given to mankind, to see if man will avoid them, or to use them properly, by enjoying This World to the extent that a body is calmed, so that it will allow the soul to be free to serve its Creator.

There is a very subtle point. A proper amount of pleasure will calm the "animal" level of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*), and this is good pleasure, and this is a redemption to physical pleasure. But if one pursues a little more pleasure than necessary, one becomes attached to the pleasure and he becomes needy of it, and this "exiles" the soul's pleasure. One should become clear of this fine distinction.

Tasting The Shabbos Food

There is also a specific time of the week when it is actually encouraged to give the body some physical pleasure. This is on *Shabbos Kodesh*, when there is a *mitzvah* to taste the Shabbos food. One should try to taste good-tasting food primarily on the day of Shabbos, as opposed to the weekday.

Going a little further with this, the *Shelah HaKadosh* explains that one should only "taste" a little bit of the Shabbos food, because since the *mitzvah* is to "taste" the Shabbos food, the Hebrew word for taste is *taam*, from the word *me'at*, which means "a little", implying that one should only taste a little bit of the food on Shabbos. One

should eat enough of the food until he feels that he has calmed his body from it, but he should not eat more than that.

The *Shelah* also adds that even on *Shabbos Kodesh*, when there is a *mitzvah* to eat specially prepared food for *Shabbos Kodesh*, one should make sure to taste all of the dishes prepared for *Shabbos Kodesh*, but he should not fill up his stomach from each dish. Instead, one should taste a bit of each dish on *Shabbos Kodesh*, just tasting it and no more. This is the holy physical pleasure that one can have on *Shabbos Kodesh*. Therefore, practically speaking, when you are eating on *Shabbos*, make sure to have a taste each of the different foods on the table - a little bit of each kind of food, but not more than that. Try all of the dishes, but only taste them, and don't fill your stomach with them.

Elevating Our Eating During The Weekdays

There is also a way to elevate our physical pleasure during the week. Whenever you eat, it is recommended that you put down the fork for a few moments and take breaks between the bites. Instead of eating like an animal, which continuously gorges on its food without pause, we can be composed as we eat. As human beings, we have the power to have self-control over our desires while we are eating, and we are able to take breaks in between each bite as we are eating. We may certainly enjoy the food we eat, but we can do so calmly, staying in control over our physical desires.

This is a way to redeem the soul's pleasure. The idea is that we are able to rectify the desire for physical pleasure through making sure to "taste" the food, as opposed to simply "eating" our food. More of this is explained about in the series of *Fixing Your Water-Desire*, but here we have explained a general method of how to repair the desire for physical pleasure.

Finding Pleasure In The Spiritual

Another way to redeem the soul's physical pleasure - which is also the goal - is to learn how to get pleasure from the spiritual.

Any Jew on this world, in order to serve Hashem properly, must know how to get pleasure from *avodas Hashem*. We should not be satisfied with simply doing acts of *chessed* and doing all of the *mitzvos*, if don't find enjoyment in doing *chessed* or in *mitzvos*. Besides for just "doing" the *mitzvos*, one needs to be able to enjoy them.

In order to begin tasting spiritual pleasure from doing *mitzvos*, the first, basic step is to lessen our dependency on physical pleasure, as explained earlier. This brings a closer to being able to enjoy spiritual pleasure.

When one is more in touch with his soul, it is natural for him to get pleasure from the spiritual. But for most people, who haven't yet revealed their souls, they should at least try to get a bit of pleasure from the spiritual. Every Jew has something spiritual which he gets pleasure from. One needs to become aware of the area in his life where he is already getting spiritual pleasure from, and then, one should expand it further.

The point of this is not to come up with a newfound pleasure in the spiritual. Rather, we just need to expand upon any spiritual pleasure that we already have. We need to see how we already have pleasure in the spiritual, and then we need to expand upon that source.

How do expand upon our spiritual pleasure? Generally speaking, after we have identified where we get pleasure from in the spiritual, we need to think about it more and to learn more about it. With the more that we learn about why we get spiritual pleasure from a certain area, the more that our hearts will become opened to it, and then we will be able to gain more pleasure from that area. Along with this, we should also *daven* to Hashem to open our hearts more to the spiritual.

In our generation, we can see that there are many children who leave the path of Torah and *mitzvos* (may G-d have compassion on them). Suffice it say that they weren't getting any pleasure in their Torah learning and in doing the *mitzvos*. They may have been doing everything that they had to do, but they weren't enjoying what they were doing. In today's times, in order to spiritually survive, a Jew must reveal a deep pleasure in the spiritual.

Finding a deep pleasure in something spiritual will protect a Jew today from the allure of the many material pleasures available in our world today. This is the obligation of our generation: to get pleasure from the spiritual! We need to do for ourselves, and then we need to show others how to have pleasure in the spiritual (in doing the *mitzvos*, learning Torah and in doing Hashem's will), and this is how a person will be able to protect himself, and to show others as well how they can protect from themselves, from the outside world today.

The word *Gan Eden* (Paradise) is from the word *gan idun*, a "shield" of "pleasure". This is a hint that when we are getting pleasure from the spiritual, we will be shielded from the allure of the outside world.



Q&A

Q1: *When we seek pleasure from the spiritual do we also need to minimize how much we are seeking material pleasure?*

A: There are always two parts to one's *avodah*, based on the verse "*Remove yourself from evil, and do good*", meaning that we need to stay away from evil and also engage in constructive, spiritual action. Simply speaking, the verse is saying that first we need to remove ourselves from evil, and then we can do good. The *Baal Shem Tov* taught however that in order to remove ourselves from evil, we need to first do good. In previous generations, the accepted approach was to first remove ourselves from evil, before we could do any good. In the more recent generations, the *Baal Shem Tov*'s approach (that we should first "do good", in order to be removed from evil) has become the more accepted approach. One needs to be able to do both (removing himself from evil, and also doing good) in order to perfect his *avodah*, and one is able to start from either step, but practically speaking, it is too difficult for a person to remove himself from material pleasure unless he knows how to get pleasure from the spiritual, so a person should first have a spiritual source of pleasure.

...Therefore, the first step in coming out of the "exile" of pleasure is to first experience spiritual pleasure, even for the sake of pleasure alone. But one should not stay at that level, because that is still exile. The next step is to use the spiritual pleasure as a means of connecting to the spiritual. But the first step is for one to find a spiritual area where he gets pleasure from.

Q2: *When seeking spiritual pleasure it seems that I am giving pleasure to my “animal soul” as well...?*

A: The “G-dly” layer of the soul (the *nefesh Elokis*) also gets pleasure when a person does something spiritual. But when one seeks spiritual pleasure for the sake of the pleasure alone, this gives pleasure only to the “animal” layer of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*). In contrast, when one seeks spiritual pleasure as a means of becoming more connected to the spiritual, this gives pleasure to the “G-dly” layer of the soul.

Q3: *There are people who don't feel deserving of pleasure. What can they do about getting pleasure?*

A: Why don't they feel deserving of pleasure?

Q4: *They were told since they were younger that it's wrong to get pleasure.*

A: This is a sensitive issue. A person like this will need to calm his “animal soul” by getting pleasure, just as anyone else needs to do, but he should also not overdo it with indulgence. So a person in this situation should make sure to get a little physical pleasure, but he should be very careful not to overdo it. Otherwise, he will feel like he is getting out of jail (because until now he was deprived of pleasure, and now that he has given himself some pleasure he may want more and more of it), and then he will seek a tremendous and unhealthy amount of pleasure, because until now he had felt stifled from it. So it is a very sensitive issue. The person will need to learn how to get some physical pleasure, but he must be careful not to overdo it, because if he overdoes it he will seek too much pleasure.

