

דע און נשמתך

# TORAH WAY TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Adapted from hebrew shiurim of  
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## *Translator's Introduction*

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You may have heard about *hisbodedus* before and you may have read about it in other places, but in this volume, you will study it as never before, seeing it in an entirely new light. This book spans fundamental Torah values and how we can reach our purpose on this world that we were created for, of how we can use the soul and all its powers to reach our desired purpose.

Throughout this volume, you will encounter three general levels, alternating back and forth between them as you advance.

The first level can be called “**Self**”, where you connect to your soul, via the five layers of the soul: *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah, and Yechidah*. At this first stage, you are learning about yourself, the different parts that are in you, and in turn you become more connected with your true self. Ultimately, by connecting to your true self, you can connect your being with Hashem, and that should be your underlying motivation. But in this stage, you are mainly involved with simply getting in touch with your self, with your soul.

The second level can be called “**Bonding.**” These parts explain how to utilize your soul with its five layers to develop your relationship with Hashem.

The third level can be called “**The Level Beyond.**” It can be described as a non-ego state, in which you “let go” of your sense of self.



We present the English adaptation of this special and holy *sefer*, with the hope that it will benefit those who are interested in *hisbodedus* and with a *tefillah* to Hashem that the study of this *sefer* will bring us closer to ourselves, and to Hashem - each on our own level.

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## *Author's Preface*

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Man is comprised of a body and a soul, and it is his *avodah* (inner work) to divest himself of his *guf* (body) and to reveal his *neshamah* (soul).

The direct path to achieve this is through *emunah* (faith in the Creator), exerting oneself in learning the holy Torah, carrying out the *mitzvos* as carefully as possible, and fixing one's *middos* (character traits). This is the way which our great leaders traversed throughout all the generations.

However, only a few have truly achieved their life's task through doing all of this, and because this was so, they sought additional ways to achieve it. This *sefer* has come to explain **one** of those ways that were added on throughout the generations: *hisbodedus* (inner solitude).

Yet, the reader should be wise and 'use his head' properly. Don't turn what is secondary into priority, and don't neglect the priorities. The matters discussed in this *sefer* are only secondary to our main tasks, which are: **to have *emunah*, learning Torah diligently, doing all the *mitzvos*, and fixing our *middos*.**

Thus, the reader should be aware that only few great leaders traversed the paths described in this *sefer*; in addition, the learning of this *sefer* should only be regarded as secondary to one's Torah learning. We are stating this specifically because there will be readers here who will think that the learning of this *sefer* must become top priority in their life, while the truth is really the opposite: the matters of this *sefer* are only secondary to our main tasks in life.

We were very doubtful about putting out this *sefer*, as most people do not need it, and in addition, many people are prone to be mistaken about the matters of this *sefer* and misunderstand it. However, since there are many people who learn about these matters, it was seen to fit to produce this *sefer*, so that these matters can be given the proper guidance that they require.

The purpose of this *sefer* is therefore **not** meant to deliberately cause people to become interested in these matters. It is simply coming to give guidance to those who would anyhow learn about these matters. We hope that this *sefer* will indeed help those who need that guidance.

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# *01 / The Concept of Hisbodedus/Jewish Meditation*

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## 1. Introduction

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Often, when people learn of something new, there is a general tendency to jump to what the practical outcomes of the ideas are going to be. However, it is said, “*Sof maaseh b’machshavah techilah*”, “The end of actions, is first with thought” – before we learn about what to do in the practical sense, one first needs to go through a preliminary stage, of learning and understanding the concepts well, before learning of how to apply it practically. We must see what the structure is, what the details are based on, and then we can get down to the practical aspects.

It is written, “*With wisdom, a house is built.*” In order to build a house, you need careful planning, and then you can build it, now that you have understood how to build it.

Therefore, before we learn how to do *hisbodedus* [to meditate in solitude and thereby bond with the Creator] – we must first know what *hisbodedus* is on a conceptual level, and where it came from.

## 2. The Roots of Hisbodedus

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*Hisbodedus* is not a new idea that started some twenty or thirty years ago, or even a hundred years ago. It has been around for a very long time.

The first *sefer* to mention *hisbodedus* is *Sefer HaMaspik L’Ovdei Hashem*, which was written by Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam – one of the *Rishonim*, who lived over a thousand years ago. There, he writes that all of our forefathers practiced *hisbodedus*; they were all shepherds who sought solitude out in the quiet fields as they tended to their sheep. Our *Avos* (forefathers) led lives of solitude, looking to be in quiet places, where they were free to reflect on their Creator.

Thus, *hisbodedus* is not a new idea. If we think that *hisbodedus* is only for certain types of Jews, we will be limiting the gains from it. We have so far learned here that it is the way of our *Avos*, our prophets, and our earlier leaders. Let us go in their footsteps and search to get back to the ways of old, which our holy *Avos* took, and which Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Dovid *HaMelech* and other great *tzaddikim* took.

Certainly, there are many ‘colors’ to *hisbodedus* – all different kinds – which have been recently introduced in the later generations. But the concept itself of *hisbodedus* is not new at all. It is the way which our holy forefathers traversed.

So let us be clear, before we start, that we are not coming to say anything new here about Judaism. We are not coming to involve ourselves with something that is only for certain types of

Jews in the world, and we are not talking about anything novel that has been introduced at different stages of Judaism.

That is the very basic point to know, before we begin.

### 3. External and Internal Hisbodedus

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The concept of *hisbodedus* is a multi-layered matter. As we know, the Torah is “*longer than the earth in measurement, and it is wider than the sea*”. There is layer and layer within the Torah’s words. So too, *hisbodedus* is an all-inclusive matter.

The first layer of it is **external seclusion**, which we will soon explain. When we enter deeper into *hisbodedus*, we reveal depth within depth to it, with the more we uncover, until we eventually get to the innermost point of all, which will be the true goal of *hisbodedus*. This will also be explained here as we go along, with Hashem’s help.

Let’s first explain the two ends of the spectrum here: what the external *hisbodedus* is - physical seclusion - and what the inner level of *hisbodedus* is.

*Hisbodedus*, on its most **external** level, is when a person leaves the noise of civilization and he secludes himself from all the noise. The very fact that he has left noise and that he is alone is already the first, external stage of *hisbodedus*. By contrast, **inner hisbodedus** is when a person feels completely alone with the Creator.

So, [in short], the external level of *hisbodedus* is physical seclusion from noise, and the inner level is when a person is alone within himself, connected in a very real way with the reality of the Creator (within). These are the two ends of the spectrum, and in between these two points will be all of the other steps of *hisbodedus* that we will explain here.

### 4. Why Do We Need To Do Hisbodedus?

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Now that we have explained, with *siyata d’shmaya*, what the concept of *hisbodedus* is we will explain why we need it, what we are missing without it, and how it indeed perfects a person.

Why do we need *hisbodedus*? We were created for one purpose: to bond with the Creator of the world. On this world we are found in, there is so much taking place [and hence so many stimuli which bombard us and distance us from going inward]. All of the things we know of, on one hand, can be a tool to help us get closer to the Creator and reveal His existence within our heart. On the other hand, everything on this world can greatly deter us from our purpose. We have the Torah to guide us and show us how to use Creation as a tool to reveal Hashem. At the same time, the Torah also tells us to stay away from many things that distance us from our purpose.

*Hisbodedus* is only “one side of the coin” in how we serve Hashem. One of the big errors that people make is that they think that *hisbodedus* is a goal unto itself. But the true perspective, as viewed by the Jewish people, is that *hisbodedus* is not everything. On one hand, the Jewish people are “*a nation that lives in solitude*”, but on the other hand, many converts have joined our nation. So while we are “alone” from the other nations, we are also “united” with them [via the righteous converts].

This is true in the general sense, and it is also true in the individual sense, that each individual Jew has two sides of the coin in his service to Hashem: one part of us is meant to bond with other Jews and love them (within the bounds of *halachah*), and the other part of our *avodah* is to be “alone.”

If a person is extreme in either of these two sides of the coin, he is misguided. If he only is social with others and he never has any solitude of his own, although it is wonderful that he loves other Jews, he is missing recognition of Hashem in his heart, for he lives solely around people, and he has no time spent with Hashem. On the other end of the extreme, if a person only does *hisbodedus* and he does not love other Jews, then although he recognizes Hashem in his heart, he is missing another part of the equation, which is to unify with the world.

We are made up of two layers: one part of us is alone from others, to feel Hashem in our heart. The other part of us is meant to unify with all of *Klal Yisrael*, with a strong love.

Although Hashem certainly wants the world to be populated with people, we know that people can either be a valuable tool to reveal Hashem in this world – or they can be very hampering to us sometimes. When we are always around everyone, the noise doesn’t let us have any inner peace. So we need to *hisbodedus* to get away from all of this noise.

But that is not the purpose - that is only one side of the coin. Although we have to be away from all the noise, we must also get along with people, because we must have *ahavas Yisrael* (love of all Jews)!

So we have two opposing layers to our being. On one hand, we are “*a nation that lives in solitude*”, and on the other hand, there is a part of us that must be used to connect outward, to the rest of the Jewish people, to love all other Jews. We must have both.

If a person only has *ahavas Yisrael*, but he never has *hisbodedus*, he might be a wonderful person, but he is lacking a major part in his *Avodas Hashem*. He is lacking a basic awareness of Hashem. Yet, if a person is only alone and he has no involvement with people, he has no *ahavas Yisrael*, and he cannot either reveal Hashem on this world, because he has no unity with others.

Generally speaking, people gravitate towards either of these two extremes of *avodah*. Some felt more of a pull towards *ahavas Yisrael*, with no attraction towards *hisbodedus*. As a result, they do not come to a greater sense of recognition of Hashem, and they can become so involved in their *ahavas Yisrael* that they come to forget about Hashem and the *mitzvos* in Torah, *chas v’shalom*. Others naturally crave the solitude of *hisbodedus*, but they are not that interested in *ahavas Yisrael*. As a

result, they may do a lot of *hisbodedus*, but they detach themselves entirely from others, both in the social sense and in the emotional sense.

Either of these paths is a mistaken approach. The true way, as we have begun to explain, is to take the “middle” path: to integrate *hisbodedus* and *ahavas Yisrael* together. One must have times of the day (or in his life in general) of practicing *hisbodedus*, separated from others and alone with Hashem, and to also have times of the day (and of his life in general) where he can connect outward to others Jews and love them.

We see this from our holy prophets. The prophets reached a deep level of inner silence in their souls, but at the same time, they were receiving their visions for the benefit of the Jewish nation. It was they who worried about the spiritual situation of the Jewish people.

The words here serve as an introduction to the entire matter of *hisbodedus*. When we speak of *hisbodedus*, we must remember throughout that this is only one side of the coin, and therefore, **we are not implying here that one must live a life of complete *hisbodedus***. A “life of *hisbodedus*” is therefore only one side of our life, because in conjunction with our *avodah* of *hisbodedus*, we also have an *avodah* to fully connect to the Jewish people with love (*ahavas Yisrael*).

The bulk of this *sefer* will discuss the *avodah* of *hisbodedus*. But in order to clear up any misconceptions about this matter, we had to first mention that the *hisbodedus* we are discussing here in this *sefer* is not implying that one live a life of absolute *hisbodedus*. For, as we have explained here, *hisbodedus* is only one side of our life.

Having made that clear, we can proceed to the next step.

## 5. Solitude and Silence: A Tool To Reach Our Souls

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Why do we need to do *hisbodedus*? As we have already begun to explain, it is because we lack quietness in our life.

To give an example of what we mean, there are many wonderful people who do countless acts of *chessed* throughout the day, but they are anxious inside, and they don't have any inner peace. If they are doing *chessed* all day, which is clearly a spiritual act and the will of Hashem, why doesn't this automatically bring them to feel closer to Hashem?

It is because man is made up of body and soul. The soul functions well when it has quiet solitude to reflect, but the body thrives amidst action and noise. Therefore, when a person is involved heavily in the world of action – even if these actions are acts of *chessed* – usually, it is only the body which becomes involved, with the soul only in the background. The involvement in all of these actions awakens the body, not the soul. So while a person may be performing a positive act, even if it is a *mitzvah*, the person will be more connected to the “bodily” aspect of the act, but he lacks the “soul” of the act, which is a sense of inner quiet and calm.



However, if a person does the opposite, and he lives all the time with inner quiet and silence, and he is disconnected from the physical side to life, it as if he is disembodied. This is the opposite kind of problem, and it is not either what Hashem wants from a person. If Hashem would have wanted a person to be like this, He would have let all of our *neshamos* remain in Gan Eden and not make us come down here. But He didn't want it like that. So if we are here on this world, we cannot ignore our body or the need for outward connection to others.

That being the case, we must learn the Torah and do all the *mitzvos*, and along with this, we also need inner quiet in our life.

Solitude and quieting is therefore a tool that one needs to use, in order to reveal one's inner worldview, which comes from the *neshamah* within him. When a person is always around other people, this noise does not let him concentrate on his *neshamah*, and it will be out of reach. In order for the *neshamah* to be revealed, one first has to quiet the body.

The external act of *hisbodedus* is therefore not meant to be a simple act of disassociating from civilization and going to a secluded place such as a forest or desert. Rather, the purpose of this first, external part of *hisbodedus* must be **to reveal a more inner layer in one's being**. Revealing a more inner layer in oneself is the beginning of the revelation of the soul. **The greater purpose of it all is to reveal the Creator, within.**

So the first part of *hisbodedus* is the physical [seclusion], the intermediate stage of *hisbodedus* is to reveal the soul, and the final stage of *hisbodedus* is to reach the goal, which is to reveal the Creator of the world. Therefore, we will first explain how to quiet the body, and then we will explain how to slowly go about revealing the G-dly soul within us, until we can reach the inner point in the soul, which is connected and attached to the Creator, as it were.

In summary, the bulk of *hisbodedus* is about revealing the soul, and its end goal is to reveal [the Presence of] Hashem [within man].

## 6. The Preliminary Stage: Quieting The Body

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At the first stage of *hisbodedus*, we need to work upon revealing the soul through quieting the body. Since man is comprised of a soul and a body, and the body conceals the soul, due to its noisy and coarse nature, and usually a person is tied down to the materialism of this world, making his body the dominant force in his life. When the body is the main driving force in a person's life, the soul goes into hiding.

Therefore, in order for one to reveal his soul, he will need to separate from the body's hold - from the physical noise of the world – and in that way, he gives place for the soul to be revealed. In this preliminary stage, there is not yet *hisbodedus*. It is to simply quiet the body. When the body has been calmed, the soul can come forth. So we are not yet using any inner approaches to expose the soul.

We can compare this to two items that are taking up the same place. There isn't enough space for both items to be there at once, so what do we do? We push away one of the items to the side, so that the other item can remain in place. It is the same with *hisbodedus*. Man contains a soul and a body. When a person is found within the noise of the world, his soul cannot be revealed. When one silences the body, he allows a place for the soul to be revealed. He can do so by going to a place where the body doesn't have a hold upon. However, it does not directly reveal the soul.

Here is another example that illustrates the above idea. Deep in the earth, there are diamonds, and in order to uncover the diamonds, the earth must be dug into very deeply, and then the workers can go underground and search for the precious stones. Digging into the ground is not directly exposing the diamonds, though. It is just enabling the workers to get into the earth and be able to search from there. People dig into the earth all the time, not always for the purpose of uncovering precious stones, such as by laying a foundation for a building, and other purposes. So while the act of digging into the earth certainly paves the way towards reaching the diamonds, it is not directly exposing the diamonds and it is not specifically meant for that purpose.