Q5: *What about a person who isn't able to get pleasure from anything on this world who doesn't enjoy anything?*

A: If a person does not enjoy anything, the person is suffering. If a person is suffering because he isn't getting any pleasure, it means that he isn't getting what he needs. He will need to come to terms with his suffering and accept this suffering from Hashem with love. Just like a person goes hungry if he doesn't have what to eat, and he suffers, so does a person suffer when he needs pleasure and he is not getting it. However, I would need to know some more specifics about this situation, in order to answer this question more fully.

Q6: *If one know what will give him pleasure but he doesn't have access to the pleasure, does that mean he doesn't need it?*

A: As we said before, a person suffers when he doesn't get what he needs, and he must accept this suffering with love. A person also suffers when he doesn't get something which he imagines that he needs, when he doesn't really need it. For this, a person must accept that these are just wishes that he has, not actual needs, and that is why he didn't get them.

Q7: *If a person isn't married, does that mean that he or she is being deprived of the pleasure of being married, and it is a sign that it isn't really necessary for this person to be married?*

A: Almost all people that come onto this world need to find their *zivug* (marriage partner). There are rare instances in which a person doesn't find his or her *zivug*. This can either be due to a punishment upon that particular soul, of being sentenced to descend onto this world without be able to finding one's *zivug*, or, it can happen for an opposite reason: Because there are sometimes *tzaddikim* who don't come down for their own *tikkun* (soul-rectification), but only in order to help others achieve their *tikkun*, and therefore they don't have a *zivug*. This is reminiscent of how Moshe Rabbeinu separated from his wife Tziporah, and also the sage Ben Azai who never married.

But usually when a person isn't finding a *zivug*, it is because some factor is holding back his or her *zivug*, and the fact that he or she is not finding his or her *zivug* does not mean that it is not necessary for them to get married.

May Hashem send you your *zivug* quickly, and may it be your true *zivug*, according to your soul root.

Q8: *What is the spiritual pleasure that comes from honor? Is this spiritual pleasure or materialistic pleasure?*

A: Do you mean pleasure from personal honor or pleasure in revealing the honor of Hashem? Pleasure from personal honor is in the category of faulty pleasure. Pleasure from seeking the honor of Hashem is spiritual.

11 | *Redeeming Your Emunah*

Emunah: Believing In The Incomprehensible

We are continuing to learn, with the help of Hashem, about redeeming the soul. In this lesson we will learn about the power of *emunah* in the soul, how our power of *emunah* becomes “exiled”, and how we can “redeem” our power of *emunah* from its state of exile.

There are several ways of our Sages of how to define *emunah*. One approach is that “Wherever the intellect ends, that is where *emunah* begins”⁵⁰ [hence, when we cannot understand or comprehend something, that is when we need to make use of our *emunah*, to believe in something that we cannot understand]. The second approach is that *emunah* fills all of existence [and therefore there is always a need to use *emunah*].

According to the first approach, there is no need to believe in something if we already understand it. *Emunah* begins where the intellect ends, and therefore, if our intellect can comprehend something, there is no need to have *emunah* in it. But if there is a situation where we don’t understand something, or if our intellect is being swayed and we can’t think logically enough, there is a need to use the second approach: to believe, even when we don’t comprehend.

Thus, the soul’s faculty of *emunah* is used whenever we believe in something that goes beyond our intellectual comprehension.

Three Uses Of Our Emunah – In The Creator, In The Sages, And In Our Soul’s Abilities

There are several uses of *emunah* (believing in the incomprehensible). The most fundamental use of our *emunah* is when we believe in the Creator, Who is above the comprehension of all creations.

A second use of our *emunah* is to believe in our Sages. The Torah says that the people believed in Moshe (“*And they believed in Hashem, and in Moshe, His servant*”⁵¹), and that is the root of *emunas chachomim*, believing in the wisdom of the Sages. One must believe that the Sages are above his level, and therefore, they have a greater level of comprehension.

A third use of our power of *emunah* is to believe in oneself. This is not referring to “self-confidence”, but to a deeper use of *emunah*, of believing in the powers of the soul that are in oneself. It is said that on Chanukah, the Chashmonaim “believed in themselves (with *emunah*) and placed their trust (*bitachon*) in Hashem.” What does it mean to have *emunah* in oneself?

There are five names to the soul, as the *Gemara* in Tractate Berachos states.⁵² The Sages elsewhere state the five names of the soul (from the lowest level to the highest level): *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah* and *Yechidah*.⁵³

⁵⁰ Rav Dessler zt”l in sefer *Michtav M’Eliyahu*

⁵¹ *Shemos* 14:31

⁵² *Berachos* 10a

⁵³ *Beraishis Rabbah* 14:9

These are five parts to the soul. A person at the level of *Nefesh* must believe that he also has a *Ruach*, and that his *Ruach* is motivating him and energizing him, even if he doesn't understand how. One must also believe that he has a *Neshamah* which enables him to think, and that he has a *Chayah* which serves as the higher source of understanding, and that he has a *Yechidah* where his root will is. In short, a person needs to have *emunah* that there are higher parts to his soul which are above his current level of comprehension.

The following is an example when one doesn't have *emunah* in oneself. The Ramban said that Aristotle was a heretic because he did not believe what he didn't comprehend. On a simple level, Aristotle was a heretic because he didn't believe in the Creator, since he didn't see the Creator. That is certainly true. But the deeper understanding of the Ramban's words is because Aristotle lacked the ability to believe in what he didn't understand. Just because you don't understand it, that doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

We must believe in the different abilities in our soul, which can motivate us and energize us. The more we believe in these abilities in our souls, the more we will gain from these powers.

In summary, we have so far mentioned three uses of the soul's power of *emunah*, which is always about believing in the incomprehensible: to believe in the Creator, to believe in our Torah Sages, and to believe in our abilities.

The Creator's "Emunah" In His Creations

There is also another aspect to our power of *emunah*. All of the abilities in our soul are a spark of the Creator's abilities, so there is also an *emunah* of the Creator, as it were. Our power of *emunah* is really an offshoot of the Creator's *emunah*, so to speak. What is the Creator's *emunah*?

The *Sifrei* states that "Hashem believed in the world and then created it."⁵⁴ This is the "*emunah*" of the Creator: the fact that Hashem "believed" in the creations, in order to create them. Why was this *emunah* necessary? Man is given free will to choose between right and wrong, to choose to do against the will of Hashem. Therefore Hashem had to "believe" in the creations in order to allow them to oppose His will. (On a deeper level, Hashem knows what everyone will do, because there is a "higher knowledge" (*yediah*) above the power of free will (*bechirah*) of human beings.)

Let us briefly summarize the four kinds of *emunah* mentioned so far. We have the ability to have *emunah* in the Creator, to have *emunah* in the Sages, to have *emunah* in the higher parts of our soul. There is also the Creator's *emunah* in the creations, which is the root of all *emunah*.

Exile Of Our Emunah

Based upon what we have learned thus far, we can now understand what the "exile" of our *emunah* is, and accordingly, what the "redemption" of our *emunah* will be.

The ability of *emunah*, of being able to believe, is ingrained in our character from the time we are born. All human beings are believers, by their very nature. There is no person in the world who doesn't believe in anything. The only question is *what* we will believe in. A person can use his power of *bechirah* (free will) and choose to utilize

⁵⁴ *Sifrei to Devarim 32:4*

his power of *emunah* to believe in the Creator, in the Sages, and in his soul's inner abilities. But it is impossible for a person not to believe in anything. A person always believes in something.