Contrast this with the use of a microscope, which is used in order to see microscopic cells, atoms, or bacteria, which cannot be seen with the human eye. A microscope is designed specifically for this purpose. Seeing through a microscope, in contrast to digging the earth for diamonds, is for the purpose of directly revealing what we want to find.

Let's use the above parable to understand the external and internal parts to *hisbodedus*. The external part of *hisbodedus* is like digging in the ground for diamonds. The body conceals the soul, and by quieting the body through going to a quiet place, the soul is allowed to be exposed. The quieting of the body is not, in and of itself, the tool that actually reveals the soul. Compare this to two people who are constantly bickering, and in order to silence them from fighting, we place each of them in a separate corner of the room. The same is true for the body and soul. If the body isn't allowing the soul to become revealed, we need to go to a quiet place, where the body will be quiet and won't get in the way, and then the soul will come.

That is all but the external side to *hisbodedus*. The inner side to *hisbodedus* is to use the *hisbodedus* as a tool to reveal the soul. Let us now explain this.

## 7. Internal Hisbodedus: Reaching The State of "Alone"

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In the soul, there are many layers. The innermost layer in the soul is called the "*Yechidah*" [lit. "individual"]. The absolute, inner level of *hisbodedus* parallels the concept of the *Yechidah*.

The *Yechidah* is a reality where there is only oneness, and nothing other than this oneness. The inner root of *hisbodedus* lies in the part of the soul that is called "*Yechidah*". Lower than the "*Yechidah*" level of the soul is the "*Chayah*", below that is the "*Neshamah*" level, and below that is "*Ruach*", and the lowest level is called "*Nefesh*", and each of these levels certainly requires *hisbodedus* to reveal them. But there is a fundamental difference between the *hisbodedus* used to reveal the

*Yechidah*, with the *hisbodedus* to reveal the lower levels of the soul. They are not the same kind of *hisbodedus*.

In order to understand the difference, we can use the above analogy about digging to get to the diamonds. The *hisbodedus* that is needed in order to reveal the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah* and *Chayah* is like how digging the earth makes it possible to search for the diamonds underneath. Here, the *hisbodedus* is not directly revealing these soul levels. Rather, the “noise” of the body is silenced, and then we can slowly go about revealing the parts of the soul.

But when we do *hisbodedus* in order to reveal *Yechidah*, it is like using a microscope to see atoms. The *hisbodedus* here is a tool that is used specifically to reveal the *Yechidah*, in the same way that a microscope is designed specifically to see microscopic cells. The *Yechidah* is an inner dimension where there is only one reality alone, and nothing else other than this reality. When a person is with other people, he is not an individual, and then he cannot become a tool to reveal the *Yechidah*, which is an individualized state. When one is secluded and alone, he is an individual, and he is then able to reveal the *Yechidah* within him.

We will expand upon these words with an additional parable. There are generally three situations which a person can be in: Either he is amongst people who are not spiritual, or he is amongst people who are devout, who serve Hashem and who are connected to spirituality and G-dliness, or, he can be alone. When a person is among non-spiritual people, he is likely to be influenced by them and connect to their lifestyles, and his physicality will take over. In order to overcome this problem, it seems that he should place himself amongst spiritual people, who serve Hashem, and he can thereby become connected to the Creator. Why, then, does a person need to do *hisbodedus*? Wouldn't it suffice to just be around spiritual people?

The answer to this is, that if the purpose of *hisbodedus* was to become separated from physicality and materialism, then it would indeed suffice if a person is surrounded by spiritual, truthful people, and then we have solved the problem. But that is only the lower level of *hisbodedus*, which is used to get to the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah* and *Chayah* levels of the soul. In order to reveal the level that is “*Yechidah*”, however, even being in the company of spiritual people isn't enough, because there will always be some level of disturbance, even if all of these people want to serve Hashem.

Each person needs to be alone and separate from others, in order to reach the *Yechidah* part of his soul. This is what “*Yechidah*” implies – it is about the concept of “*yachid*”, “individual”, to be alone and individuated from others. If there are two spiritually aspiring people in the same room, they are not alone as individuals, and they will each be prevented from accessing the *Yechidah* level.

That is why, generally speaking, there are two kinds of *avodah* of *hisbodedus*. One kind of *hisbodedus* [the lower level], is to separate from materialism of the world and reveal the spiritual, the soul. For this, it will suffice just to separate from materialistic people and to be in the company of spiritual, truthful people. But in order to reach point of “G-dliness” in the soul, the *Yechidah*, even being around very spiritual people will not accomplish this. There is only one way – to be separate from others and go into a deep, inner solitude.

Therefore, *hisbodedus* includes two kinds of *avodah*. It includes the aspect of separating from bodily materialism, thereby revealing the soul, and it also includes revealing the “individual” aspect of man, whereupon a person can become a container for the “Infinite Light” (*EinSof*) to be revealed within him.

It is particularly important to understand these words, so that one can gain the most out of *hisbodedus* and its desired purpose. Because even if a person reads *sefarim* and books about *hisbodedus*/meditation, he may not know how to use these *sefarim*. He will come across many different concepts and erroneously label them as “*hisbodedus*”.

But this is like referring to every doctor in the world with the title of just plain “doctor”, without naming specifically what the doctor specializes in. There is a doctor for internal surgery, there is a doctor who specializes in treating the heart, etc. The title “doctor” is therefore misleading, unless a person knows exactly what the doctor specializes in. The same is true for *hisbodedus*. There is a general term called “*hisbodedus*”, which has many applications, but it is only a general term.

When we explain the details of *hisbodedus*, we will discover that there are two general kinds of *hisbodedus*: One kind of *hisbodedus* is in order to reveal the soul (the *neshamah*), and another kind of *hisbodedus* is in order to reveal G-dliness (*elokus*).

## 8. Two Paths In Hisbodedus: Methodical, or Skipping

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The above can also be explained in different terms. The two different paths in *hisbodedus* can be described as: One path of *hisbodedus* that follows a methodical, step-by-step manner, and another path of *hisbodedus*, which skips and jumps over the lower levels [and goes more directly to the higher levels].

The first approach, which is a methodical and step-by-step, is to remove the body’s holy and slowly go about revealing the soul, and after a person reveals the soul, he can then reach the inner point [the G-dly part of the soul]. The second approach skips over the lower levels, because it involves directly meditating on the presence of the Creator, thereby revealing the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul with relation to the Creator.

We will explain this in simpler terms. A person might begin approaching *hisbodedus* by isolating himself from others and living totally alone. He may go into a forest, or a desert, or any other isolated place, wherever he can find total quiet in order to have quiet mental reflection. He may do this for a year, for two years, for three years, or more – but without ever revealing the presence of the Creator. He is not doing anything wrong, because for a certain amount of time, there is validity to his approach. But it is only the first step. He is embarking on the path of revealing the “I”, which is the first level of *hisbodedus* – to quiet the body, and to thereby reveal the soul.

Another kind of *hisbodedus* is where a person reflects and meditates on the presence of Hashem, Who resides in one’s heart. This kind of *hisbodedus* involves the higher, “*Yechidah*” level of the soul.

For every matter, there are always two different angles of approaching it, and there is always a third, middle point which connects the two paths together and harmonizes them. The “middle point”, when it comes to *hisbodedus*, is that a person is involved with his own self, but he also turns to the Creator and prays that whatever he lacks be filled. He discovers his shortcomings and things he is lacking in, and he asks the Creator to complete what he is missing. This is essentially bridging together the two kinds of *hisbodedus* [because it involves both the “I”, as well as the “G-dly” part of the soul which focuses on the Creator].

## 9. The Three Levels of Hisbodedus

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In summary of the above, we have defined altogether three kinds of *hisbodedus*.

1. **The lower level of *hisbodedus*:** The goal of this *hisbodedus* is to reveal the “I”. Man is comprised of soul and body, the body conceals the soul, and by doing *hisbodedus*, the hold of the body can be bypassed, in turn revealing the soul, which includes the “I” itself, in all its parts and layers. This is done slowly and in steps.
2. **The higher level of *hisbodedus*:** The goal of this *hisbodedus* is to reveal the presence of the Creator within man.
3. **The intermediate level of *hisbodedus*:** The goal of this *hisbodedus* is to serve as a bridge between the above two levels. It is for a person to reveal the self via bonding with the Creator. It involves prayer: asking the Creator to complete whatever you lack, so that the “I” can be completely rectified.

Each person needs to examine himself and figure out what the proper order of the three levels should be. The normal approach is to begin with the first step, revealing the “I”, and to then turn to the Creator in prayer to fix the deficiencies of the “I”, and then the final step, which is to reveal the presence of the Creator, within man.

## 10. Being Aware of The Structure of Hisbodedus

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Without being aware of these introductory points about *hisbodedus*, a person will not know how to work his way through the steps of *hisbodedus*. He will be like a person who is pressing the buttons of a machine without knowing what each button does.

Usually, when people feel an inner need to do *hisbodedus*, and especially if they have read or heard about it, they pursue *hisbodedus* without guidance, approaching it from a different direction each day. This is like hiring a constructor to build a house, and one day he builds some of the floors, the next day he places sinks on the other side of the house, and on the third day he decides to put up the roof, before putting up the beams. Clearly, he will not succeed.

It is the same with people who want to do *hisbodedus* and who have good intentions, but who lack the proper understanding and direction of how to do it. Each day, they will just go with their gut feeling about it. They will use *hisbodedus* to fulfill something that they are missing today, and tomorrow, it will be about filling a different void, and the next day, something else. But this approach will not last. With *hisbodedus*, it will not work if a person just follows his natural feelings about what he wants to accomplish through *hisbodedus*. Any sensible person knows that in order to build a structure, there must be a specific order to follow.

For example, if a person wants to learn Chumash, it will not work if he learns one *possuk* on Sunday, an on Monday he learns the seventh *possuk*, and then he goes back to the second *possuk*, and then jumping to the third *possuk*. A person cannot either keep switching what he learns. He cannot learn Chumash one day, *sefer* Yeshayahu the next day, then some Zohar at night, and then two days later he is learning different *sefarim*. This is not the way to do things. Anyone who wants to learn in a sensible way understands that there is a certain orderly approach that must be followed.

The soul, in the way it is structured, is not just a random mix of internal forces, nor is it a mix of internal problems. If we want to go about *hisbodedus* properly, we must know its structure. This cannot be done one day by praying to Hashem a specific thing and on the next day to pray for a different thing. It cannot vary based on the person's feelings, moods, or events that have happened, on that day. Rather, *hisbodedus* must always be approached each day with the same consistent rules.

Therefore, the first thing a person needs to figure out, before attempting *hisbodedus*, is to see which of the three kinds of *hisbodedus* he wants to enter into. In order to do this, one needs to learn *sefarim* that explain that particular kind of *hisbodedus*. A person may be attempting to do a certain kind of *hisbodedus* but he is reading *sefarim* that are describing a different form of *hisbodedus*, and then he will run into trouble and confusion.

For example, a person cannot know what *hisbodedus* is just by learning “*Sefer HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem*”,<sup>1</sup> a *sefer* that describes *hisbodedus*. This *sefer* only speaks of the beginning and advanced levels of *hisbodedus* – connecting to the soul and revealing the presence of Hashem – but it does not address the intermediate level, which is to pray to Hashem during *hisbodedus*. In contrast, the *sefarim* of Bresslov, which discuss *hisbodedus*, only deal with the intermediate stage, which is praying to Hashem. But if a person is unaware of this, he may confuse it with other elements of *hisbodedus*.

When a person lacks awareness to this, he may be doing *hisbodedus* for 40 or 50 years, and all of *hisbodedus* consists solely of different prayers to Hashem, and he never comes to reveal any sense of the Creator in the heart. He will relate to the Creator only in terms of asking for things that he wants, filling what he lacks, etc.

In more extreme cases, he skips over even the first stage of *hisbodedus*, which is to uncover the self. He will be praying and praying for all of his life, but he has out of touch with his own self. One must be aware of what the role of prayer is, when to use it, and at which times it is appropriate to prepare for prayer. Prayer is a tool to enable a person to complete what he lacks. But before he asks

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<sup>1</sup> Authored by Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam

Hashem to complete what he lacks, he must become a proper “container” in the first place that can receive what Hashem has to give him.

This can be compared to a person who asks his friend for a cup of water, and his friend pours water into his hand, without the cup. If a person only does *hisbodedus* through prayer, but he has not yet revealed his soul, it is like pouring water where this is no cup to hold it.

There are people who have been doing *hisbodedus* for a year, for two years, for ten or twenty years, having prayed hundreds of special *tefillos*, yet they don’t succeed in getting anywhere. They are forced to conclude, “We must believe in our Sages, that this is the way to go in.” Although they are right that we must believe our Sages, what they don’t realize is that the words of the Sages must be learned and understood well, in order to know how to implement them. If the “I” is not solidly built, one’s prayers will not be complete.

We are not coming here to say that a person should not begin *hisbodedus* with the intermediate stage of *hisbodedus*, prayer. Rather, what we mean is that a person must understand that at a certain point, he must go back and build the first step, which is to build his “I” [reveal his soul].

Clearly, the more sensible and fundamental approach is to *hisbodedus* is to begin with the first step, then the second step, and finally the third step. But in addition to this, each person must choose other, additional methods that will enable him to traverse all of these three steps.

If a person remains only with the first step of *hisbodedus* [revealing the soul], he will definitely reveal more spirituality, but he will stop there, and he never reaches a greater sense of recognition of the Creator’s presence. He may be able to identify himself as a *neshamah* and to reveal a spiritual light within him, but he will not form a bond with the Creator through it. The same is for a person who only practices the second step of *hisbodedus* (prayer). He may be deluded his entire life, simply speaking, because he only prays, but he has no self-awareness.

So there is a fundamental difference between those who are truly serving the Creator, who learn how to have a developed and well-built approach towards a matter, with those who learn *sefarim* without any guidance and without understanding, who attempt to actualize the words they learn. Even if a person has good intentions and is well-meaning in *hisbodedus*, and even if he invests time in it, he will not succeed, because he will always be involved with the intermediate stage, of consistent prayer, of noticing more and more of the things that he lacks and what he needs, and this is what he will pray for throughout all of his *hisbodedus*. He has never built the first step, which is revealing his own “I” as a *neshamah*. His prayers will therefore not stand on any basis, because he has no “container” for any of these prayers to settle upon – he has no revelation of his own “I”.

If a person spends all of his days only in the second step of *hisbodedus*, we can say that for the most part (and possibly for the entire part), that he is living his entire life in a delusion, and his approach will not last. And if a person tries to only involve himself with the third step, he is attempting to jump to the highest levels, which he is not yet ready to enter, and he will attempt to reach the level of revealing Hashem’s Presence in the heart. Even if he is ready for this revelation at

the start, often he is being unrealistic and delusional, with his head in the heavens, and he doesn't feel the reality at hand.

There are people who are very spiritual and much attached to the Creator, but as far as they are concerned, there are no other people in the world. They live in their own lives and they are completely self-immersed. This is not the goal of *hisbodedus*. Just as one must be a bond with the Creator, so must one bond with all of the Jewish people and love them all, and to connected to the reality of the many creations that are on the world.

## In Summary and In Conclusion of Chapter One

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With *siyata d'shmaya*, we have defined the three parts of *hisbodedus*:

1. *Hisbodedus* for the purpose of revealing the “I”.
2. *Hisbodedus* for the purpose of completing any deficiencies of the “I”, via praying to the Creator.
3. *Hisbodedus* for the purpose of revealing the presence of the Creator in one's heart.



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## ***02 / Revealing The I - As A Neshamah***

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*(Summary: In this book, we are traversing our way in stages, beginning from the first stage and all the way until the highest stage; may Hashem merit us to get there. Even from the start, however, we need to bear in mind the ultimate goal of “hisbodedus”, long before we arrive at that stage. The order of steps, as we explained in the previous chapter, in summary, is: To reveal the “I”; then to rectify all that is lacking in the “I”, by turning the Creator in prayer; and, finally, to reveal the presence of the Creator in one’s heart).*

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### **I. Revealing The “I” – Only As A Tool To Reach A Greater Goal**

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Already at the very beginning of our way, when a person begins to reveal his “I”, he must remember that he is ascending the rungs of a ladder of growth, of which the final step is: to reveal the presence of the Creator in the heart. If one is not cognizant of this goal, and instead he immediately begins the steps, this is very endangering, because he may become too focused on trying to discover his “I” and he will remain forever in this search.

Compare this to the following. A person has a child. Every parent wants his child to grow and mature past his current age. No one wants his child to remain a one-year for his entire life. So too, with our own selves, there is a beginning point of our *avodah*, which is to reveal our “I”, and we should strive to develop our “I” and grow further, so that we can eventually reach the final step in all of this. So when we begin, we must bear in mind that the purpose of life is not to reveal the “I”. Rather, the purpose of life is to reveal the presence of the Creator, within man.

How do I reveal the Creator? By means of revealing my own “I”. In other words, the “I” is but a tool that the Creator has given me, which enables me to reveal His presence within me. So the revelation of the “I” is nothing but a tool, a means to a greater end.

This can be compared to a person who is looking for a job so that he can support his household, and he succeeds in finding a job, but his workplace is far away from where he lives, so he has to buy a car in order to commute every day. The purpose of buying the car is so that he can get to his workplace every day, so that he can earn livelihood and be able to support his family. But if he forgets the goal, he views the car as a purpose unto itself. He will get up in the morning and drive all day in his car, but he will never get to his workplace.

The lesson from this is clear. When we begin the very first step, which is to reveal the “I”, we must understand that the “I” is but a tool for revealing the Creator in one’s heart. So although we will be working to reveal the “I”, this is not as a purpose unto itself, but a means to a greater end.

## 2. Our Task: Revealing Reality

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Now that we have defined that the “I” is nothing but a tool to reveal the Creator, now we need to understand: How do we reveal the “I”? What are the actions we must do in order to reveal it?

Let us first address a certain point which many people are mistaken in, when it comes to this beginning part of the *avodah*.

In general terms, the soul consists mainly of two parts, which are also called the “two kings” that reside in man: the *seichel* (mind) and the *lev* (heart). The *seichel* mind is a cold, logical, rational force, and it stems from the soul’s element of water, which is naturally cold. The *lev*/heart is a warm force, for it stems from the soul’s element of fire.

When people consider the idea of revealing the heart, they will usually think that this means to reveal the emotions, such as love, hate, fear, etc. There is a generality associated with the heart, that it refers entirely to character traits and emotional reactions. Almost all people tend to think of the “heart” in this regard. Therefore, “revealing” the heart may seem to be an *avodah* to reveal the character traits and emotions. But this is erroneous. Consider the concept of your “I”, for example. Is your “I” a collection of emotions, character traits and reactions? No! It is a reality which you can sense.

To illustrate, if a person has just had a baby born to him, he has feelings of love for the child. In addition to the love, he is also aware that there is now the reality of his child which has just entered his life. If a person would imagine that he loves his child that has not been born to him, does this mean that he has a child, since he feels a love for this imaginary child? The child is a reality only if he becomes born. When a child is born, he is a tangible existence which the parent can feel, and this is accompanied with feelings of love for the child. But the reality of the child is not the love; it is the very existence of the child.

Entering into inner *avodah* is in the same vein. It is not defined as feelings of love, joy, etc. Although one needs to “serve Hashem in joy”, that is only an aspect of *avodah*, and it is not the definition of *avodah* itself. Without joy, a person cannot genuinely serve Hashem, but the joy itself is not the act of serving Hashem, it is just an aspect of serving Hashem. Joy, love, and other positive spiritual feelings are but tools in our *avodah*, and they are not the defining purpose of our *avodah*.

What, then, is our *avodah*? It is to **reveal reality, as it is**. Do you view yourself as a certain reality? Yes. Do you look at the table in front of you as a reality? Yes. After you know the table exists, you can decide if you love it or not, but first you see it as existing in the first place.

Thus, when we speak here of inner *avodas Hashem*, we will not be using terms such as love of Hashem, fear of Hashem, or any of the other major terms of *avodah* that we may be familiar with. Although love of Hashem and fear of Hashem are both areas that elevate man, they are termed by the Zohar as “two wings” that are inseparable from each other, meaning that they are like “wings” which elevate a person, implying that their role is to uplift, as wings do - but not that they fundamentally define our inner *avodah*.

A common error which people make when entering into *avodah* is that they define our *avodah* as love of Hashem, fear of Hashem, and joy. But these concepts are not the actual definition of our

*avodah*. They are rather **tools** that assist us in our *avodah*. What, then, defines our *avodah*? Our *avodah* is to grasp reality as it is: the revelation of our true “I”. That is our *avodah*! What are the “tools” that help us get there? They include love of Hashem, fear of Hashem, and any of the other major areas that are involved in our inner *avodah*.

If we want to enter the inner world, we must know that it is about grasping a certain reality, and it is not about becoming emotionally amazed with feelings of elation. It is not either about improvement of character traits. It involves [mainly] our spiritual **heart**, which has both an external and internal layer to it. The external layer of the heart contains our emotions, such as love, fear, joy, sadness, etc. There is a more inner point in the heart, however, which is entirely an ability to grasp reality as it is.

To illustrate this idea, the *halachah* is that in order for a knife to be fit for kosher slaughter, the knife must not contain any nicks. In order to avoid this problem, the butcher must inspect the knife in various ways, with his fingernail, with his finger, and by passing it over his palm. The Gemara says that this requires “understanding of the heart”. This “understanding of the heart” cannot be done through feeling some kind of emotion. To the contrary - if the butcher is overtaken by emotion, he is apt to err in the inspection of the knife. He needs inner quiet in order to check the knife calmly. The inspection can only be done in the quiet, so that everything is calm – and in this way, he can inspect the reality in front of him.

Usually, if a person is overtaken by emotion, he cannot see reality objectively, and he is apt to see an erroneous perspective. As an example, some people become overly excited as soon as they see a new item that is advertised on the market, and they quickly run to the bank and take out a loan so that they can purchase the item, and the bank will tell them that they can only take out a certain amount of money, but in their excitement, they just say “Yes, yes” without even hearing what the teller is saying to him.

In order to inspect reality, a person cannot be overtaken with emotion. If he is, his perception of reality will be a bit warped. Therefore, when we come to enter into *avodas Hashem*, we need to know that this is an *avodah* to essentially reveal what reality is, and it is not about becoming more emotional. One does not come to inspect something unless he is interested in what is there.

When it comes to entering *avodas Hashem*, a person is obviously interested in seeing what is there, since he wishes to enter it. But he may enter it out of wonder, which means that he is being overtaken by emotion and will thus not succeed; or, he may enter it from a quiet calmness. The spiritual feelings such as love of Hashem and fear of Hashem are but tools that can help a person have a desire to inspect [the inner] reality.

### 3. Your Personality Is Not Your “I”

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So far, we have already explained that if we want to reveal the “I”, we must not define it as some kind of emotional understanding, but as an actual reality.

Now we will clarify an additional common misconception about this. When someone thinks of this concept of “revealing the I”, he may think that this means revealing his personality traits or his

individuality. He might seek to define his “I” based on trying to find his unique character and personality traits. Some people have a unique power of deep understanding, others have a unique memory, another kind of person has a unique ability to have a deep love for others, and another person may possess very unique talents. These personality traits may all be true, and indeed, they exist in people. But if we want to define what the “I” is, we must know that the “I” is not the unique personality of the person. It is not the positive qualities, or the negative qualities.

Let’s return to the analogy we mentioned earlier. When a child is born to someone, the child is a reality. Upon this reality, we can get to know the child’s personality, like if he tends to cry a lot or if he tends to be more serene, if he tends to be happier or sadder, etc. But before we analyze his personality, the child exists as a reality. Thus, the reality of the child does not depend on his personality or character traits. His reality starts before that.

If we wish to reveal the actual “I” that is within us, we must know that the external layer of our “I” contains our personality and our character traits, our unique aspects, our unique faults, etc. But the actual revelation of who we are – of our very reality – is independent of our personalities.

Thus, since we are defining *hisbodedus* as an *avodah* to reveal the “I” as it is, this is not an *avodah* about revealing our personality traits, or our emotions. It is an *avodah* to reveal the “I”, as it actually is! The “I” itself is an existential reality, and upon that reality, there are personality traits. But the mistake that people make is that they think, “How will I discover my true self? By identifying my main personality traits. In that way, I will be led to reveal my actual self.” After all, if a person does not identify his unique personality traits, he will act in a way that is not true to who he is.

That is what many people think, but it is clear to me that if a person attempts self-revelation in this way, he will not arrive at his true self. The thinking is that if I recognize my unique personality traits and I learn how to use them, in this way, I will come to recognize my true self. I can’t say that there is no validity to this thinking, but it is not the way of *hisbodedus*.

The way of *hisbodedus* is to reach the “I” not in relation to the unique personality traits of oneself, but to recognize the I as it is. As a result of revealing your “I”, you can also uncover your own unique personality traits. But recognizing the “I” itself, as it is, does not come from recognizing the emotions, or the quieter and calmer abilities of the soul, or one’s unique personality. It is to recognize the “I” itself, as it is.

If the purpose [of *hisbodedus*] was to become full of emotion and wonder, then *hisbodedus* would be based on emotion and wonder; if the purpose was to reveal the unique personality of one’s soul, then we should all hire a psychologist to analyze our personality and then tell us who we are. But the *avodah* of *hisbodedus* is none of the above. It is about revealing the actual I, as it is.

Thus, in summary, *hisbodedus* is not about emotion and it is not about the personality and character traits of one’s soul. It is about the reality of the “I” itself.

## 4. First Experiences of the "I"

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There are those who do recognize their own "I", whereas others are not aware at all to the reality of the "I" that resides within them.

If a person was not born with a sense of recognition for his "I", or if he did not receive any formal guidance to reach and reveal it, or if he did not go through a particular experience or tragedy which would have led him to it, generally speaking, he will not come to experience what his true "I" is. The most he can recognize about himself is: What I love, what I hate, what I am good at, what I am not good at, etc. This is a superficial awareness, because these things are but results of the "I", not the "I" itself. So even if a person thinks he "knows himself" very well through the above information, he is still missing recognition of his actual "I".

We can give an example to help understand this. Every one of us goes through infancy and childhood, and slowly, we mature. If anyone thinks at all about his past, he will realize that until the age of about 14 or 15 or so (each person is different when it comes to this), he had no self-awareness at all. He simply did things, he liked or disliked certain things, and he wanted certain things, etc. But before a person matures, there is no self-awareness, no recognition that there is an "I". This is normal with most people, and only a few individuals have self-awareness already at a younger age.

At maturity, a person suddenly begins to realize that he is a soul, and then he begins to think: Who am I, really? Until this realization, a person lives no differently than an animal's orientation. A cat will inspect the food in front of it and it will like or dislike certain foods; a small child will also be picky about what he puts into his mouth. [So the fact that a person knows what he likes and doesn't like is not a sign of maturation or self-awareness]. Eventually, a person becomes aware that there is something inside him, his "I", and he begins to have some minimal experience of it.

This is the beginning of self-awareness, but it is only a spark of it. It is not yet an experience of the "I" as it is. It is just a minimal awareness in a person that there is something more to him than what he does, likes, dislikes, etc. The person becomes aware that there is something inside him. This awareness is usually hidden from the consciousness of most people, unless a person was born with it, or if he uncovered it through formal guidance, or through some experience that triggered his self-discovery. Although it is usually hidden from the consciousness of most people, it is still existent in all people.

## 5. Revealing the "I"

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Thus, the first task here is for a person to reveal the "I" within him, and to know: What is in my "I"? What is my actual "I"?

If we want to know of anything from the physical world, we use any of the five senses: seeing, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. But we cannot see or hear our "I". Nor can we smell it or taste it. But we can feel it (this is a use of the sense of touch).

Obviously, we cannot physically touch our “I”. We are referring to a power of touch in our soul, to feel a certain perspective, and through it, we may feel the “I”.

The task of recognizing our “I” is therefore a use of our soul’s sense of touch. We will not be using our body’s physical sense of touch for this – we will be using our soul’s sense of touch, which can be used to feel a reality.

Let us now define the deep understanding of what the actual “I” is. (There are also deeper definitions that exist, but here we are explaining the one that is of relevance to us right now.) Revealing the “I”, as it is, is to reveal an existing *havayah* (reality) – it is to feel its reality as it is.

When we use our physical sense of touch, we are touching something outside of us, and just as we can touch something outside of us, so can we feel something inside of us. We do not mean performing heart surgery, which enables the physical hands to reach the heart. Rather, we are referring here to sensing an actual reality within us. That is how we can define recognition of the “I”. There is nothing else to do to recognize the “I”, because it is entirely a sensing of an existent “I”. There is no picture of it, and there is no smell or sound to it. It can only be “touched” – it can felt.

Let us now summarize the first step in *hisbodedus*. As mentioned before, we still have not yet touched upon any actual guidance in doing *hisbodedus*, as of this point. We are simply learning about how to approach it, and to clarify our understanding about it.

The very first step is to know exactly what we are searching for here. After we know that, we can then explain the steps in between and the goal of it all. **The goal is to find the Creator within us.** *In the path to get there, one needs to find his actual “I”.* The actual “I” of a person is not emotions or reactions, or any of one’s unique personality traits and characteristics. The “I” is a reality that is independent of those factors, and it can be tangibly felt.

## 6. The Two General Ways To Reveal The “I”

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Now that we have defined the first step of *hisbodedus* as being a revelation of the actual “I”, and we have clarified that the “I” is not emotions or personality traits or characteristics, but an existing reality unto itself, we will now try to explain, with the help of Hashem, the more practical steps which can bring a person to experience this reality of the actual “I” within him.

Man is comprised of a soul and a body; the body conceals the soul, and man’s task is to remove the “barrier” that is his body, and to reveal the soul. Certainly, **the basic condition needed in order to reveal the soul is for the body to be sanctified through the observance of the 613 *mitzvos* of the Torah**, which are parallel to the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of the body (adding up for a total of 613). This means that a person must keep all of the *mitzvos* that are applicable to him/her. This is the basis of **purifying the body**.

Upon this basis, there are two general and fundamental paths which can bring a person to his *neshamah* (Divine soul of a Jew):

1) Through **weakening the body’s physical hold** on a person; also known as “breaking” the body. 2) Through **shining the light of the soul, from within the body**. Meaning, although the

body is a barrier that covers and conceals the soul, there are “cracks” and “windows” within the body, so to speak, which the soul to shine through and thereby be revealed within the body. These “cracks” and “windows” within the body are, according to the *Arizal*<sup>2</sup>, essentially referring to the body’s senses of sight, hearing, smell, and speech. These senses are the general “cracks” through which the soul may come out its hiding and be revealed.

## 7. The First Method: “Breaking” The Body’s Hold

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The first method – weakening or breaking the body [the hold of physicality] – can be generally explained as follows.

With men, “breaking of the body” is accomplished through exertion in studying the holy Torah. It is written, “The words of Torah do not last except in one who kills himself over it.”<sup>3</sup> Clearly, this means that one must “kill” his body [his hold of physicality upon him] for this, and the intention is not to kill his soul, *chas v’shalom*. One needs to make himself “like an ox to a burden, and like a donkey to a load” – a person must exert his physical body for the study of holy Torah, and through expending physical energy for the Torah, he weakens the body<sup>4</sup> and “breaks” it, and in turn, the soul is then revealed.