1. Belief In Other Gods

When a person stifles his *emunah* in Hashem or in the Sages or in his abilities, he will place his belief in other powers, and this “exiles” his *emunah*. One example is the belief in false gods. In previous times, people would believe in the power of “other gods”. A long time ago, people believed very strongly in the forces of nature and placed their confidence in them, making them into gods. Pharaoh thought of himself as a god, and the Nile River was worshipped as a god. People used to think that the sun and the moon were gods. (The event of the sin with the golden calf became the root of all of these false beliefs and false gods).

2. Atheism

Another way to exile the power of *emunah* is when a person does not believe in any concept of G-dliness at all. He doesn't believe in G-d and he doesn't even believe in other gods, because he does not believe in a G-dly concept at all. He claims, “I don't believe in *anything*.” [The only thing he believes in is in his atheism]. Being an atheist is false from the start, because every person has belief in something, deep in his subconscious, ever since he was a baby, when he began to believe and trust in his mother to nourish him and take care of him. Even if a person denies the Creator, and even if he doesn't seem to believe in anything, his ability to “believe” will definitely come out in other areas. He will always “believe” in something outside of himself and place his trust in it.

3. Misusing The Ability Of Emunas Chachomim

When it comes to *emunah* in the Sages as well, one should not go too far with this belief. There is a holy way to use belief in the Sages, and there is also an impaired way to use this ability, *chas v'shalom*.

One way of twisting the ability of *emunas chachomim* is that instead of believing in the Sages, one believes in people who are not wise, who are fakers and liars. Another way to twist *emunas chachomim* is when a person does not trust any people at all, and therefore he doesn't even trust the Sages. This also exiles the soul's power of *emunah*. Another way to twist *emunas chachomim* is when a person believes in the Sages as if they are godly beings who did not choose to be this way, as if they are simply a gift from Heaven. Although it is true that the Sages cannot achieve any comprehension without receiving it as a gift from Hashem, this does not mean that they didn't choose to exert themselves to get there.

4. Doubts About Our Spiritual Essence

Emunah in the abilities of the soul can also be in exile. Every person is born with a certain spiritual level. Everyone is born at the level of *Nefesh*, and a person is able to gain the higher soul levels of *Ruach* and *Neshamah*, through various means of exertion to get to these levels. If a person is at the soul level of *Nefesh*, he must believe,

with *emunah*, that there are higher abilities in his soul than his *Nefesh*, and even though he is not yet on those levels, he must believe that these higher levels definitely exist in his soul.

Sadly, one might believe that he is just a physical body, living a reactive kind of existence, and that he doesn't have any spiritual essence (a soul) in his being. He knows that he needs to eat and sustain himself, but he views himself no different than an animal. He doesn't even believe in the lowest levels of the soul, such as the *nefesh habehaimis* (the "animal" level of the soul). This is the most total level of exile to the *emunah* in the soul's abilities.

Another form of exile to our *emunah* is when a person commits an act of sin (G-d forbid) or a negative act, and therefore he thinks "This is me", when he does the negative act, as if his essence is to be evil, and he is unaware of his pure *neshamah*. He may believe that he is more spiritual than an animal, but when he sins, he thinks that he is sunken to such a low level because of this, and as a result, he denies that there are more spiritual parts of his being. This exiles the *emunah* in our soul's abilities because it is a denial of our inherently pure self, our *neshamah*. This particular form of "exile" to our *emunah* in our soul is very common. Many people, not only subconsciously but even on a conscious level, will say that they do not believe that are the purer parts of their existence.

Another form of exile to our *emunah* is when a person believes in the existence of spiritual concepts but he thinks that he is not able to gain a connection to them. The *Gemara* says, "Even though he doesn't see, his *mazal* sees".⁵⁵ The *mazal* refers to the higher parts of one's soul which guide, motivate and empower a person even when he isn't consciously aware of it. So even if you cannot sense certain spiritual concepts or abilities in the soul, that doesn't mean they don't exist. The more you believe in your spiritual powers, the more you will be able to gain from them.

One Who Believes, But Doesn't Believe

Chazal describe three levels of belief: a believer in Hashem (*maamin*), a non-believer, and one who "believes, but doesn't believe" in Hashem (*maamin v'aino maamin*). There is an intermediate level between having *emunah* and not having *emunah*: when one is a *maamin v'aino maamin*, when "one believes, but doesn't believe". The Sages used this term about Noah, who believed that the *Mabul* could come, but didn't actually go into the Ark until the waters were actually flooding.⁵⁶

Every person as well has this part in himself which "believes, but doesn't believe." Every person is moving back and forth between his higher, more spiritual level and his lower, more basic level. This is because every person has alternating periods of being more spiritual and period of being less spiritual. This cycle is also described in the *Sefer HaYashar* (attributed to Rabbeinu Tam) as "Days of Love" (periods of spiritual growth) and "Days of Hate" (periods of spiritual descent).⁵⁷ Therefore, even if a person has *emunah*, he also has times in which he doesn't have *emunah*.

When one has less *emunah*, he is *maamin v'aino maamin*, he "believes, but doesn't believe." This is not referring to someone who has doubts about the very concept of *emunah* altogether. Such a person is in the category of a non-believer. Rather, one who "believes, but doesn't believe" is someone who has *emunah* only when he is at a period of spiritual growth and elevation, elevated, and he loses his *emunah* when he is at a period of non-growth.

⁵⁵ *Megillah 3a*

⁵⁶ *Rashi Beraishis 7:7*

⁵⁷ *Sefer HaYashar: 6*

In all of the three kinds of *emunah* discussed earlier, there exist these three levels: a believer, a non-believer, and the level in between, “one who believes, but doesn’t believe.” There is also a fourth kind of *emunah* mentioned: the *emunah* of the Creator, in His creations. When it comes to this *emunah* as well, we can also find these three levels: when the Creator believes in His creations, when He “doesn’t believe” in His Creations (so to speak), and when He “believes, but doesn’t believe” in His creations, so to speak.

The Creator also has times of “believing” more in us, and “believing” less in us, as well as not “believing” at all in us (so to speak). There was a time when the Creator didn’t “believe” at all in us, and this was when He allowed the Destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

The *Gemara* explains that in Hashem’s “outer chambers”, Hashem always has joy, but in the “inner chambers”, Hashem weeps over our state of exile. The *Gemara* then explains, however, that by the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, Hashem wept even in the “external chambers”⁵⁸. Based upon this statement of the *Gemara*, we can learn that there is an external dimension and an internal dimension of Hashem’s attitude towards us. On the external level, Hashem showed that He didn’t “believe” in us, at the time when the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed. But at the inner level, Hashem always “believes” in us [even amidst the worst times of destruction and tragedy for the Jewish people, when He allows His wrath to be shown].

The Jewish people didn’t believe that their enemies would come to the gates of Jerusalem, and this allowed for the Creator’s “non-belief” in the creations, and to allow the enemies of the Jewish people to come and attack Jerusalem. Whenever the spiritual light of *emunah* is obscured, destruction arrives. Destruction essentially results from a lack of *emunah*. The people then didn’t “believe” that the destruction could happen, and therefore Hashem also reflected this non-belief and didn’t “believe” in His creations, and this allowed for the Destruction.

The spiritual light of the Creator would come to us through the *Beis HaMikdash*, which revealed His *Shechinah*, and this was essentially a state of revealed *emunah*. The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* therefore meant the absence of the *Shechinah*, which meant an absence of the light of *emunah*. This absence of the light of *emunah* is, essentially, the very idea of being in exile. In contrast, when the light of *emunah* is revealed, this is the very idea of the Redemption. This is also the understanding of the statement of the *Gemara* that “Came the prophet Chavakuk, and said that it (the final Redemption) all depends on *‘And the righteous will live by his faith’*”⁵⁹, meaning that the Redemption from this exile will depend on revealing the light of *emunah*.