This is the more recognizable and familiar path, known throughout the generations. Since the times of the Sages who composed the Mishnah and the Talmud, there have always been those who toiled with all of their physical energy as they exerted themselves in Torah study. When they had used up every last bit of their physical energy, their body was “broken”, meaning that they broke the hold of physicality upon them.

It can be compared to breaking a sealed barrel in order to release the wine inside it. The holy *neshamah*, so to speak, is like the wine inside a sealed barrel, and the body is like an earthen barrel which contains the wine. When a person exerts his body greatly in order to understand the Torah, he “breaks” the body and the soul is thereby revealed. That is one way of how to reach the soul.

This is a path that certainly requires guidance, but not as much guidance as the second path does [which is the path we are explaining in this book]. The general guidance for this first path [breaking the body through exertion in Torah study] is that one needs to have a balance between guarding his physical well-being, so that his mind will still be able to function properly. If a person weakens his body too much, his mind cannot work, and he loses anything that is to be gained from this, because then he won’t be able to learn Torah. So the body can only be weakened to the extent that one can maintain a clearly-thinking mind.

Anyone familiar with this matter knows that there are many who err when they take this path. There are people who exert their bodies very much, using all their physical energy in order to learn Torah, but along with this, they weaken their minds as well. They do not reveal their souls through

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<sup>2</sup> “Ari Zal” – acronym for Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, of blessed memory (famed 15th century kabbalist and foremost sage on the Torah’s hidden mystical wisdom)

<sup>3</sup> Talmud Bavli: Shabbos 83b

<sup>4</sup> Sanhedrin 26b

it. The reason for this is because the mind is the tool to get to the soul. The soul resides in the mind, so if the mind is weakened, the soul suffers as well. He is like a person who overworks himself when trying to build a structure, who will simply break his body in the process. The soul cannot be revealed in this manner, because it will have no place for this revelation to occur.

In this *sefer*, we will not be using this path, although it is a complete discussion for itself.<sup>5</sup> Instead, we will focus on the second path [shining the light of the soul onto the body].

## 8. The Second Method: Shining The Soul Onto The Body

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The second path [in order to reveal the soul] is to **shine the light of the soul**, within the body - to let the soul's light penetrate into the body. We will explain what prevents this revelation, and how a person can reveal the light of the soul from within the physical body.

Let's use the examples of hearing, sight, and the other physical senses. How do our eyes see, and how do our ears hear? They cannot see on their own. They can only work because there is a soul animating the physical body and allowing them to function. However, since the soul is clothed by the physical body, we will usually see only through our physical senses, and not through the soul. We will see something physical, and we will hear something physical, but we will not see or hear the spiritual. But the guiding force behind our sense of sight, the actual lens which we are using whenever we see something, is really the soul. The same is true for our other physical senses. The soul is moving our senses and allowing them to work. It is just concealed within the body, and that is why our senses are usually be accessed solely on a physical level.

In the coming chapters, we will explain several practical ways of how a person can see using his "spiritual" sense of sight [to see from the soul]. However, first, we must emphasize two very essential points. As we stressed in the beginning of this chapter, the basis is the observance of the 613 *mitzvos* of the Torah. This includes guarding our eyes and ears from seeing/hearing anything that is improper for us to see or hear.

If a person, *chas v'shalom*, is careless when it comes to avoiding spiritual damage to his senses of sight and hearing, his physical body will be too callous to the spiritual, and it will prevent the revelation of the soul. Only after a person is making effort to protect his eyes and ears from improper things, can he begin to shine the light of the soul, onto his physical senses, of seeing and hearing, etc.

Secondly, as we have mentioned before and which we are not repeating and emphasizing, the ultimate end goal is not to simply acquire more spiritual senses, to learn how to see and hear from the soul, etc. Rather, accessing the spiritual uses of our senses is but a tool that we need in order to reveal the soul, which is ultimately a means to reach the general goal of this all: revelation of the presence of the Creator.

So when we will be learning here of how we can go about revealing the soul, the purpose is not to be able to see from the soul, to hear from the soul, etc. Rather, this is all a means to open the

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<sup>5</sup> Editor's Note: The Rav has explained this elsewhere in the derasha entitled "The Weekly Shmuess\_014\_Vayechi\_Illness and Purifying The Body In Shovavim"



“cracks” within the body, which will in turn allow the soul to come forth and be revealed. When the soul comes out from its hiding, we are then able to reach the core of our very existence, but the goal is not to be able to have “spiritual sight” and “spiritual hearing”, or anything of the like.

The Baal Shem Tov warned that many erred in this regard, by seeking high levels of understanding, or to see spiritual sights, or to hear messages from Heaven. The curiosity and urge to attain high levels of understanding can actually be the biggest factor that prevents a person from the truth. Truth is not about seeing spiritual sights or hearing spiritual messages. The purpose is to reach the soul, and from there, to reach the very core of our very *havayah* (existence) – which is the Creator of the world.

## 9. Differences Between Physical Senses and Spiritual Senses

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There is a fundamental difference between our physical senses, with our spiritual senses.

Our physical senses have certain limitations. The eyes can see up to a certain distance, and the ears can hear sounds from far away but not further than that. But the spiritual senses of sight and hearing are not limited. It is as the Gemara says regarding Adam HaRishon, that he was able to see from one of the world to the other. His sight was not limited with the constraints that we recognize. Our spiritual senses do not contain the limitations that we are familiar with.

Another difference between our physical and spiritual senses is in their very structure. The structure of the physical senses is designed to be somewhat noisy, meaning, that they require movement. For example, in order for a person to see something, he must move his eye, and in order to hear something, there must be sound waves. These physical movements, albeit minimal, are still louder than the spiritual. The spiritual senses, the senses of the *neshamah*, are more silent.

In summary, the physical senses are noisier than the spiritual senses, whereas the spiritual senses are quiet and calm; in addition, the physical senses are also limited, whereas the spiritual senses are not.

## 10. The Three Dimensions: Worlds, Souls, and G-dliness

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Before we explain these spiritual senses, we will first explain the body and framework of this *sefer*.

One of the well-known principles of the holy Baal Shem Tov (also explained by the Arizal, in different terminology, as well as in other holy *sefarim* in many other terms; here we will use the language of the Baal Shem Tov regarding this matter) is that there is a general division of three dimensions, which are:

1. *Olamos* (Worlds)
2. *Neshamos* (Souls)
3. *Elokus* (G-dliness)

The first [and lowest] level is “*Olamos*” (Worlds), which refers to the “vessels” (or tools, or containers) that we need in order to get to our greater spiritual goals. The intermediate level, “*Neshamos*” (Souls) refers to the spiritual “illuminations” [which can settle upon our “vessels” and thereby be contained in them.] The highest level, “*Elokus*” (G-dliness) refers to the *EinSof*, the Infinite.

In relation to using our spiritual senses for *hisbodedus*, our spiritual senses will need to pass through these three levels, as follows:

1. *Olamos*/Worlds – These are the “tools” which we need in order to get to our greater spiritual goals. In the physical world, tools help us get to our goals. In the inner, spiritual dimension, there are also spiritual tools which we use; such as the “heavenly realms”.

2. *Neshamos*/Souls – The *neshamah* (soul) is spiritual light. Light is always a form of the spiritual. There are varying degrees, however, of how powerful the light of a *neshamah* can be; there are varying levels of this light, ranging from the level of lower-rooted souls and all the way until the level of “new souls” of the future.

3. *Elokus*/G-dliness – Above the level of “*Neshamos*/Souls” is “*Elokus*”, G-dliness. This refers to the *EinSof* (the Infinite) of the Creator.

## Overview of the Coming Chapters

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We will be working throughout [*hisbodedus*] using our spiritual senses, in all of these three levels. For example, in order to fully access our spiritual sense of sight, it will need to pass through the stages of “*Olamos*”, then “*Neshamos*”, and, finally, to reach “*Elokus*”.

It is also necessary for us to understand that the senses are not disparate from each other; rather, they are a unit. Our four senses [sight, hearing, taste, and speech] are therefore not disconnected from each other; they work in tandem. So it is upon us to let our senses traverse all of the stages of *Olamos*, *Neshamos*, and *Elokus*.

At first, we will explain how to use the senses with regards to the material world, which we refer to as “*Yeish*” (the material existence). We will see the “positive” [direct] use of each of the senses, and then we will see how to use the senses in the “negative” [the abstract and non-material], which we refer to as “*Ayin*” (nothingness). In that stage, we will essentially be silencing each of the senses [negating its simpler and more tangible use]. After that, we will learn how to rise to the stage after “*Ayin*”, which is to touch upon the light of the Infinite.

Through each of the senses that are found in us, we will need to rise from the level of “*Olamos*” to “*Neshamos*”, and from “*Neshamos*” to “*Elokus*”. As we explained, the task of a person is, first:

- 1) To reveal the *neshamah* (Divine soul of a Jew);
- 2) After that, to reveal the soul’s bond with her Creator;
- 3) And, after this, to reveal “the Infinite”.

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## 03 / Seeing The Spiritual In Yeish-Material

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*(Summary: In the previous chapters, we have begun to explain the path of hisbodedus. The general outline of hisbodedus is in three stages, as will be explained in detail throughout this sefer. The first stage is to reveal the self as a soul. The second stage is to bond with the Creator in prayer. The third stage is recognition of the Creator and revelation of G-dliness, which is the true havayah (reality) of all that exists.*

*We have begun to scratch the surface of the first stage, by establishing that man consists of *guf* (body) and *neshamah* (soul). The *neshamah/soul* in us is hidden. Therefore, our first undertaking here will be: to reveal the *neshamah*.*

*We explained that the body has four senses through which the soul can shine through and thereby be revealed: the senses of sight, hearing, smell, and speech. The soul's senses are unlimited and are not bound to the rules that we know of our physical senses. The senses of the soul are calmer, whereas the physical senses are louder.)*

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### I. The Expansion and Quieting of the Senses

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In order to allow the soul's senses to be come out from its potential state and be revealed, we will need to both **expand**, as well as **quiet**, the physical senses.

From this point onward, we will explain the ways of our early Sages in how they reached the revelation of the senses of the soul. In order to do this, we will need to go through each of the senses, both quieting and expanding them. In the coming chapters, we will provide examples of how the senses of the soul can be expressed, learning how to both quiet and expand them.

In this chapter, we will go into detail of how to expand the sense of sight, as well as how to quiet it, (in accordance with Hashem's will). First we will deal with how to actively use the soul's sense of sight, which we refer to as seeing "*Yeish*" [lit. "substance", the physical layer of reality], and in the next chapter we will explain how to use a deeper kind of sight, which we will refer to as seeing "*Ayin*" [lit. "nothingness" – seeing a non-physical dimension].

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### 2. Expanded Vision: Looking At The Sky

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The *Arizal* writes that one of the ways in which a person can expand his comprehension is by looking at the sky, when it is clear and bright. How does this work?

The simple understanding of this concept is that when a person looks at the sky, he is seeing something that is more spiritual. This is true, but it is not the inner perspective of the matter. Although the sky is definitely more spiritual looking than the physical earth you walk on, and it is more purifying to your vision when you look at it, there is a more inner understanding to this.

Looking at the sky opens you up to the concept of an unlimited kind of vision. The sky is endless, so when you look at it, you are learning how to see something that is unlimited. Of course,

if you use your eyes to take in the view of the entire spectrum of the sky, you will see where it begins and where it ends in the scope of your vision, just like you see the beginning and end of a table. So what did the Arizal mean, that viewing the sky is an endless kind of vision? He was referring to something deeper – a deep kind of perspective that can be gained, through looking at the sky.

These words of the Arizal were very subtle. He meant that one can see the sky *through a place in himself that is free from limitations* - by getting used to seeing something which doesn't seem to have an end, you gain a kind of 'lens' that is endless. He did not mean that the sky is endless, of course, because we know that all creations are limited and have an end at some point. What he meant was that looking at the sky can help a person free himself from the limited kind of vision that we are used to.

Let's analyze this further. All creations that we see are limited. A table, a chair, and a house all have a shape with measurements. The shape of each thing we see is its limitations – and the same is true vice versa. Thus, if a person wants to expand his vision, he needs to learn how to see something that has no specific measurements.

So the depth of the concept of staring at the sky is to learn how to gain an unlimited kind of viewpoint. The sky has no specific measurements you can see.

Later, we will mention another concept which expands vision: looking at the stars or the moon, in which the gain will be that a person sees something illuminating. We will soon explain this, with Hashem's help, but we will mention here briefly that this practice contains a drawback: one is seeing something limited. When you see the stars or the moon, you're seeing a compacted version of it in its entirety, so you're not seeing something unlimited. But when you see the sky, you see something that cannot be contained in the entirety of your vision.

### 3. Expanded Vision: Looking At The Sea

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The same gain is accomplished by looking at the sea, which also offers a person an expansive and unlimited view. You can't see the end of the ocean, so when you look at it, you are seeing something that cannot be entirely contained in the vision of your eye.

If you keep focusing your vision on the point where your vision cannot see further, you learn how to free your soul from being used to a limited kind of vision.

In contrast, staring at the ocean waves will not give you this gain. Although it is calming to watch the waves, the drawback to it is that you can see the entire wave, which means that you're seeing something limited.

Trying to see the depth of the surface underneath the ocean's water is another example of seeing an unlimited kind of view, because you are seeing something in which you cannot see the end, so it offers the same gain of looking at the expanse of the sky.

## 4. What About Looking At Air?

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At this point, you might be wondering: If so, why doesn't looking at the air in front of me accomplish the same thing? After all, you can't see air, so looking at the air should also be an example of seeing something unlimited. But although there is truth to that, the fact of the matter is that looking at the air in front of you will not expand your vision. This is because your physical eyes need to see something tangible, in order for it to develop its sense of sight for the unlimited.

We are used to seeing something that has tangibility, and therefore, in order for the average person to expand his sight, he needs to see something that can be visualized which is also expansive at the same time. Looking at the air, by contrast, is not something you can visualize, because it is invisible, so your vision doesn't become expanded when you look at it. Therefore, when most people stare at the air, they will not feel like this is doing anything for them. (However, there are some people who have greatly purified and refined their spiritual senses, and they can expand their vision even when they see nothing.)

The path which we are presenting here is to learn how to see the most subtle kinds of visions that we can see with our eyes. In each of the methods that we are discussing, though, you will find that there is one kind of vision which appears in certain aspects to be more refined in its nature than other kinds of visions, and this is true about all of them. Each of these visions contains a more refined aspect than the others, as well as aspects that are more materialistic and less refined, than the other kinds of vision. This is because there is nothing in Creation which is all-inclusive and which would contain every single aspect.

(We find the same thing with color. Each of the colors contains a certain aspect that is more calming than the other colors. [So too, each of the methods here contains a certain subtlety in it that quiets the sense of vision.])

## Summary

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We have so far explained that if a person wants to reveal the senses of the soul, he needs to expand them as well as quiet them. Until now, we have only explained about the sense of sight, and we have brought a few examples of how to expand as well as quiet this sense. The examples included viewing the sky, viewing the expanse of the sea, and viewing the ocean waves. The gain of the above examples is that it provides a person with the ability to see an expansive kind of view, enabling the human eye to see something unlimited [giving a person a sense for the endless]. Additionally, the gain of viewing these sights is because they are not contained in any form or structure. In that aspect, they also represent an endless, unlimited kind of vision.

Now we will present more examples which expand vision. We will go through each of them, with Hashem's help, and see the gains of each one, as well as the drawbacks in each of them (which is why they do not lead to a total expansion of the sense of sight, in spite of what is to be gained from them).

## 5. Expanded Vision: Staring Into A Flame

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There is an *avodah* [mentioned in the *sefarim hakedoshim*] to stare at a flame. This did not originate from gentile nations of the world; it is an *avodah* that is already mentioned long ago in the words of our earlier Sages. [And now that we're on that subject, let us mention here a disclaimer about everything else that is to come in this *sefer*: **everything mentioned in this *sefer* is based solely and purely on the *sefarim hakedoshim* [the holy, classic books of Torah literature, which explained about inner wisdom].**

Staring at a flame contains both an advantage with regards [to the soul's sense of vision], as well as a disadvantage [to the soul's sense of vision].

The advantage is that the soul become more opened when one sees light, for the *neshamah* (Divine soul) is called "light", for it is written, "*Ner Hashem, Nishmas Adam*" ("The flame of G-d is the soul of man").<sup>6</sup> The *guff* body, by contrast, is called "darkness", for This World is compared to darkness, and the body represents the materialism of This World. This is the reason behind why candles are lit for the deceased; to raise the *neshamah* as opposed to raising the *guf*. Since the *neshamah* is called "light", it becomes uplifted when a light is lit for it.

Just as there is a concept of lighting a candle for the soul of the deceased, a person can do so with his own self. How? By focusing one's vision on a lit candle, a person awakens and reveals the light that is in his soul. One's soul, and the flame that he sees, are of the 'same type' – and when two of the 'same type' meet each other, they are delighted.

(We will mention here briefly that there is also an *avodah* even deeper than this: sitting in the dark. With the help of Hashem, we will soon explain this. Although darkness is usually associated with negativity, there is a way to use darkness for holiness, and this is called "higher" darkness. However, right now we will not discuss this. Here, we are discussing how to reveal the *neshamah* through means of light, not through darkness.)

The *avodah* we are currently discussing is that one focuses his vision on the flame of a lit candle. This is not accomplished by merely sitting in a room surrounded by candles. It is rather to look deeply into the flame of the candle. It is an act of bonding of the soul - and it is an experience that cannot be described in words.

One of the Chassidic *Rebbes of Chabad* said, "Chanukah lights can talk." When someone connects in his soul to the light of a lit candle, his soul can feel the flickering of the flame. This is only experienced if a person really connects to it in an inward way.

Any person can gain from looking at a flame, each to his own level; it can awaken a person to have a degree of revelation of his soul. The advantage of this *avodah*, as was explained, is that it

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<sup>6</sup> *Mishlei* 20:27

serves as a tool to reveal one's soul, for the body is "dark" and the soul is "light", thus, looking at light can free the soul from the "dark" veil that is upon it.

Although we are dealing with a physical flame, there is something about a flame on a candle that inspires one to the spiritual. We see this from the fact that there is a *minhag* that a candle is lit for the deceased to uplift their *neshamah*. It is because when we see a flame, we can be reminded of the higher and spiritual dimensions. As Chazal say: "Know Who is above you."<sup>7</sup> The depth of this is that even what we do here down below on this physical earth can have an effect on the spiritual dimension that is above us. Focusing your vision on the flame of a candle is one of the ways to awaken the revelation of the soul.

As for sitting in a room full of candles, this can also be effective, but the drawback to it is that it does not allow for as much focus, being that all the flames of the candles are bunched together.

Now that we have explained the advantage of looking at a flame, we will now explain what the disadvantage is. As we mentioned earlier, the soul can only be revealed when we look at something unlimited, something with no measurements. A candle can be fully contained in the scope of your vision, so we do not have the gain here of seeing something unlimited.

Perhaps we can say that although the candle is limited, the flame is unlimited, being that it can provide an endless amount of flames when we touch it with another candle. If so, it would seem that looking at a flame is like looking at something unlimited. But although we are aware of that, our physical vision cannot see this, so a flame is therefore not a good example of seeing the unlimited.

Until now, we explained that this *avodah* applies to seeing a lit candle, but it can also apply even to seeing an electric light. It is much more recommended to look at a candle (which is a natural flame) than to see man-made fire, which is electricity, but even electricity can have some kind of spiritual effect when you look at it [because it is also a form of light].

For example, when you walk into a well-lit wedding hall, you are able to experience some kind of inspiration, and this can serve to awaken your soul's inner light. Although electric lights are physical (and although the person who owns the hall only put the lights there so he can make money), the fact that there is a plethora of light in the room can provide a spiritual effect. When you're in a room with a lot of light, this is something that can help you get started in conceptualizing the light of your soul.

Each method of expanding spiritual vision has an advantage that the other does not have. A lone candle in a room is a deeper kind of light that you see, because it is natural, and the natural flickering of the flame is more conducive for inspiring the soul. Electric lights do not have this advantage. But when there are a lot of electric lights in a room, there is an advantage of having a lot of light – and in fact, this can provide an even deeper effect than a natural candle.

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<sup>7</sup> *Avos 2:1*

So if you find yourself in a room that is very brightly lit, and if you have the perseverance to work on this, you can take the opportunity to use the brightness and remind yourself of the soul, that it is beginning to light up within you.

Let us use the following analogy to help understand this a bit better. If we want to create an opening in a wall, there are two steps. First we need to make a small hole, and then we widen the gap. Making the first small hole is always the harder part. After we have made some crack in the wall and we now want to widen it, the work becomes much easier.

In the same vein, some of the ways of *avodah* which we are mentioning here are relatively easier to work upon, because there is a “crack” that has already been made, and it is not the first time that a person will be trying to make the opening. That is why if a person has not yet opened his sense of spiritual sight, he will not feel anything when he stares into a flame or at many lights in a room. But if there is already some small “crack” – if the sense of spiritual sight has been opened at least a little, the work is then much easier, because all a person needs to do is expand it further. Such a person will be able to gain from viewing a plethora of light in a room.

## 6. Expanded Vision: Looking At The Name of Havayah

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There is another kind of *avodah* that involves our sense of sight, mentioned in the name of the *Arizal*, and also mentioned in the beginning of *Shulchan Aruch*: to visualize the *shem havayah*, the four-letter Name of Hashem. There are two general ways to visualize it (and many more specific approaches, but here we will only explain the two general ways).

**1) Focusing The Vision On The Name of Havayah** – A person can simply visualize the name of *havayah* by seeing it written in a sefer Torah scroll, or in any *sefer* (and it must look like the way it is written in a sefer Torah scroll, which is called *ksav ashuris*), by focusing his vision on the word *havayah* in front of him.

Looking at the name of *havayah* is a very deep matter. Hashem created the universe using His holy Names, and these include the ten general names of Hashem which may not be erased, as well as all the other names that branch out from these. The root of all names of Hashem is the name of *havayah*. Therefore, looking at name of *havayah* is like looking at the root of Creation, which is the deepest possible thing to view. (Higher than this form of *avodah* is to look at the end point of the letter *yud*).

Visualizing the name of *havayah* is much a deeper kind of vision than other names of Hashem such as *Elokim* and the name of *adnus*. Picturing the name of *havayah* can be helpful to reveal the actual root. Through focusing the vision on Hashem’s name of *havayah*, a person can penetrate into his own *havayah* (essence), and after that, to the *havayah* of the Creator.

**2) Mental Cognizance of the Name of Havayah**. Above, we discussed seeing the name of *havayah* on a piece of paper, blank ink upon a white background, as it appears in the *sefer Torah*; it



may be seen in any sefer as well. But there is also another way to picture the name of *havayah*: when it is being shined within. A person may be cognizant of the name of *havayah* in front of him, either because he has reached this from inner understanding, where the name of *havayah* is always in front of him; or, because he has revealed the essence of his soul, so that the name of *havayah* is always being illuminated before him.

This concept is described in the words of the *Arizal*, mentioned in *Mishnah Berurah*: “One who wishes to examine if his soul is perfected, should close his eyes; if the name of *havayah* rises in front of his eyes, this is proof that his soul is perfected, and if only part of the letters rise, it is a sign that they cannot rise for they are damaged.” That is how a person can discover, generally, what he needs to rectify. If no letters appear, it is a sign that he is far from rectification.

Another way of how one can become cognizant of the name of *havayah* is through imagining it vividly. This does not mean that the person has actually reached the level in which the name of *havayah* is shining in front of him, though.

## The Advantages and Disadvantages In All of the Above Practices

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Picturing the name of *havayah* contains two advantages in developing our spiritual vision. Firstly, since it is a form of heavenly illumination, it contains the same advantage of viewing light. Secondly, since it is the main name of Hashem, it is the deepest view of *havayah*, and therefore it can reveal one’s own *havayah* (essence). One who is cognizant of the name of *havayah* in front of him is shining his own inner light, and in addition to this gain, he also gains from the “light” of the name of *havayah*. In contrast, looking at a flame cannot lead to a revelation of *havayah*.

However, there is a drawback to this *avodah* as well. The name of *havayah* is ultimately limited, because if it can be pictured, it is limited to that form. In this regard, looking at the sky is more advantageous, because it is a limitless kind of view. Both of these visual practices, picturing the name of *havayah* and looking at the sky, are mentioned in the works of the *Arizal* as tools that can lead to inner understanding. We have explained the pros and cons to each of these practices, and why one practice is not necessarily more advantageous than the other, and vice versa.

## 7. Expanded Vision: Looking At The Face of a Tzaddik

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In addition to the above methods, there are also other ways to develop spiritual sight. One of the fundamentals of *Chassidus* is to see the face of a *tzaddik* (righteous, saintly Jew). There are deep matters contained in this concept, and we will try here to at least scratch the surface.

It is written, “*And G-d created man in His image, in the image of G-d He created him.*”<sup>8</sup> When Hashem created man, He created him in a perfect image, the “*tzelem elokim*”, a resemblance of Heaven. When man sins, he damages his *tzelem elokim*. The Torah writes, “*And all the nations of the world will see that the name of Hashem is written upon you, and they will be afraid from you.*” It is explained in our Sages, and in the *sefarim hakedoshim* at length, that when a person is untainted with sin, this *tzelem elokim* dwells on his face, and others who see his countenance are afraid of him (with some exceptions to this rule). When a person sins, this *tzelem elokim* is removed from him. The *Nefesh HaChaim* says that even when a person thinks of sinning, his soul leaves him, because the parts of the soul are really connected with this *tzelem elokim*. When one’s deeds are perfected and he has a heart that can receive the presence of the *Shechinah*<sup>10</sup>, he can become a container that can hold the *tzelem elokim*, and he can contain the light of the “image of G-d” in himself, as it were.

A *tzaddik* guards himself from sin, he is connected to the light of the Infinite, and therefore the *tzelem elokim* can shine upon him. “*The wisdom of man illuminates his face*”<sup>11</sup>, and this “wisdom” refers to the root of one’s vitality, as it is written, “*Wisdom sustains its owner.*”<sup>12</sup> When there is a revelation of spiritual vitality, as it is with a *tzaddik*, this illuminates his face. (There is also a more inner level than this, the *Yechidah*, which does not become revealed on the face, because it remains hidden deep in the heart, and it cannot even be seen on the face of a *tzaddik*.)

Thus, looking at the face of a *tzaddik* is a way of seeing the soul in its purity. Although a *tzaddik* is ultimately a human being with a physical body and with physical needs (as Rebbe Nachman of Bresslov pointed out, that people erroneously think that a *tzaddik* is an angelic being with no physical body, and this isn’t true, for we see that Moshe *Rabbeinu* ate, drank and slept), a true *tzaddik* has attained a revelation of his *neshamah* that is apparent.

On a superficial level, looking at a *tzaddik* is very spiritual because a person “receives the light” of the *tzaddik*’s soul, by looking at the *tzaddik*’s face. But the depth behind it is because looking at the *tzaddik*’s face awakens the viewer’s own soul. Just as the *tzaddik* has reached and revealed his own soul and it shines on his face, so can the one who views him attain a revelation of the soul; through “seeing the soul” of the *tzaddik* (through the means of viewing the *tzaddik*’s face), the viewer’s own soul can be revealed. The amount of inspiration that a person gets when looking at a *tzaddik* depends on how deep the connection the person has with the *tzaddik*.

Thus, seeing a *tzaddik* is actually a way to reveal one’s own soul. If a person takes a picture of a *tzaddik* and he concentrates on it for a long time, focusing strongly on it and connecting to the picture of the *tzaddik* through his soul, he can reach very high levels of understanding. This is because the revelation of a *tzaddik*’s soul is more apparent, and one who views the *tzaddik*’s face in an inner way can awaken his own soul, and in turn, he can then reveal it.

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<sup>8</sup> *Beraishis* 1:26

<sup>9</sup> *Devarim* 28:10

<sup>10</sup> *The “presence of G-d” as manifested in this world*

<sup>11</sup> *Koheles* 8:1

<sup>12</sup> *Koheles* 7:12

The depth of this matter really cannot be explained. In addition, all of the ways of *avodah* which we are explaining here are based on an inner perspective, which cannot be expressed fully in any words.

We have so far explained the gains of looking at the face of a *tzaddik*, and now we will examine the drawbacks of this practice.

There is a big danger to practicing this *avodah* of seeing a *tzaddik*, in that a person may turn this into a purpose unto itself, without connecting it to a greater goal. As we mentioned earlier, the need to reveal the soul is only a means to a greater end, and it is not for its own purpose. We should only be trying to access our soul for one reason: we need to reveal our connection with our Creator. The purpose of life is to become close to Hashem, and that should be the goal in anything we do. If a person can look at a *tzaddik's* face and use the spiritual effect of this for the sake of revealing his own soul, this is the commendable approach. But if all he does is connect to the *tzaddik* and he remains there, he has failed, because he was supposed to remove this “garment” and reveal the Creator there.

Therefore, looking at pictures of *tzaddikim* requires much understanding, in order to go about this sensibly. One who practices it needs to go about it in appropriate limits, using it as a means to reveal his soul, making sure not to become “caught up” in his soul connection to the *tzaddik*; after feeling connected to the *tzaddik*, he must then divest himself of the “garment” (the *tzaddik*) and in its place, to reveal a connection to the Creator.

There is another problem with this *avodah*. Even when looking at a *tzaddik*, a person is not seeing a soul alone, but a soul with a body. Therefore, when looking at the *tzaddik*, he may become attached in his vision to the physical body and appearance of the *tzaddik*.

To our great sorrow, we can find many people who, instead of connecting to the souls of *tzaddikim*, have fallen into an attachment to the physical body of the *tzaddik*. Although the body of a *tzaddik* is also holy, and many times the body of a *tzaddik* is even holier than even the souls of others, even so, a person may entirely lose focus on connecting to the *tzaddik's* soul and instead he is mesmerized by the *tzaddik's* physical appearance, and he is foregoing the soul connection. A person may spend a lot of time being around a *tzaddik*, yet he is only involved with the body of the *tzaddik*, and not with the soul of the *tzaddik*! That is why connection to *tzaddik* requires caution, that it should be mainly focused on having a soul connection to the *tzaddik*, with minimal attention given to the *tzaddik's* body.

Another drawback to viewing a *tzaddik's* face is that the face is a limited kind of vision, but in order to fully expand the vision of the soul, we need to see something which is unlimited.

Now that we have explained the drawbacks, we will say that there is an advantage, however, of seeing the face of a *tzaddik*, which outweighs any of the points mentioned until now.

Every person has a soul, and, to give a general description, each soul is mainly rooted in one of the four “worlds”, known as *Atzilus* (lit. “Emanation” - the highest spiritual root), *Beriah* (lit. “Creation” - second to highest), *Yetzirah* (lit. “Formation” - third to highest), and *Asiyah* (lit.

“Action” - lowest). So, for example, if a person has a soul rooted in *Yetzirah* and he views a *tzaddik* whose soul is rooted in *Asiyah*, it is possible that the *tzaddik*'s soul is less prominent than the soul of the viewer, but the *tzaddik* has reached his soul, while the viewer hasn't.