Redeeming Our Eemunah

We have so far explained what the “exile” of *emunah* is. Now we shall discuss how we can “redeem” our *emunah*.

There are several meanings to the term *emunah*. The word *emunah* means to rely upon something, as in the term *yated neeman*, (lit. “trustworthy peg”, a peg that a tent is tied to and relies upon for support). The term *emunah* also means to “raise” something, as in the verse, “*Mordechai raised Hadassah*”, which uses the term “*omain*”, from the word *emunah*. Thus, if we want to leave the “exile” of *emunah* and enter into the “redemption” of *emunah*, we need to learn how to “rely” on a force other than ourselves, actually placing our trust in what we believe in, as well as to raise and elevate our current level of *emunah*.

⁵⁸ *Chagigah 5b*

⁵⁹ *Makkos 24a*

Firstly, one should analyze how much he really believes in the Creator, in the Sages, and in his own abilities. Although a person might think that he believes completely in the Creator, in the Sages, and in his abilities, usually a person is in the category of those who “believe, but don’t believe.” Meaning, people will say that they believe, but they don’t *really* believe.

Here is an example. When one says that he believes in the Creator, does this mean that he believes that Hashem is able to give him any amount of money? Most people believe that Hashem can give them a dollar or five dollars, or a little more than that. But if you would ask most people, “Do you believe that Hashem is able to give you five million dollars?” Most people would quickly respond, “No.” This means that most people do not actually believe that Hashem can give them five million dollars.

Why? Don’t they believe in Hashem, and that Hashem is able to do anything? The answer to this is because most people “believe, but don’t believe.” They say that they believe in Hashem’s power, but they don’t *really* believe in Hashem’s power.

When it comes to *emunah* in the Sages and Rabbis as well, we see that most people do not really believe in their wisdom, even though they do believe somewhat. Most people will ask a Rabbi a question and they are willing to listen to the Rabbi’s answer, but only if the answer or the advice makes total sense to them. If the Rabbi’s answer is a bit hard for the person to accept, in most cases, the person will usually doubt the Rabbi and he doesn’t believe in the wisdom of the Rabbi. So even though people will generally believe in the Sages and in the Rabbis [who are transmitting to us the rulings of the Sages through the methods of Divine tradition], at the same time, they don’t *really* believe in the Sages and in the Rabbis.

People also will believe that they have abilities in their soul, but do they *really* believe that they can work on their *middos* and improve them, reach higher levels of their soul, and become closer to Hashem? Most people will say that they don’t believe they can actually do it.

Therefore, the first step in “redeeming” our *emunah* – learning how to “rely” on what we believe in - is to identify our current level of *emunah*, how much we really believe in Hashem and in the Sages and in our soul’s abilities: to what extent, and what our limitations of *emunah* are, at our current level.

The second step in “redeeming” our *emunah* is to “raise” our *emunah* a bit, by trying to increase our *emunah* just a bit above our current level of *emunah*. One may not be able to attain a high level of perfect *emunah* in Hashem, in the Sages, and in the soul’s abilities, but one can still progress a little further in his *emunah* right now, at his current level. He can try having a little more *emunah* (in Hashem, in the Sages, and in his soul’s abilities) than how much he normally has, and to progress a little further than his current level of *emunah*.

These are the two parts to “redeeming” our *emunah*: To identify our current level of *emunah*, and to also progress a little further in our *emunah*. This is how we can leave the “exile” upon our *emunah*, and to enter into a state of “redemption” of our *emunah*.

May the Creator merit us to redeem our *emunah*, and thereby reveal the *emunah* in our Creator, and that we should merit the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash* this year, and this month.



Q&A

Q1: *How can a person know if Hashem believes in him right now or not?*

A: To the extent that one believes in the Creator, that is how much the Creator believes in the person. *Chazal* state based on the verse “*Hashem is your shadow*” that having *emunah* in Hashem works like a shadow, a reflection: according to the level of your *emunah* in Hashem, that is how much Hashem will reflect back to you, in the same way that a “shadow” reflects a person.

Q2: *How does a person develop the ability to always believe in any situation that Hashem believes in him, even when he is feeling down and he feels like Hashem doesn't believe in him?*

A: One should always try to focus on any small point in which he can increase his *emunah* in Hashem. By strengthening yourself even a little bit in your *emunah*, you will find that Hashem believes in you. Another way to strengthen your *emunah* in Hashem's belief in you is to realize that even when Hashem doesn't believe in us and He allows for punishment and destruction, that is only in the external dimension, but there is an inner dimension where Hashem always believes in us. So even when a person finds himself in a spiritually low situation, he can tell himself that Hashem's frustration with him is only on an external level. On the inner level, Hashem always believes in him.

Q3: *Is there any advice for us to raise our current level of emunah?*

A: To be brief, first we believe intellectually, by learning the words of the Sages about *emunah*, and then to think about these words more. A second step way to verbalize our *emunah*, which helps us internalize our *emunah*, by verbalizing our *emunah* with deep thought and feeling. A third way is to act upon what we learn, by doing something small that actualizes our knowledge and words of *emunah*.

Q4: *Can the Rav explain more about the external and internal dimensions of Hashem's belief in us?*

A: This is a very subtle concept. There is always a concept as well as the revelation of the concept. Does Hashem always believe in us? Yes. That is the reality, and that is the inner dimension. Is it always revealed to us? That is the question. In the inner dimension, it is revealed to us, but in the external dimension, it is not revealed to us so we do not see it.

Q5: *So then Hashem doesn't always believe in us, if we are not in touch with the inner dimension?*

A: You can always have *emunah* that Hashem believes in you right now, and that is how you can always be in touch with the inner dimension, where Hashem always believes in us. Here is an analogy. When a father is angry at his child, right now does he love his child? Externally, he is not showing love to his child, because He is angry at him. But deep down, the father still loves his child (even if he isn't conscious of it). On the inner level, the father always loves the child. So too, on the inner level, Hashem always loves us and believes us, even though externally He is showing anger at us.

Q6: Can a person manipulate how Hashem feels towards him right now?

A: Absolutely. We have explained here a very powerful concept, which has tremendous repercussions. Awareness to this concept can bring a fundamental change to a person's entire life.

Q7: I was at a bris of a grandchild. When the baby cried at the bris, it felt to me as if the baby felt betrayed by his parents, whom he had trusted, and who were now allowing him to go through pain. So even though a baby is born with a natural trust in his mother, it seems that the baby loses this inborn trust at some point. So do we really remain with our trust that we had since we are a baby?

A: There are two parts to the crying of the baby when he receives his *bris milah*. At the external level, it is because the baby cries out of pain, and this is a result of the effects of the sin of Adam *HaRishon*. Adam *HaRishon* was created circumcised, and there was no need for him to undergo a *bris milah*. After Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, *Chazal* state that he was in the category of a heretic. Ever since then, man would have to undergo *bris milah* in order to rectify the effects of the sin, which caused the *neshamah* to lose part of its connection to its Source above. The act of *bris milah* serves to rectify the lack of *emunah* which was created from Adam's sin. So when the baby is crying from the *bris milah*, in a sense, it is because the baby feels sad, due to the original sin causes man to undergo this rectification process. That is one aspect to the baby's crying: it is sad to undergo *bris milah*, due to the sin which caused the need for *bris milah*.

There is also second, a deeper aspect to the baby's crying: that the baby is crying out of happiness. When the baby is circumcised, he gains *temimus* (earnestness), because he gains the light of the *neshamah* that he previously could not access, before receiving a *bris milah*. The baby cries at the *bris* out of joy of returning to his source: the light of the *neshamah*. This is a crying of joy, of returning to the source, and not a crying of pain.

Q8: The crying of the baby at the bris is a crying of yearning, not a crying out of pain?

A: Yes, the crying of the baby is, on a deeper level, because the *neshamah* is crying tears of joy that it is becoming returned to its source. The baby is crying on two different levels: he is crying from pain, because of his body that is in pain, but at the same time the baby is also crying tears of joy, because his *neshamah* has returned to its root, now that the baby has received a *bris milah*. The term "*bris*", which means a "pact" or a "treaty", is a strengthening of a connection. This is a joyful occurrence, and it can elicit tears, not tears of pain, but tears of joy, a result of longing and yearning for each other.

12 | *Redeeming Your Essence*

Havayah: The Very Essence Of The Soul

With *siyata d'shmaya* we have merited at this point to learn about at the last step of redemption of a Jew's soul.

The deepest part of the Jew's soul is the very essence of the soul itself, which is called the place of *havayah* (existence) in the soul. The point of *havayah* in the soul is the basis of the entire structure of the soul. Upon *havayah* lies the rest of the soul's "garments", which are *emunah* (the faculty of believing), *taanug* (the faculty of pleasure), *ratzon* (the faculty of will), *chochmah* (the faculty of wisdom), the faculty of *binah* (comprehension), and the faculties of speech, the *middos* (character traits and emotions), and the faculty of action.

Living Mainly In Our Havayah

The ideal state to be is when one lives mainly in the *havayah* of his soul, and to sometimes be involved with the garments of the soul, and then to retreat back into his *havayah*. That is the way that an ideal Jew is supposed to look like. But when a person is not connected to his *havayah* – and this is indeed the state of most people – a person lives in his soul's garments, either in his *emunah*, or in his *taanug* or *ratzon*, etc. He will be spending his entire life experiencing only the garments of the soul, but never the soul itself. This is the depth of the exile of the soul.

Thus, the ideal way to live is for one to mainly live in his *havayah* and every often to make use of his soul's garments, then retreating back into his *havayah*.

The "exile" of the soul is, essentially, when one lives in his soul's garments alone and he is not connected to his *havayah*. Since that is the "exile" of the soul, we can now understand that the depth of the "redemption" for our soul is to live in our *havayah*.

Every Ability In Our Soul Is A Movement Of The Soul

Let us think more about what the very *havayah* of our soul is.

Let us use a car, as an analogy. A car gets us from place to place, but is that the car itself? There is the car itself, and there are the movements of the car. Here is another example. The sun rises and it sets. There is the sun itself, and there is also the movement of the sun: its rising and its setting. Similarly, there is the soul itself, its very existence, and there also the movements of the soul, the soul's abilities, its garments.

Most people are only aware of the movements of their soul, the different abilities of the soul. This is because when a person is always making use of his soul's movements, and not the soul itself, the movements conceal and hide the soul itself from the person. A person is constantly involving himself with what he wants, what he feels, what he is doing. These are all examples of movement of the soul. Rarely does a person think about the soul itself, and therefore he is constantly being concealed from his own soul, to the point that a person thinks that his very existence is limited to the various uses (garments) of the soul.

Reaching The Havayah (Essence) Of Our Soul – Through Menuchah (Serenity)

In order to recognize the *havayah* of the soul, a person needs to reach the level that is called *menuchah*, serenity. Without *menuchah*, a person only recognizes the movements of his soul and his *havayah* is concealed from him. When a person merits reaching *menuchas hanefesh*, he takes a “rest” from his soul’s abilities and he recognizes the very *havayah* of his soul.

In depth, this is the meaning of *galus*, exile, from the world *galgal*, a wheel, which keeps turning and never finds rest. Exile is a situation of constant movement without rest, without *menuchah*. Redemption is when a person finds serenity in his place. The closer a person is to *menuchah*, to *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity of the soul), not physical serenity alone but the serenity of the soul, the closer one is to the depths of redeeming his individual soul.

1. Developing Awareness Of Our Soul’s Movements

Therefore, each person needs to become aware of these two places in the soul: the inner root of one’s *havayah*, which is reached through *menuchah* (serenity), and the outer parts of the soul, which are the various abilities and movements of the soul, the soul’s garments. Slowly a person should begin to recognize these two areas of the soul.

Practically speaking, a person should acquire awareness of the movements of the soul. One should be aware that any time he is using an ability of the soul [i.e. pleasure, will, thinking, speaking, acting] he is really using a movement of the soul.

2. Awareness Of The Specific Movement Of The Soul

To be more specific, awareness of the movements of the soul divide into two parts: the awareness to the soul’s movements, and the awareness to the specific movement of the soul. There is movement of action, movement of emotion, movement of thought, movement of speech, and movement of the will. At any given moment, a person should try to identify which movement of the soul he is using. One should wonder: “Am I using the movement of the soul for will, or for thought, or for emotion, or action, etc.”?

The more a person trains himself to being aware of these two concepts – the awareness that his always using his soul’s movements, as well as the awareness to the particular movement of the soul that he is involved with - he will begin to live with deep awareness of the different movements of the soul.

3. Accessing The Power Of Menuchah/Serenity

After doing the above, the third step, is to identify the beginning and completion of the movement. This gives a person an idea of how to become serene from the soul’s movement – we shall explain about this more.

3a) Serenity Within Our Actions

A person begins to do something and before he finishes it, he starts doing something else. He has no serenity between these two actions because he didn’t give himself a break. Instead, a person should make sure to complete

what he's doing, and only after he has finished his first action should he begin his next action. However, in either of these two scenarios, a person has not touched upon any *menuchah* (serenity).

There is an alternative, third way act, in contrast to the above, which is the true way to act. After one calms down from doing his first action, he then begins his second action. In this way a person goes through movement, then serenity, then returning to movement. One can keep becoming aware of the place of serenity in his soul.

3b) Serenity Within Our Emotions

So far we have discussed how a person can attain some serenity within his actions. But how does a person reveal serenity within his emotions?

When one has not yet organized his emotions, he will cycle back and forth between different positive and negative emotions. He will experience love, and sometime later he will experience anger, then another positive emotion, and then a different negative emotion. He becomes a melting pot of unorganized emotions, an emotional mess with many different emotions mixed into each other. That is how most people experience their emotions.

A person cannot have any serenity in his emotions when he hasn't yet "organized" his emotions. He will just be transitioning from one emotion to another, with no serenity in between. This is an "exile" to the emotions - an emotionally charged life, with no serenity.

In contrast to the above, the proper way to experience our emotions is, that after a person has experienced any positive emotion, such as love or joy, one should then identify the emotion, and then, after some time, when the positive emotions begins to wane, he should also identify its disappearance. One should see how the emotion slowly dissipates and look at this as a way to "rest" from the emotion. In this way, one can properly transition from one emotion to another emotion, and this is how one allows himself to become "serene" from the emotion. When an emotion weakens and disappears, one should view this as a way to put a "rest" to that emotion.

This is the way for a person to gain serenity within his emotions. Since most people do not clarify their emotional realm, they also do not learn how to have serenity within their emotions. So even when people know how to be serene when it comes to their actions, they can still be missing serenity because they don't know how to organize their emotions. Very rarely do most people attain serenity within their emotions.

3c) Serenity In Our Speech

Most people also do not experience serenity within their speech. The tendency of most people is to keep talking, continuously and without pause, so they are generally not serene as they are talking. In contrast to this, a person can experience serenity as he is the midst of talking, by pausing his words every so often, allowing for a space of silence in between some of his words, and feeling a sense of serenity from this short silence.

One can then become serene in his speech when he becomes aware of the shift between speaking and being silent: by being aware of the "movement" of his soul, which is expressed through speech, and by the "serenity" of his soul, which happens when he pauses from speaking.