So although the viewer may have a higher soul root, if his soul is concealed from him (because he hasn't yet reached it), he has what to gain from viewing the *tzaddik* with the lower soul root, who has a revealed soul. When he views the *tzaddik*, he may be able to get deeper into himself and reach his soul. But at a later point, if he continues to view the *tzaddik*, he is lowering his own spiritual level, because the *tzaddik*'s soul is of a lower soul root than his own.

The same is true vice versa: if the viewer has a soul rooted in *Yetzirah* and the *tzaddik*'s soul is rooted in *Beriah* (a higher realm than *Yetzirah*), the viewer can gain a deeper level of spiritual light when he sees the *tzaddik*, because the *tzaddik*'s soul is from a higher world. Not only will seeing the *tzaddik* help him reveal his soul; it will even provide him with a deeper soul level.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslev stated that although the task of man is to find his own personal *tzaddik* to connect with, a person must also find the [understanding of the] “general” *tzaddik*, who includes the level of all *tzaddikim*. What is the depth of his words?

There are people who feel that they are unable to reach the “general” *tzaddik*, so they settle for a bond with a *tzaddik* of lesser stature. But if a person connects to a *tzaddik* who has a lower soul root than he does, although the *tzaddik*'s soul is revealed and this places the *tzaddik* on a higher level than the person, the person can only receive the level of spiritual light that is limited to the *tzaddik*'s level. In contrast, when a person bonds with the “general” *tzaddik*, although he cannot contain the light of this *tzaddik* inside himself, the *tzaddik*'s light can still have an effect on him, because it can envelope him as an “*ohr makif*” (“surrounding light”). So, as much as one can, it is worthwhile for him to connect to the highest level of spiritual light that he can receive.

This can be compared to the following analogy. In one tries to view the sun, and he stares at it with his eyes, he will damage his vision. In order to view the sun properly, one needs to see it through glass. The “general” *tzaddik*, who has a powerful and all-inclusive spiritual light, can be compared to the sun's light, which one should not view directly. It would seem that one should keep a distance from the general *tzaddik* and not look at him, so that he should not become harmed by the great amount of this *tzaddik*'s light. But even when a person is viewing the sun through glasses so that he is not directly viewing the sun, he can still feel the warmth of the sun's light on him; everyone knows the feeling of a stormy, cloudy day where there is a sudden parting of the clouds and then the sun comes out from behind the clouds, and there is resulting warmth that feels very pleasant.

The lesson of this parable is, that if a person is found within his own “clouds” [his own darkness and spiritual deficiencies], even amidst this murkiness, he can receive a sudden burst of powerful light. Although he cannot view this light directly, he can feel its warmth penetrating into him.

When a person views a *tzaddik*, if he thinks that he can truly view the *tzaddik*, this is a mistake. One can only receive a connection to the spiritual light emanating from the *tzaddik*, and to feel the

accompanying “warmth” from it, but he cannot actually view this light. The same is true even when one looks at a *tzaddik* of lesser stature – when one views the *tzaddik*, he should not think that he is actually viewing the *tzaddik*, and he is just receiving some of the *tzaddik*’s light, according to the level that he can receive.

Therefore, viewing a *tzaddik* contains a great gain, because it is a means by which a person can receive a spiritual light higher than the level of his own soul [which, in turn, will greatly refine the soul’s senses]. This is in contrast with the other methods mentioned, which enable a person to shine the light of his own soul, but not more than his own soul level.

## 8. Seeing Through Imagination

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There are also other methods of vision which can awaken a person to have a more inner perspective and thereby see deeper into things.

One of the abilities which Hashem has implanted into human beings is the power of imagination (in Hebrew, *dimayon*). From a superficial understanding, imagination has a negative connotation. But in the writings the Sages in our *sefarim hakedoshim*, we can see that the Sages made much use with the power of imagination.

A person can “see” things with his mind. Just as a person can see something through his physical eyes, so can he “see” something, in his mind, when he thinks about it. The Hebrew word for in-depth thinking is called *iyun*, which is related to the word *ayin*, “eye”, because in-depth thinking is a way of seeing things. There is physical vision, and there is spiritual vision. Spiritual vision, on its lowest and most basic level, is to view from the *seichell* mind, which is directly ‘underneath’ the *neshamah* (soul), and the more inner use of this power is to view from the *neshamah*.

Viewing from the mind can be done in two different ways. It can be viewed from the intellectual compartment in the mind known as the *seichel*, or, it can be viewed through the faculty of the imagination. In other words, you may see something intellectually, or you may see something in the imaginative sense.

Seeing intellectually is accomplished through logical thinking, or through just seeing reality objectively as it is; through an understanding of something. Seeing through the imagination is a way to view something which is not directly in front of you, or to view something which is not here, or to view something which does not exist at all (and in spite of its nonexistence, a person can still visualize it in his mind, through the use of the imagination).

Viewing through the imagination, though, is a matter that requires caution. As we know, becoming an ‘imaginative person’ does not have a good connotation. Imagination is positive and constructive as long as a person recognizes that he is using only his imagination, and that it is not reality. One must make sure that he isn’t mixing reality into his imagination.

The falsity within the imagination is when reality becomes mixed with imagination [when a person thinks that what he imagines is part of the reality]. That is the mistake that people make with imagination. A person should think of imagination and reality as being two separate domains. To illustrate, in the laws of Shabbos, there are four kinds of domains. In the same vein, there is a domain of the intellect, which is its own class, and there is a domain called the imagination, and these two domains stand separate from each other, never to be intertwined.

Altogether, we mentioned three kinds of vision. There is physical vision, intellectual vision, and imaginative vision. If imagination becomes mixed with intellectual vision or with physical vision, there is a danger that the person will, G-d forbid, enter so deep into his imagination that he may become carried away with it. We all have fantasies, but as long as this stays within the relatively normal bounds, it will not lead to delusions.

When one makes use of his imagination, he must be clear that he is using an ability which is only proper if it stays within the proper boundaries of the imagination, that it should not become mixed with intellectual vision and physical vision. If a person ignores this rule, he is treading a path that will lead to total failure. So before we make use of the ability to “see” from the imagination, it is first necessary for a person to understand the proper bounds which the imagination must stay in. Imagination is proper as long as I recognize that it is only in my imagination, and not the reality.

We can use an analogy for this, though the lesson is not quite the same as the parable. A person receives a note from the bank that he has 67,000 shekel to collect when he receives his pension. Excited, he runs to the bank, swipes his credit card, and tries to withdraw the amount of 67,000 shekel. It doesn't go through. He asks the teller why it's not working, when the bank had sent him a letter that he has 67,000 shekel waiting for him. They tell him, “That doesn't take effect now. It will not take effect until 30 years from now.” He wonders to himself: “So what I am working for now, if I anyways cannot get the 67,000 shekel yet?” The simple answer to this is because if he doesn't work now, he won't get the pension in 30 years later. The money exists and it is supposed to go to him, but he cannot use it right now. In other words, just because something exists, that doesn't mean we can use it right now. There are some things which we do not use at all, and there are some things which we will only make use of later.

Whenever we make use of the imagination, if we use it within its proper bounds and in the right place, it is positive. But if we mix intellectual vision or physical vision into it, we are losing its proper design.

Man is called “*adam*” in Hebrew, which is from the word *dimayon*/imagination, and also from the word *adameh*, “I will imagine.” (There are also additional connotations to the word “*adameh*”, but we will not get into this now). Man is meant to use the power of imagination, for there is nothing in Creation that is negative in essence, as is well-known; we just have to direct each ability for a positive use, and it will bear positive results.

Only when we misuse an ability, does it lead to negative results. So if we use the imagination in its proper place, limiting it to the bounds of the imagination and recognizing it as such, there is then much we can gain from the imagination.

The same is true vice versa – if a person does not properly limit his imagination, his imagination will become destructive. That is why we are emphasizing that the imagination must be used with caution. Many have erred by misusing the imagination, leading to disastrous results. There have been many people who started to use the imagination for holy purposes, but they ended with an imagination that was totally delusional.

Using the imagination is a kind of vision; a person “sees” things through his imaginative faculty. Consider dreams, for example. We all have dreams when we go to sleep at night. As is well-known, dreams at night come from the imaginative faculty. What we see in our dreams does not exist in reality (except for a few individuals who merit to see reality in their dreams, which is not the case with most people, whose dreams come from the imagination). Does a person see tangible things in a dream? Yes, he sees tangible objects, but it’s only in his imagination. Even during the daytime a person may dream, whenever he fantasizes and he uses the power of imagination, where he is seeing something through his imagination.

We mentioned this earlier, when we discussed the method of viewing the name of *havayah*, in which a person may imagine the four-letter name of *havayah*. We mentioned two ways of viewing the name of *havayah*. One way is when a person reaches a state of mind where he is always cognizant of the name of *havayah* in front of his eyes; this is reached through self-purification, which shines the light of the soul. The other way to view the name of *havayah* is to imagine it.

When a person imagines the name of *havayah*, this is usually a very contained and limited kind of imagination, because he is only imagining four letters, so there is not that much of a concern that he will start taking his imagination too far. (There are opinions who did not approve of imagining the name of *havayah*, and their reasoning is that if one is not really at that level where it comes from within, he should not try to attain it through the outside, via the means of imagination. However, most opinions encouraged this practice of imagining the name of *havayah*.)

That is one use of imagination. The *sefarim hakedoshim* take the power of imagination further. The *sefarim* of Rav Kolonomis Kalman Shapira, which include *Chovos HaTalmidim*, *Hachsharas Avreichim*, *Bnei Machshavah Tovah*, and other *sefarim*, are entirely based on using the soul’s power of imagination. These methods include: Imagining that you are found in Heaven, imagining that you are singing with the angels, and imagining that you are standing in the *Beis HaMikdash*. These “sights” are all being viewed through the imagination, and they all spiritual uses of the power of vision.

The greatest advantage that can be gained from using the power of imagination is because it gives a person a picture of something great and holy which he isn’t able to [tangibly] connect to. The soul is hidden from a person, and it is only the physical body which is revealed; a person may want to

awaken his inner forces of holiness, but his soul is concealed from him, so he may use the imagination to imagine things that are holy, which can awaken him to feel those realities.

For example, when a person strongly and vividly imagines that he is standing in the *Beis HaMikdash*, he can gain great holiness from this. One cannot go to the *Beis HaMikdash* today with his actual physical body, both because of our ritual impurity and also because the *Beis HaMikdash* is absent; but by imagining vividly that one is standing in it, or by learning *Maseches Middos* which discusses the laws of the *Beis HaMikdash*, one can get a tangible picture of the *Beis HaMikdash* and thereby draw its holiness onto him.

However, when most people use their imagination, their thoughts become jumpy, and with each passing moment, they are imagining about something else. So in order for a person to use the imagination properly as a way to enhance his power of spiritual vision, he needs to clean out his imagination from any impurities. His imagination needs to be a little sifted out, if he is to use it to concentrate and focus on a certain thing.

Imagination is used to “see” something which doesn’t exist right now, or even if it never existed before, and perhaps even if it will never exist at all. It is a spiritual use of the sense of vision, which can awaken the soul.

To give a general description, imagination divides into three types [of how it can be used for holiness].

## 8a) Imagining Something Holy In The Physical Realm.

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The first use of [holy] imagination is to vividly picture, through the imagination, anything that is holy. It can be an imagination of something physical that is on this world, which contains holiness.

One example of this is to imagine what the *Beis HaMikdash* looked like. (Although we did not actually see the *Beis HaMikdash*, it exists on a conceptual level, in our souls. This is because the physical *Beis HaMikdash* was made from the four physical elements of this world, and the soul also contains the four elements).

Another example is to imagine the lights of the Chanukah *Menorah*. (This does not have to be done on Chanukah specifically, because any time that a person imagines the lights of the Menorah, it increases a light upon his soul).

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## 8b) Imagining The Spiritual or Heavenly.

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A second kind of imagination is when a person imagines the spiritual. There is both an advantage, as well as a disadvantage, to this kind of imagination (in contrast to the first way of imagining).

The gain of imagining the spiritual, as opposed to imagining holy physical places and objects that are/were on this physical world, is that it is a connection to a higher realm than our world, which is composed of the four physical elements. [The spiritual realm is above the four physical elements and therefore when one imagines it, he is connected to a higher realm.] The drawback, however, is that there is a great danger when imagining the spiritual.

As an example, we mentioned earlier a method of imagination explained in *sefer Chovos HaTalmidim* and *Hachsharas Avreichim*, in which a person imagines that he is in Heaven and singing with the angels. The danger of imagining this is that a person has not actually been to Heaven. Although his soul was there, his body was not, and since he is not consciously aware that his soul has been there, he does not have even an inkling of a perception of the upper realms.

It is forbidden for a person to do *hagshamah*, to “materialize” or give any physical form to Hashem, but this prohibition does not include giving physical form to the angels; however, even though it is not expressly forbidden to give physical form to the angels, our main problem with this is that the person is trying to imagine something which he does not recognize, and he will try to picture the angels with what he is familiar with from the physical world. There are artists today who draw “pictures” of angels, or how a “Heavenly voice” looks, and the like, trying to give material form to the spiritual.

What does a picture of the spiritual really look like? It is like an internal sound which rings within (This is a broad matter, which requires explanation. With the help of Hashem, we will explain it later). If a person imagines anything heavenly or spiritual in the form of something physical – which includes any of the four physical elements of this world – it is impossible to say that there is no gain to this, but it is very problematic, because he is giving material form to everything, even to the spiritual. He is bringing everything down to his level of understanding things.

In summation, using the imagination singing with the angels, and anything else heavenly, contains both a gain as well as a drawback. The gain of it is that it gives a person a picture of something that is above the material world. The drawback to it is that a person is imagining something he doesn’t recognize, and this may lead to giving material form to the spiritual, *chas v’shalom*.

## 8c) Imagining An Ascension Through All The Heavenly Realms.

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A third use of imagining the spiritual is mentioned in the end of *sefer Shaarei Kedushah* of Rav Chaim Vital, which describes how man can attain self-purification, through learning Torah and

keeping the mitzvos, along with rectifying the character traits. After working through these levels, Rav Chaim Vital explains how man can ascend to the higher worlds [these are the four realms of *Asiyah*, *Yetzirah*, *Beriah* and *Atzilus*], one after the other.

How can a person know of the higher worlds? If a person has already attained the sense of spiritual vision, he does not require this guidance. But if a person does not have spiritual vision, he can only know of the higher worlds by learning the holy *sefarim* which describe these worlds and their structure, and how to ascend from each world to the next, and what the order is.

In that way, he can ascend from one realm to another, using his very power of thought. Ascending from one realm to another, through the power of thought, may either be a non-visual kind of thought, or, it may be in the form of imagination. A person may think about it in an abstract way that does not involve any mental visualization. He fixes in his mind that there is a reality of ascending from one world to another, and he thinks simply: "I am ascending to that world", and the like. Alternatively, he may imagine it. He may picture in his mind what each of the realms look like, what their structure is, and how to ascend from each world to the next.

This *avodah*, of imagining oneself ascending to the higher realms, is a risky path, which many have stumbled in. The first reason for the errors that people make with this path is due to the reason mentioned earlier, that since no one has ever seen the heavenly realms, one is apt to give material form to these realms, trying to imagine the spiritual with a physical understanding. Instead of rising to the spiritual realms, people who take this path often fall lower, by falling into the problem of giving material form to the spiritual.