3d) Serenity In Our Thoughts

People experience very little serenity in their thoughts. This is because the imagination is usually in control of one's power of thought, and the imagination by its very nature is a jumpy, unpredictable force of the mind. The imagination causes the thoughts to keep jumping from one subject to another.

In order to counter this and to become more serene in one's mind, first one needs to become aware of his thoughts, and then he should not think about another topic until he has finished thinking about the first topic. In this way, one allows for a space in between in his thoughts. This calms the mind a bit before beginning to think about something else, and in this way one attains some "serenity" within his thoughts.

3e) Serenity In Our Will

The desires, wishes, and wants of a person also prevent a person from being serene. This is because a person is constantly wanting different things, both consciously and subconsciously. Even when a person does not consciously want something right now, there are desires that he has which can keep rising up from his subconscious. All of these desires do not allow a person to be serene.

In order to counter this, one should keep himself focused on attaining one will at a time. When one needs to take care of something that he wants, he should focus on attaining that particular will, then pause a bit, and then he can begin pursuing the next thing that he wants.

The Goal – Living A Life Of Menuchas Hanefesh

These words comprise the final step of all that we have been explaining in the lessons of this series, and they are about a very deep concept. We have been describing in this series how we can repair our actions, speech, emotions, thoughts and will, and to thereby "redeem" them from their state of "exile". However, we need to understand that each of these areas of our soul is very complex. In these lessons, we explained very belief how we can repair these areas of our soul, but in order to fully repair them, we need to learn about each of them individually, on a more in-depth level. We would need to learn an entire series on each of the areas, which would include "*Da Es Maasecha*" (Getting To Know Your Actions), "*Da Es Diburecha*" (Getting To Know Your Speech), "*Da Es Hargoshosecha*" (Getting To Know Your Feelings), "*Da Es Machshavosecha*" (Getting To Know Your Thoughts) and "*Da Es Retzoncha*" (Getting To Know Your Will).⁶⁰

The purpose of this lesson was that a person should live a certain kind of life, in which *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity of the soul), should become a regular part of our life, and not just as a tool for calming down when we feel exhausted or stressed. The more we become connected with the power of *menuchas hanefesh*, the more we can gradually recognize the very *havayah* of our soul, because *menuchas hanefesh* helps us touch upon *havayah*.

When one merits to attain *menuchas hanefesh* and to touch upon the *havayah* of his soul, he will suddenly feel as if he has become an entirely new being.

A Second Approach To Reach Menuchas Hanefesh: Through Quietening The Soul

There is also another way to reach the *havayah* of the soul, but it is not for everyone to practice, because not everyone can do it. However, we will still mention it (for those who can practice it).

⁶⁰ Editor's Note: To date, the Rav has only delivered the series *Da Es Hargoshosecha* (Getting To Know Your Feelings) and *Da Es Machshovosecha* (Getting To Know Your Thoughts), whereas the other series mentioned (Getting To Know Your Actions, Speech and Will) have **not** been given yet. After the shiur, the Rav was asked when he will deliver a series on the areas of action, speech, and will. The Rav responded, "With the help of Hashem, if Hashem allows for it to happen."

Each day, a person can set aside time every day (when possible) in which he has utter quiet and calm. One can use this quiet time every day that he sets aside for himself, and, through the quiet stillness, one can become aware of his feelings, thoughts, and desires. When everything is quiet, one can identify all of his feelings, thoughts, and desires and thereby become aware of them. Then, one should attempt to “quiet” his feelings, thoughts, and desires, by feeling calm and serene in spite of all the many feelings, thoughts, and desires that are present inside him. Gradually, as one keeps quieting his emotions, thoughts, and desires, he can eventually penetrate to the very *havayah* of the soul.

The Greatest Pleasure On This World – Experiencing Your Havayah

When one is regularly practicing both of the above methods, he will attain fuller access to the *havayah* in the soul. This is a source of great pleasure to a person. It is the pleasure of the very soul itself, as the *Chovos HaLevovos* describes. It is the deepest pleasure one can experience on this world. That describes the complete level of redeeming the soul: to reveal one’s *havayah*, and derive pleasure from it. After reaching one’s *havayah*, one needs to stay balanced by continuously cycling back and forth between his soul’s *havayah* [the soul itself] and his soul’s movements [all the abilities in the soul, such as action, emotion, thought, will, etc.].

The Greater Goal – The Serenity In Finding Closeness With Hashem

Let us finish this discussion by describing the greater purpose of all of these lessons about redeeming our soul. The greater purpose of all that we have been describing thus far is, to reach closeness with Hashem. Any degree of *menuchah* (serenity) that one can attain by reaching his soul’s *havayah* is ultimately a serenity within the “movements” of This World. We are in a world of movement, our soul is constantly moving, but we can attain a degree of serenity within This World of movement, by attaining serenity in our souls. However, this serenity is ultimately limited, because it is within a world of movement. The existence of movement, by its very definition, doesn’t allow for complete serenity.

But there is a higher level of *menuchah* we can reach, which is higher than the *menuchah* that can find in the *havayah* of our soul. This is referring to the *menuchah* that we can get from attaining true closeness with Hashem. That is a *menuchah* above This World of movement.

To summarize, there is a serenity that we can attain within This World, the serenity within movement, and there is also a higher form of serenity, which is above This World, and above all movement. This is a more complete kind of serenity. When one merits to integrate his existence with the Creator, that is where he will find the most genuine level of *menuchah*.

Concluding Words

I am thankful to all those who joined in this series about redemption of the soul. May we all merit to reach our individual redemption, as well as the collective redemption, and to be written for a good year, and to merit that this year will be a year of redemption: the revelation of Hashem upon the world.



Q&A

Q1: *When one reaches his havayah, how will he avoid self-absorption and relate better to others?*

A: The place of *havayah* in the soul is a place of oneness and all-inclusiveness. The place of *havayah* in the soul is a place of “oneness” with the Creator and with all of the Jewish people. When one truly reaches his *havayah*, it means that he will be connected with all others on a very deep level, on a level of being one with all others. At lower levels of the soul, the garments, one feels separate from others, that he has an individual existence of his own. There is no oneness with others, at the lower levels of the soul. Before a person gets married, he is called a *palga d’gufa*, half a person. After marriage, when he has found his *palga d’gufa*, he is longer his own person, but a part of a greater whole. Marriage can be likened to the place of *havayah* of the soul. At the *havayah* of the soul, a person is “one” with others, just as a husband and wife become “one” through marriage and they are no longer identified as private individuals of their own. If one genuinely reaches the *havayah* of the soul, he will feel a sense of oneness with all souls in the Jewish people.

Q3: *Can the Rav explain more about how a person can attain serenity when it comes to emotions?*

A: Whenever a person feels an emotion, even a positive emotion, he eventually feels that it’s time to move on from that emotion. He feels somewhat tired from the emotion and he can feel it disappearing. That is when he should try to derive serenity from the emotion: by allowing himself to “rest” from the emotion. For example, if a person feels joyous, the joy eventually wanes. When the joy begins to dissipate, that is the time when one should feel that he is “resting” from his emotion (in this case, joy), and that is how he how can apply serenity to his emotion.

Q4: *How can I know when my emotion is starting to dissipate?*

A: Become aware of your emotions to begin with (for example, become aware of your joy or your love), and later you can feel when it is beginning to weaken. You cannot know exactly when the emotion is ending, but you can have a sense of when the emotion is beginning to dissipate.

Q7: *Of the two ways to reach menuchas hanefesh that were given, which one is the better or more recommended way?*

A: Each of the ways given has an advantage as well as a disadvantage, so there is no one way that is better than the other. In the first way given, a person can attain menuchas hanefesh throughout the entire day, by learning how become more serene in his actions, emotions, speech, thoughts and desires. The gain of this is that it is available to you at any given time of the day. However, the drawback of this approach is that this kind of serenity is not as deep. The gain of the second way – setting aside time each day to quiet the soul – is a deeper kind of menuchas hanefesh. However, the drawback of it is that it needs more time and you will only be able to access it for a short amount of time a day, whereas the first approach can be practiced any time of the day. Therefore, each of these ways has its advantage as well as its disadvantage.

Q8: *When a person reaches havayah and from there he can feel one with all of Klal Yisrael, can he also reach a deeper level of being one with all of the creations?*

A: Yes, certainly that is the deeper level.

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Appendix of Q&A

[I Don't Want Moshiach To Come Yet]

Question

We always daven that Moshiach should come, but i don't understand how this works out with the fact that a person still hasn't yet reached his personal *tikkun* (soul repair). Throughout the year a person learns more and more Torah and further improves his *middos*, but if Moshiach would suddenly come today, a person hasn't yet completed most of his task.

Answer

If a person wanted to fix his soul and then Moshiach comes and he still hasn't yet done what he needs to do for his soul, he is considered to be the category of "One who thought of doing a mitzvah and then he was not able to do it", which is considered as if he did the mitzvah. Over here also it is considered as if he has fixed his entire soul (however, it is only on the level of "as if").

Therefore, a person needs *mesirus nefesh*, to want that Moshiach should come now, for the purpose of revealing the *Shechinah* and for the benefit of *Klal Yisrael*, even though he prefers differently.

[How Should I Prepare For Mashiach]

Question

Shalom, in honor of the Rav, may Hashem guard him and sustain him. It is clear to any sensible person that Moshiach is at the doorway, and the great war is also at the doorway. I do not know how it will happen. Will the final redemption be like the first redemption, in which only 20% were saved, or will everyone be saved, and there will be miracles above nature, for everyone? What is the message of the Rav to each person of the Jewish people? "We are Your nation, Yisrael" – individually, what can each person do to have a meaningful effect, for the coming of Moshiach, and that his coming should arrive with complete mercy? We want Moshiach, to reveal his kingdom. Should each person take out 10,000 shekel from the bank, or more, in order to buy tapes of *shiurim* to distribute for the benefit of the public...? Should we daven stronger, should we learn more Torah? What can I do, and what can each person do, and what should each person do? We are asking that the Rav please tell us. It is said that "If one wants to be saved from the war of Gog and Magog, he should be involved in Torah and chessed" (Sanhedrin 98a), but as it is apparent, I am asking this question not for my own sake, but for the sake of the nation of Yisrael, for the sake of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Who doesn't want His children to have pain.

Answer:

On one hand, a person needs to arrange his life and his day [to be prepared] that behold, he [Moshiach] is coming.

At the same time, a person also needs to arrange his life and day that he [Mashiach] may chas v'shalom be prevented [from coming] whether minimally or majorly. One needs the balance between these two approaches.

[Preparing For Mashiach Through Torah Learning]

Question

1. I have heard in the name of the Chofetz Chaim that after 10 “shemittah” cycles, Moshiach will come. I understand that the time for this has already passed. The question is: What is preventing the coming of Moshiach? Is there anything holding him back altogether, and if there is, what is the main reason that Hashem isn't sending Mashiach? I am asking this because if we would be informed what the reason is for his prevention, then each person could know what needs to be done, whether through investing time or money in making the coming of Moshiach possible, whether by bringing in Rabbonim who could speak about the main issue we need to fix, or by distributing CDs about the topic.

2. The Rav explains in the *shiurim* that the only way to be saved from the “50th gate of defilement” is through the way of the inner dimension of Torah, which means to become connected to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. On a superficial level, I understand this to mean that people need to learn more about the inner Torah. So the question then becomes: Which holy sefarim can the Rav recommend that we learn, which address the inner part of the Torah, so that we can begin and continue the process?

3. How much time a day does the Rav recommend we spend on learning the inner dimension of Torah? And how much time needs to be spent on the external part of learning, such as *Gemara, halachah, Chumash* and *Mishnayos*?

Answer

1) The “light of Mashiach” is termed by our Sages as “the 50th gate of holiness.” This is countered by the “50th gate of defilement”, which prevents the revelation of holiness. To explain the concept, there are 49 “gates” of the spiritual dimension [both in holiness and in the side of evil], corresponding to 7 levels that each subdivide into 7 levels. Our world is on the spiritual level of the number 7, for there are six days of the week and a seventh day of Shabbos. That is the perspective of “division” in Creation [as opposed to the original state of undifferentiated oneness]. Each of these 7 divides into another 7, as implied by the daily morning prayer, “Today is the first day to the Shabbos”, “Today is the second day to the Shabbos”, etc. The Sages said that the “son of David [the Moshiach] cannot come until all of the *perutos* (coins) are finished” – and it is brought in the name of Eliyahu *HaNavi* that the word *perutah* (coin) is from the word *peratiyos*, “individual”, meaning that Mashiach cannot come until all of the “individuality” ceases, and collectiveness (*kelalus*) is revealed. This collectiveness (*kelalus*) is also called the 50th gate of holiness.

In the side of holiness, *kelalus*\collectiveness is the concept where all details become unified as one: “On that day it will be that Hashem will be One and His Name will be One”. It is when all souls of the Jewish people will become connected together, “as one man, with one heart”, the unification of all souls, and the unity of all the creations. They will all become unified under the oneness of Hashem's Name. It will all come together, forming one

perfected form of man. For all of the creations – including the non-living, plants and animals – are all but parts of the perfected man. Currently, this is all seen as disparate parts, each with their own design, but in the inner dimension, they are all but parts of one perfected man. This perfected state is called the “light of Moshiach”. In contrast, the 50th gate of defilement is a “pseudo”, imitation form of oneness. In depth, it is total disparity. It is a unifying which leads to total disparity. It begins with unity and ends with disparity. Superficially, it appears to be unity, but on the inside, it is disparity.

How does the “50th gate of defilement” manifest itself? Anyone with a logical and simplistic perspective can see that in the last few decades, the world is becoming more and more collected into one whole. As an example, a huge distance between continents has been vastly reduced to a short amount of time travel, and it takes little time and money to get to faraway places, and it is also made very comfortable. People are able to communicate with each other instantaneously, in any place in the world, and at any time. It is possible to see a person found on the opposite side of the world, by means of the media/technology. It is a way to “see from one end of the world to the other”.

The very concept and essence all media/technology in general, and the “smartphone” in particular, is all a means of using “one tool” which is all-inclusive of all existing information and knowledge. It unifies all possible information that can be sensed through seeing, hearing, smell, speaking, and touch. I am not even referring to all of the harm that result from all of this – those are just the results. I am referring to the very concept of how technology unifies everything together. It is the evil and twisted use of the power of *echad*, “oneness”, because it unifies all information together. It is the very “50th gate of defilement”, with all that this entails. For it can open up a person to a dimension which includes everything, and that is the very idea of the “50th gate” – an all-inclusiveness.

Any logical person can understand that the Redemption is the idea of *echad*, oneness, and that the very idea of *hester*/concealment [the period preceding the Redemption] is a “pseudo”, imitation form of “*echad*”/oneness. The clearer that the light of true oneness will shine, the more that people will realize how the “oneness” of the Other Side is an illusory kind of oneness. That is the secret of the Redemption.

2-3) Everything contains an external and inner aspect.

The external aspect of a matter is always about “disparity”. On an impaired level, disparity is epitomized by the dissension of Korach and his followers and all that resulted from their dissension. On the repaired level, disparity is epitomized by the arguments between Hilel and Shamai, of which it is said, “Their words and their words are the words of the living G-d.” Getting more specific, “disparity” is used on a repaired level when one sees all of the parts in something. Rav Chaim Soloveitchik would split every concept into 2 different parts, and the Rogotchover *Gaon* would split everything into 3 different parts. Getting even more specific, one uses “disparity” on a repaired level by seeing all of the different factors and aspects of a matter. One can split every matter into two different points, right and left, or into 3 different points: right, left, and middle. The idea is to take one concept and split it into either 2 or 3 parts – to see all the different parts to the matter.