An additional reason why it often fails is because it is a very subtle *avodah*. Imagining the higher realms is often more subtle than imagining the song of the angels, because in addition to trying to imagine the spiritual, the person doing this also needs to imagine himself ascending from each realm to the next, and this can lead him into fantasies. He might become totally delusional from all of this imagining. Sometimes a person can receive inner spiritual light from imagining this ascension, but generally speaking, it is not recommended to enter into this kind of *avodah* (unless a person has attained a great amount of internal self-purification).

That being the case, we will not elaborate upon this form of *avodah*, because it will just entice people to enter into this when they do not qualify for it, and there is a great danger in it. We mentioned this *avodah* only because it is part of the general structure that exists. We know that there are not a few people who have involved themselves in this kind of *avodah* - and some of them became simply insane from it. As for the ones who didn't - they still became very disconnected from reality. They did not discover the revelations they were looking for, and instead of becoming connected to the higher realms, they became disconnected from reality.

Therefore, we should stay away from this path of *avodah* and instead look for a more solidly grounded approach.

## 9. Seeing White and Colorless

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Let's continue with the path here, with some other methods of how we can awaken the soul via the sense of sight.

Hashem has created many different colors in Creation. We have a tradition that there are four root colors, parallel to the four letters Hashem's name of *havayah*. The *sefarim hakedoshim* write that these colors are: white, red, green and blue. (Although the scientists will say that this is not precise, we are stating here the words of our trustworthy Sages, who are more reliable to us than any of the scientists.)

The darker colors of red and blue are the more "materialistic" colors, closer to our physical, material realm which is known as "*Yeish*" [lit. "Material"], whereas the lighter colors are more subtle, so they are closer to the spiritual realm known as "*Ayin*" [lit. "nothingness", the negation and absence of anything material]. The lighter the color, the more suitable it is to help bring a person closer to the spiritual.

If we take a look at the four main colors – white, red, green, and blue – it is clear to us right away that the color closest to the spiritual is: white. Therefore, looking at the color white is the best color to assist us in reaching the spiritual.

It is written, "*If your sins are like scarlet, they will become white as snow; if they have become red as crimson, they will become white as wool.*"<sup>13</sup> The prophet is correlating sin with the color red, whereas atonement from sin is being associated with the color white. What is the connection?

Sin originates in the body, so "whitening" the sins is essentially a removal of the body's hold, which in turn reveals the soul. Sins cause the body's hold to become stronger, making the body dominate. Man is called *adam*, from the word *edom*, "red", and there is a verse, "*For the blood is the life*"<sup>14</sup> [implying that the red color of blood is associated with man's physicality]. Since this is so, any color which is closer to red and to a darker hue - which includes all of the colors, on a general scale - is largely associated with the body's physicality. In contrast to this, the soul is more associated with the color white. When there is atonement from sin, the sins are "whitened".

Anyone who has been in the presence of especially holy *tzaddikim* will notice that there is often a white tablecloth that is always on the table in front of them. It is our custom to have white tablecloth only on Shabbos. (In our times, people have changed the style to include other colors in the Shabbos tablecloth, because they think it looks nicer that way. But according to the tradition that we received from our fathers, the custom was always to honor the Shabbos with white tablecloth). What is the depth behind the white tablecloth that we spread out for Shabbos?

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<sup>13</sup> *Yeshayahu* 1:18

<sup>14</sup> *Devarim* 12:23

The six days of the week represent the physical body, while the holy day of Shabbos is called the “day of the *neshamah*”. To reveal Shabbos, we reveal the *neshamah*.

We already mentioned earlier that one of the ways to reveal the *neshamah* is through looking into a flame. For this reason, we light candles in honor of Shabbos, which is symbolic of the revelation of the *neshamah* that is revealed through Shabbos. When we are separated from our *neshamah* on Motzei Shabbos, this also happens through a flame: the flame of the *havdalah* candle. Spreading the white tablecloth in honor of Shabbos is also an expression of this revelation of the *neshamah* that is on Shabbos.

Every custom in the Jewish people is holy, as the Sages state, “The Jewish people, even if they are not prophets, are the sons of prophets.”<sup>15</sup> The root of the custom to spread white tablecloth for Shabbos is because Shabbos is “day of the *neshamah*”, it is the day when we receive an “extra soul” (*neshamah yesairah*), which essentially means that there is a revelation of the *neshamah* that is found on our holy day of Shabbos.

Thus, seeing the color white can be expansive for the soul. It can help a person leave behind the material, physical dimension and identify more with the spiritual. However, this can only be beneficial for one who has already opened a ‘crack’ in himself for spiritual vision. If a person hasn’t yet opened this ‘crack’, seeing the color white will not help to do it. As we can see, many people sit in front of a white tablecloth on Shabbos and they don’t feel a thing from it.

Within the color white, we have the white color itself, and there is also a subtler version of the color white: colorless, which is transparent. The four general colors of white, red, green and blue are parallel to the four letters in the name of *havayah*. But in the name of *havayah*, we can also find a ‘fifth’ aspect: the end point of the letter *yud* (known as “*kutzo shel yud*”). This is representative of the spiritual realm that is known as *ayin*, “nothingness”. In terms of color, *ayin* is represented by colorless. Transparent colorlessness is above the four colors.

The color white is the closest color to transparent colorless. This is apparent from the fact that when we place any of the colors on top of white, we can see the color standing on its own, stark against the white background; whereas if we place any of the colors on top of all other colors besides for white, the colors mix and they become different shades. An example of seeing the colorless color of *ayin*/nothingness would be to look at a wide, vast amount of space.

This is very unlike any of the other visuals we dealt with until now. Up until this point, we have explained various methods that expand the spiritual sense of vision, which all involved viewing physical, tangible matter – *Yeish*. Examples included gazing at the sky, sea, a flame, the face of a *tzaddik*, and the color white. These are all tangible sights. Even imagination feels tangible. But within this world of tangible sights which we can picture, there exists a picture of something we cannot see: when we view something clear and transparent.

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<sup>15</sup> *Pesachim 66a*

(We are only mentioning this here briefly, once we are on the subject of the ‘fifth color’ - colorless. We will elaborate more upon this subject [of viewing transparent ‘nothingness’] later, with the help of Hashem.)

Thus, the most spiritual kind of sight we can view within this material realm (*Yeish*) is to view the color white. But there is a higher and deeper perspective that can be gained when we view the subtler form of white: transparent colorless. Therefore, viewing something transparent is a deeper kind of vision.

## 10. Seeing Beauty and Extravagance

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Another method which can awaken the *neshamah* is by viewing beauty. This is reflected in the verse, “*Beauty and splendor before Him, strength and glory in His temple*”,<sup>16</sup> and also the verse, “*Splendor and beauty You donned*.”<sup>17</sup>

There is a *halachah* that a king of the Jewish people, as well as the *Kohen Gadol*<sup>18</sup>, must be wealthy. The Gemara says regarding a *Kohen Gadol*, “He must be greater than his brothers (others) in strength, beauty, wisdom, and wealth.”<sup>19</sup> Regarding a king of the Jewish people, the Rambam codifies that the Torah apportions him certain monetary rights over the nation, and this is so that king should remain wealthy.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that if the Torah requires the Jewish king and *Kohen Gadol* to be wealthy, this is not something external and superficial, nor is it to ensure that the king of *Kohen Gadol* will always have what to eat. It is not a form of charity to ensure that he won’t become a pauper. Rather, there is a deeper point here. It is a ruling of the Torah that the king and *Kohen Gadol* be made wealthy.

What is the depth of this matter? We find that Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi, who was the leader of the Jewish people in his time, who merited the title of *Rebbi HaKadosh* (lit. “the holy rabbi”), was fabulously wealthy. The Gemara says that the finest and most expensive delicacies never left his table, whether it was summer or winter.<sup>21</sup> He is the same “*Rebbi*” of whom Chazal say that he merited “two tables” – two worlds<sup>22</sup> [This World, and the Next World]. He is the same *Rebbi* who composed the holy Mishnah, which has the same letters as the word “*neshamah*.” There are early commentators who say that if *Rebbi* wouldn’t have had such enormous wealth, he would not have been able to compose the Mishnah (a reference to the *neshamah*).

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16 *Tehillim* 96:6

17 *Tehillim* 104:1

18 *High Priest*

19 *Yoma* 18a

20 *Rambam Hilchos Melachim: 4*

21 *Berachos* 57b

22 *Gittin* 59a

From a simple perspective, there seems to be no connection between Rebbi's wealth and his ability to compose the Mishnah. Just because he always had radishes on his table no matter the season, he merited to compose the Mishnah?! What is the connection?

But the answer to this is that wealth can be used as an ability of the soul. Let us explain how.

The body, by its very design, is deficient and lacking. The soul, in contrast, is perfect and complete, and it lacks for nothing. In This World which we are found in, we are in a deficient dimension, where we must keep completing ourselves and filling what we lack. The very fact that a person identifies with what he lacks, is exactly what causes man to identify more with his body, rather than with his soul.

When a person has wealth – whether the wealth is “internal” [i.e. an awareness of the royal status of a Jewish soul, which is a child of Hashem], or even it is external – there can be a revelation of the *neshamah*. Of course, if a person only has external wealth and he does not use it to awaken the “wealth” in his own soul, he will not uncover his soul just by being wealthy, as we can see plainly from many wealthy people in the world, who have nothing in their lives except a desire to have more money. Yet, if a person's wealth is only “internal” and he does not possess external wealth, it will be difficult for a person to penetrate the barriers of the body [because he doesn't have the tool of external wealth to awaken his own ‘internal’ wealth].

Of course, it is possible for a person to get through to the *neshamah* through a ‘crack’ in the physical body's senses which would enable him to get there, even without possessing external wealth, and clearly, there were many *tzaddikim* and holy individuals who did not have wealth and yet they had revelation of their *neshamah*. But we are saying that there is *also* a way for one's internal power of wealth to combine with external wealth, which can lead to a revelation of the *neshamah*.

When the eyes lay sight on something that bespeaks poverty and something lacking, on one hand, there is a spiritual gain to this, and on the other hand, there is a drawback.

The gain of it is because Chazal say, “This is the way of Torah: Eat bread dipped in salt, water in a cistern, and on the ground, sleep.”<sup>23</sup> It seems that physical wealth is materialistic, and that all it does is awaken the physicality of the body; and the above statement of Chazal indeed seems to imply that an increase of materialism is a negative thing.

However, the drawback to viewing poverty is because one is depriving himself of the gain of viewing wealth. And what is the gain of viewing wealth? There are situations in which viewing wealth, extravagance and beauty can assist in revealing the *neshamah*. In those situations, if the eyes lay sight on poverty or anything deficient, there can be a detriment to the soul.

What is the positive side to wealth? If a person's soul is already somewhat activated but it is being prevented by the body from becoming more revealed, and one wants very much to break past the barriers of the body, one of the tools that can accomplish this is wealth. And if a person's soul is

already revealed and now he wants to prevent the body from getting in the soul's way, there is a concept of staying away from viewing anything that bespeaks poverty, lack, and deficiency.

Therefore, revealing the soul through wealth is clearly not about having a big bank account, where the wealth isn't actually being viewed. It is rather about living a kind of life in which a person lives in the wealth, where his eyes are only seeing beauty and extravagance [thereby awakening the perfection of the *neshamah* which lacks for nothing].

Regarding this point, perhaps we can make a differentiation between two different kinds of *avodah* throughout the generations which were practiced by *tzaddikim*. There were some *tzaddikim* who would dwell in homes of abject poverty, and they would deliberately choose to sit in dark and decrepit places, all the while reminding themselves of the inner perspective that This World is only temporary, and knowing that their true dwelling place is in the Next World. In contrast to this, we find another kind of *avodah* of *tzaddikim* which appeared later, with the way of life of [some of the] holy Chassidic Rebbes, which actually has its source in earlier generations, and which had already been mentioned in the works of the first *kabbalists*: to dwell in beautiful, majestic homes.

For example, Reb Yisrael of Rizhin lived in a palace-like home. Some members of government there were opposed to the royalty being attributed to the Rebbe of Rizhin, because they felt as if his *chassidim* were making him into a king, and they feared that they were trying to replace the czar's government, for their Rebbe lived in a place that was no less beautiful than the czar's.

Living in wealth and opulence is actually a deep form of *avodah*, which needs to be understood. Taking this point further, the Rebbe of Rizhin would also take expensive golden rings and play with them. There is actually greater depth to this matter than any of the points we discussed until now, but right now we only discussing the external aspect of it.

If a person is dominated by his physical body and he then connects to wealth, this will greatly prevent him from accessing the spiritual. For such a person, wealth and extravagance will only further awaken the physicality of the body. Wealth is one of the greatest forms of materialism on this world. There is the desire for food, and there are other physical desires as well, and there is another kind of desire, the desire for wealth. If a person pursues a desire for wealth, it is a totally negative trait. But when a person has a revealed soul and he recognizes the "wealth" of his own soul, his body may prevent this revelation, and in his case, there is a gain to viewing wealth.

The soul only sees pure spirituality; it can only see that which is perfect and which lacks for nothing. It can only see true beauty, which is in the heavenly realms. But it is clothed by the body, and therefore it can lay sight on deficient things, such as a broken table, a dirty wall, a dirty floor, dark alleyways [anything dirty or dark], which darkens the soul.

There are two possibilities of how to prevent the body from getting in the way of the soul. One possibility is, "An earthenware vessel, when it is broken, is purified" – to break the body's hold, which in turn allows for the revelation of the soul. This is essentially the path of "Eat bread in salt, etc.", in which a person nullifies the body and lives with his soul. But there is also a different way of

*avodah*, parallel to *hamtakah*, “sweetening”, in which the body’s physicality becomes rectified, rather than being subjugated. In this path, the *avodah* is to elevate and rectify the body; to reveal the soul’s light onto the body.

Part of this revelation includes revealing the soul’s “wealth” onto the body. But it is impossible to do this directly from the internal “wealth” found in the soul, for the body still remains a body even after the soul’s wealth is uncovered. Therefore, we may use a physical, bodily “tool” that can help reveal the soul’s wealth onto the body: by means of viewing external wealth [which awakens the “wealth” of the soul].

Let us repeat and emphasize that this *avodah* is only applicable for someone who has already revealed somewhat the light of the soul. If one hasn’t yet merited to reveal the light of the soul and he becomes involved with physical and external wealth, he will fall completely into the lust for money and wealth. And even for one who has already merited to reach the light of the soul, it is still a path that contains a great spiritual risk and danger. Let us explain why.

When a person is involved with the spiritual, this awakens his soul and strengthens its influence. But if we are using a physical and materialistic means such as wealth in order to gain something inner and spiritual, this requires a very subtle balance, because in one moment, a person may have an abysmal spiritual descent.

Using wealth for spiritual purposes is therefore like “walking on the mouth of the *tehom* (the lowest depths of the earth)”. Although external wealth can awaken the inner wealth that is found in the soul, the danger here is that a person will connect with the materialism that is found in wealth, and it will become simply a desire for extravagance. Not only won’t he access the soul; he will weaken it. This is because the body and soul are like two jealous co-wives to each other, as the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes. If an increase of physical wealth and extravagance leads to an increase of a lust for money and wealth, all it does is strengthen the body’s hold on a person, and this in turn weakens the soul.

Therefore, the *avodah* of living in wealth is a very dangerous kind of *avodah*. It is dangerous because on one hand, a person can be using it in an elevated manner which can cause him to grow spiritually, but on the other hand, it can bring him down entirely.

We can see often that there are *tzaddikim* who live in beautiful, palace-like homes, who possess great monetary wealth, and we do not understand why they live such lifestyles, and we wonder why it is this way. There are all kinds of mixed reactions. Groups of people come to oppose and attack it, as they always do. Others seek the benefit of the doubt and they will say, “But he gives a lot of *tzedakah*.” But if they find out that all of the money is going to the *tzaddik* and it is not being given away, what then can they say? “There are other things to talk about in the streets....” But, of this kind of situation, the Kamarna *Rebbe* said: “Do not judge the heart of the king of Yisrael, for you do not know what is in his heart.”