The inner aspect of a matter, however, is always about unification and oneness. It is to see how all the different details are rooted in one matter, and how all of the details can be returned to their root. This is epitomized by the rule of “*kelal, prat, klal*” – the inclusion, then the exclusion, then the inclusion.” It is to begin from the *klall*/whole and then return to the *klall*/whole. It is to take 2 different concepts and unify them into one. This way is explained often by the Rogotchover *Gaon*, author of *Tzafnas Paneach*. There is a statement in the name of the Chazon Ish that Rav Chaim Soloveitchik turns 1 matter into 2 matters, and the Rogotchover turns 2 matters into 1 matter. This is part of his way in Torah learning. He would also turn 1 matter into 3 different matters, as mentioned earlier, but

instead of splitting 1 matter into 2, he formulates two extremes and then a third middle point which connects them together. This is what it means to learn the Torah on an inner level.

Therefore, there is an external layer as well as an internal layer when it comes to the surface understanding of Torah (*psbat*), the hinted understanding (*remez*), the homiletic interpretations of the Sages (*derush*), and the secret understanding (*sod*). This is what we mean when we say that a person should also learn the inner dimension of the Torah.

Since there are different levels of souls, each person has his own root in Torah. Therefore, each person needs to learn his own share. Included in one's personal share is to learn the Torah both on an external level as well as on an internal level, as explained above. How much time does one need to spend learning the external part of his Torah learning, and how much time should he spend on the inner way to learn Torah? This is subjective, for it depends on each person's unique soul root and each person's share in the Torah. But all people will need to touch upon the inner method of learning Torah, even if only a little, for that is where one will become unified, with his soul, with the collective whole of the Jewish people, with all of the creations, and with his root – with the Creator.

[Mesirus Nefesh On A Practical Level]

Question

In the Rav's *derashah* "The Avodah of Our Generation", the Rav writes that the way to overcome the "50th Gate of Defilement" in our generation is only through *mesirus nefesh* [self-sacrifice]. However, in other *derashos*, I have heard the Rav say that there are always different paths to traverse: to go step after step, and the path of *mesirus nefesh*. But according to what the Rav has said in the *derashah* of "The Avodah of Our Generation", it seems that there is only one path to take – *mesirus nefesh*.

I would be happy if the Rav can clarify what this means for me, practically. Let's say we have a person who has difficulty with learning Torah, and he likes to sleep a lot. Does such a person need to give up his entire being, in one moment, in order to serve Hashem [by overcoming his difficulty in learning and his desire to sleep]? How can he do this, if he's not on that level?! So what does the Rav mean by the words "*mesirus nefesh*"?

Answer

Throughout all of the generations, there were always two paths: 1) *Hadrugah*, to progress step after step. 2) *Mesirus nefesh*, self-sacrifice, as Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordaya did [see Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 17a].

In our generation, where the "50th Gate of Defilement" is in full force, the only way to counter it is through *mesirus nefesh*. Therefore, each person needs to exercise *mesirus nefesh* on [at least] one area of his life. However this does not mean that a person needs to do all of his actions with *mesirus nefesh*. It just means that a person needs to have some connection to the level of *mesirus nefesh*. It is possible for one to implement this idea by taking the area of his life in which he finds his greatest struggle in, and to have *mesirus nefesh* in that area.

Practically speaking, though, this is unfeasible for most people, so it is not close within reach of most people. So instead, one can try to find other areas in his life [where he struggles in] – each person on his own level and according to his own unique situation – and to exercise *mesirus nefesh* in those areas [in which he struggles in]. In

that way, one can become connected to *mesirus nefesh*, and thereafter, one has a connection to the “50th Gate of Holiness”, and he is no longer held captive by the “50th Gate of Defilement”. Once a person accesses this spiritual illumination, it will be shined onto all other areas of one’s *avodah*.

[Questions About Mesirus Nefesh]

Question

(1) What are the conditions for “*mesirus nefesh*”, when it comes to (a) *avodas Hashem*, (b) recognizing our soul, (c) learning Torah, and (d) doing *mitzvos*? Through *mesirus nefesh* a person receives *siyata d’shmaya* (Heavenly assistance) to skip levels. What is the simple meaning of *mesirus nefesh*? Does it mean that I have to be mentally willing to be killed *al kiddush Hashem* over something? Does it mean that I have to spend a lot of energy on something?

(2) The Rav has said that the *avodah* of our generation is *mesirus nefesh*. Is this referring to *mesirus nefesh* in *avodas Hashem*, in doing *mitzvos*, or in learning Torah? Or in all of them?

(3) I have heard from the Rav many times that the way of *mesirus nefesh* is only for individuals. If so, what is the Rav’s intention that the *avodah* of *mesirus nefesh* is for this entire generation?

(4) In the *sefer* “*Bilvavi*” (Part 6), the Rav explains that the soul’s power of “*lishmah*” (acting for the sake of Heaven) is the same power as *mesirus nefesh*, because it is the power to go above the “I” and act from a place in the soul that is higher than the “I”. However, I once asked the Rav how a person is able to reach the “*Yechidah*” part of the soul through Torah study, and the Rav responded to me that it is reached through learning Torah with *mesirus nefesh* and *lishmah*. Did the Rav mean that they are two separate things? Or are they one and the same?

Answer

1) *Mesirus nefesh* in *avodas Hashem* means that a person works on an area which he finds personally difficult to work on, and he perseveres in that area, through self-sacrifice to succeed, no matter what comes his way. *Mesirus nefesh* should not be used when one is trying to recognize the soul, because one needs calm and quiet reflection in order to slowly recognize and understand the soul [hence trying to have “*mesirus nefesh*” in order to understand his soul would only deter him from reaching it]. *Mesirus nefesh* in learning Torah is that a person learns above his natural physical capabilities, and with mental exertion, until he exhausts his mind over it. *Mesirus nefesh* in doing *mitzvos* is that a person takes one *mitzvos* and does it as perfectly as possible, on his own level, according to the halachah, and with love and awe of Hashem, and with the conviction that he will never give up this *mitzvah* under any circumstance.

2) In this generation, there is a spiritual illumination of the ability to act with “*mesirus nefesh*”, which is called the “light of Mashiach”, the light of Dovid HaMelech, who is called a “stillborn”, with no life support of his own, whose entire life source stems from acting on the level of *mesirus nefesh*.

3) In essence, the way of *mesirus nefesh* is applicable only to individuals. However, as mentioned above, since we are currently in a time period where the “light of Mashiach” is shining strongly, the light of *mesirus nefesh* is also

present, and it exists in order to aid us in contending with the evil of the “50th Gate of Defilement” that is rampant today. The only way to spiritually survive the “50th Gate of Defilement” is through *mesirus nefesh*.

4) *Lishmah* and *mesirus nefesh* bear the same root. However, there are two ways to nullify the “I”. One way is to do it from within oneself, and this is called *lishmah*, which applies to the proper intention that one needs to have in Torah learning. This is experienced through the faculty of thought: learning Torah with the intention of *lishmah* [for the sake of Hashem]. There is also a way to nullify oneself through external means, through action, which is accessed through exerting oneself in Torah beyond one’s natural physical abilities, through losing sleep over one’s Torah learning, through physical frugality, etc.

Original Hebrew shiurim:

<http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.geula>

Hebrew shiurim with english translation:

<http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/inner.redemption.series>