What is the ‘heart of the king’? It is referring to a person whose soul has been revealed, of whom Chazal say that the “children of *Yisrael* are called princes (sons of the King)”<sup>24</sup>. Most Jews, however, are not aware of this royal status (*malchus*) that is in their own souls, and in the best scenarios, they are like “servants” of the king [who are committed to doing Hashem’s will], unaware that they have the princely status of being “sons of the King” (and we hope that they are not being servants of servants, meaning that they do not serve materialism, but that they serve the Creator). Therefore, as mentioned above, there is a concept of revealing our princely status, the “king” that is within us, which is the power of *malchus*/royalty in our souls - through using physical wealth as a means to awaken the internal royalty in our souls.

We will reflect a bit more into this matter. Of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, it was said, “*A trustworthy servant You called him.*” On one hand, Moshe is called the *eved Hashem*, “servant” of Hashem. On the other hand, Moshe *Rabbeinu* also had the status of a king. The Gemara also says that Moshe *Rabbeinu* became wealthy from the sapphire stones of the *Luchos* (tablets).<sup>25</sup> For what did Moshe *Rabbeinu* need this wealth for? Did he lack for anything when he was in the desert? He did not lack food, for the manna fell every day. He did not lack clothing, for the Clouds of Glory fixed all clothing. What did Moshe *Rabbeinu* need all this wealth for, and furthermore, why would he need it if he is going to live in the desert for forty years? From a simple, superficial perspective, this appears to be a desire for wealth. Why did Moshe need it?

There is also an additional question regarding this matter. Let us think for a moment: Why did Chazal have to tell us that Moshe *Rabbeinu* got all his wealth from the stones on the *Luchos*? For what reason do we need to know the source of his wealth? What difference would it make if he got it from the *Luchos* or if he simply inherited it? Additionally, was this the only way where Moshe could have gotten his wealth from? If he wanted to be wealthy, he could have opened up a business. Why did he get his wealth specifically from the stones on the *Luchos*?

It is clear to any intelligent person that there is great depth contained in this matter. Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s wealth came from the *Luchos*, which was carved out from Hashem’s own writing. The Sages state that the word for “carved”, *charus*, can also be read “*cheirus*”, “freedom”, alluding to a freedom from the Angel of Death and evil inclination.<sup>26</sup> Moshe *Rabbeinu* had revelation of the soul, but because he had a physical body, the light of his soul was being restrained. By revealing his soul, Moshe reached a state of freedom. He merited to reach the “fiftieth gate” (according to many opinions).

So on one hand, he had the freedom of the soul, but he also had a body to contend with, which prevented his soul from being fully revealed. In order to weaken the body’s hold from upon his soul, he needed something physically expansive that could do this. For this reason, he needed to be wealthy. This is also the reason why his wealth didn’t come from a mere business, and it had to come from the *Luchos*, which connoted *cheirus*/freedom. This is a totally different kind of “wealth”

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<sup>24</sup> *Shabbos 14b*

<sup>25</sup> *Nedarim 38a*

<sup>26</sup> *Avos 6:2*

than those who seek external wealth for its own sake, which is clearly not coming from the same source in the soul as the aforementioned one.

On one hand, Chazal said, “Eat bread in salt, drink water in a cistern, and on the ground, sleep. Live a life of pain, and in the Torah you shall exert” [which implies a very frugal lifestyle and the antithesis to wealth]. On the other hand, we find that Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the one who received the Torah from Heaven, possessed wealth [and hence did not live a life of pain and frugality]. Isn’t this a contradiction? (Perhaps we can answer this issue by saying that at first Moshe was poor, and only later did he become wealthy through the *Luchos*. But this is not true, because Moshe was born into wealth, growing up in the home of Pharaoh.)

[The answer to this is based on the following.] Earlier, we brought the statement of the Rebbe of Kamarna, who said: “Do not judge the heart of the king, for you do not know what is in his heart.” The depth of this statement is that the king’s wealth [in the ideal situation] does not stem from physical desire of the body, but from a spiritual source, the soul.

The Hebrew for wealthy is “*ashir*”, from the word *aseir*, “ten”, alluding to the ten root forces of the soul, which correspond to the Ten Expressions that Hashem used to create the world with, the Ten Commandments, and the Ten *Sefiros* (lit. “emanations”, the upper worlds). When man reaches a state in which the ten root forces of his soul are revealed and these forces are in their intensity, if he would be living as a soul in Gan Eden right now, he would be fine. But since he is found down below on this “world of action”, he is clothed in the physicality of the body, which prevents the soul from becoming more revealed.

In order to allow the soul’s revelation to shine within even the physical body, man can make use of wealth, in order to accomplish this. By viewing beauty and extravagance, the wealth of the soul can be awakened and revealed.

This concept, when you first hear it, may sound absurd. But it is a very deep matter. We clearly do not mean, *chas v’shalom*, that one who possesses beautiful furniture will thereby reveal his *neshamah*. Rather, what we mean is that the *neshamah* wishes to become revealed, but the darkened, impoverished state of the body prevents the revelation of the *neshamah*, and by expanding the body’s vision [through looking at beauty and wealth], one gives space for the *neshamah* to become revealed.

In summary of this matter, if a person has not yet purified himself internally, and he becomes involved with the pursuit of wealth, all he will do is strengthen the body’s hold upon him, and from this, he may fall into all kinds of evil desires, G-d forbid. But if one is like Dovid HaMelech, who said “*My heart is emptied from within me*”,<sup>27</sup> who has calmed his physical desires, in such a case, living in extravagance is stemming from the light of the soul which has shined its way into the body. As mentioned, if this is being pursued out of a desire for wealth, a person will have an abysmal spiritual descent from it. But if a person lives in extravagance because it is an outward expression of the soul’s light within him, a person can then reach higher spiritual levels through the wealth.

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<sup>27</sup> *Tehillim* 109:22

As we mentioned before, there were some *tzaddikim* who served Hashem through “breaking the body”, and this *avodah* is also known as “rectifying the external”; they rectified the body by “breaking” its hold, and in terms of the Baal Shem Tov, this is known as “subjugation” (*hachnaah*) and “separation” (*havdalah*). Other *tzaddikim* served Hashem mainly through “sweetening” (*hamtakah*) [and that is why they lived in palace-like homes, so that they could constantly view beauty and extravagance and thereby awaken the wealth of the soul, which elevated their physical bodies as well].

One who serves Hashem through “subjugation” (*hachnaah*) and “separation” (*havdalah*) is “breaking” the body, whereas one who serves Hashem through “sweetening” (*hamtakah*) gives an inner expansion to his body, shining the light of the soul from within the body, and into the body, by using the “tools” of physical extravagance.

*Chazal* give three examples of these “tools” of physical extravagance that may be used to awaken the soul: “Three things expand a person’s mind (*daas*): A beautiful home, a beautiful wife, and beautiful vessels.”<sup>28</sup> But, as emphasized earlier, a person must first have *daas*, before he “expands” it. Usually, when a person seeks a beautiful house and a beautiful wife, he is the kind of person who does not have *daas*. Only when someone possesses holy *daas* which comes from the light of his *neshamah* - when the light of his *daas* is shining within him - can he gain spiritually from the expansion of the mind afforded from physical extravagance. But when someone does not have this *daas*, he will not gain anything spiritually from owning physical possessions of extravagance, and he will be left with nothing but an absence of *daas* (*chas v’shalom*).

We did not explain these words so that a person can walk away from this and conclude that he needs to become wealthy. Rather, we explained about this only because we need to have an inner understanding about what wealth is and how it can be used on a soul level. Anyone who has made use of wealth for these spiritual reasons will, at times, need to give an accounting to Hashem about his intentions, if this wealth is indeed needed to awaken his soul’s royalty, or if he is just using wealth for the sake of simply indulging in extravagance.

It has been explained here that in concept, living a life surrounded by wealth, and looking at beauty, can bring a person to the revelation of the soul. That is why all of the kings of our own history, from Moshe *Rabbeinu* (who is actually the first king) and onward, all possessed wealth.

## II. Seeing Objects Used By Tzaddikim

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Let us continue, to discuss another method [of spiritual vision].

One of the fundamental concepts that the holy Baal Shem Tov taught is the well-known principle that “The potential force of the doer is in the deed” (“*koach hanifal b’poel*”). Meaning to say, when a person performs an action, all of his energy is really found in the action or thing that he

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<sup>28</sup> *Berachos 57b*

has done. From a superficial perspective, a carpenter who has just completed building a table has no connection to the table he has made. But when the Baal Shem Tov would see a table, he could see what the intentions of the carpenter were in making the table were, what the carpenter's deeds were, and which *mitzvos* and sins that he did.

The depth behind this concept is that the action or handiwork of a person really contains the energy of the person. When a person has done and made something, his energies are found in it, and they exist in it. The Sages said that one may be bound to a sin and “tied to it like a dog”, and the depth behind this matter is because when he sins, he has put his own energy into the sin. Even though it was a physical act and the action is over, the action continues to exist as a potential force.

A person's energies remain existent in a deed that he has done, even after he has completed the action. Usually, he has put a lot of energy into the action, which means that he has attached himself deeply to it.

Of what relevance does this concept have to us? It bears the following ramifications. When a person reads a book authored from an impure source, he connects his soul to the handiwork of the person who wrote it, which means that he is connecting to the soul of the author. This can have a harmful spiritual effect on him, being that the particular author is an impure source. It is like a person walking into a dirty place, such as a garbage dump, which causes the dirt to become attached to him as he walks through it. So too, when one reads and learns the work of a person whose thoughts and feelings are not connected to a truthful place, these impure energies will become attached to the reader.

The same is true vice versa. If a person reads a *sefer* written by a *tzaddik*, he nurses forth spiritual power that is embedded into the *sefer*, the handiwork of the *tzaddik* who authored it.

If we extend the ramifications of this concept, we can understand that whenever we look at anything, we are either revealing the soul, or concealing it further; either we are refining our spiritual senses, or we are weakening them.

Therefore, looking at the handiwork of a *tzaddik* is beneficial to the soul, because the *tzaddik's* spiritual energy is contained in his handiwork, and by viewing it, the light of the soul can be awakened. The same is true vice versa: if a person looks at the handiwork of a wicked person, this can awaken his own dark side. For this reason, there were some great sages who did not want to view the world around them, for the world today is captured by materialism; later, we will explain more about this, with the help of Hashem. But way before that level, a person should make sure to avoid looking at things which were made by wicked individuals.

On the positive side, in order to develop the soul's sense of vision, one can make sure to look at the handiwork of *tzaddikim*, which they either made or used. For example, if a person takes a *kiddush* cup which was used by a *tzaddik* for many years, and he focuses on it with deep concentration, he may be able to become spiritually elevated from this. The *tzaddik* had used this cup, held it in his hand, and looked at it, so there was an imprint of holiness left on the cup from this. It is like a person who touched a cup when he had oily hands, which causes some of the oil on

his hands to stick to the cup, and the next person who uses the cup will get his hands oily when he holds the cup. In the same vein, since the soul of a *tzaddik* is more revealed, it extends outward and it affects the surroundings, so whatever a *tzaddik* will touch and see will become illuminated by his soul's light.

This effect varies in its strength, depending on the level of the *tzaddik's* soul, and on the connection the *tzaddik* had with the particular object, and other factors. But, generally speaking, an object receives light from the *tzaddik's* soul, just from being used or being seen by the *tzaddik*. Therefore, one who views this object can also be awakened to holiness, when he views the object with deep reflection and concentration, with the intention to acquire holiness; this illuminates the light of his own soul, when he views the object that was used/seen by the *tzaddik*.

This is why we have seen that throughout the generations, there has been much value placed on heirlooms and other inherited objects which were left over by holy *tzaddikim*, such as crowns, clothing, chairs, etc. Besides for the nostalgia associated with these possessions, and all the natural feelings that people may have for these things, there is also a great depth contained in these items, which is far more valuable. Within these objects is a hidden, inner force of energy – the light of the *neshamah*.

If a person wants to use these items wisely, he should take one of these items used by *tzaddikim* and place it within his direct eyesight, and stand in front of it for five minutes, looking and concentrating deeply on it – as deeply as one can. (In fact, it is such a deep experience that it cannot be described in the word.) The intention of looking at it should be: to reveal the soul. The intention of entering the soul into the equation, through deeply looking and concentrating, can awaken one's soul to connect with the soul of the one who had seen this object - the *tzaddik* who used it.

Thus, looking at holy items that were used by *tzaddikim*, which is the concept of “the potential force of the doer is in the deed”, is a great tool to reveal the *neshamah*, when this idea is used properly and sensibly.

## 12. The Danger To These Paths

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Before we conclude, let us review what we said in the beginning of this chapter, since it is so important. Looking at the sky and sea, looking into a flame, looking at the name of *havayah*, and the other methods of spiritual vision explained (which we will explain more of, with the help of Hashem) are all but tools that can help assist us in revealing the soul, by way of the sense of sight. Gaining a sense of spiritual vision is therefore not the goal; it is just a tool to reach revelation of the soul.

This can be compared to a person who has a home infected with mice. If he wants to trap the mice, he places a mousetrap with cheese on it, and the next morning when he wakes up he may find seven dead mice on the mousetrap, which all gravitated towards the cheese. By the same token (*l'havdil*), when a person reveals spiritual vision, or spiritual hearing, etc., he can pull the revelation of the soul towards him.

The matters here are deep and subtle, and we stated clearly on the onset of these words that they all contain a danger. There are many people who enter into these kinds of *avodah* here, and they become very delusional. In more dramatic cases of this issue, there are people who have times where they have “*kabalas kahal*” (receiving the public), where they see people who come to them and tell them the future (which we can more correctly label as fantasy), and sometimes their premonitions come true, and sometimes they don’t. They offer advice and answer people’s questions. But even if they would know for sure what is taking place behind the curtains in Heaven, we can compare it to a person looking at an object that he doesn’t recognize. How can they give advice on things which they have no connection to?!

This is like someone who offers on advice on how to use a mixer, when he has never seen a mixer and he doesn’t know a thing about mixers. His advice is worthless, because you can’t give advice about something when you don’t know its content. So even if we find a person who can see spiritual things, this does not mean that he understands what he sees. Children also see all kinds of things and they don’t understand what they are seeing, and they don’t even understand half about what they are seeing.

A person might have begun to access his sense of spiritual vision, through using any of the methods mentioned in this chapter, but that doesn’t mean he understands a thing in what he sees. Foolish and naïve people are drawn after such a kind of person, who can indeed see spiritual things, but who has become deluded by his newfound power, claiming that he can tell the future. He tells people if their next child will be a boy or girl, and this is enough for people to come see him and to believe everything he says, treating him as if he is the *Urim V’Tumim* on Aharon HaKohen....

What is the root of the error? It is certainly true that a person may begin to see spiritual things, if he has opened the soul’s sense of sight, using any of the methods explained in this chapter, which enable a ‘crack’ in the body for the soul to shine through. But if the person doesn’t understand what he is seeing, he is like one who “sees, but does not know what he sees.” Yet, he immediately starts giving advice to people....

There are people who can see certain things, but they don’t have the energy to deal with what they are seeing. It is like a person who sees that there is a tsunami coming, who can scream to everybody that a big catastrophe is coming, but there is nothing he can do to prevent it, and there is nothing he can advise to people about it. His ability to “see things” is useless. Therefore, seeing doesn’t necessarily mean understanding.

Therefore, we are warning from the start that these words contain a danger, to the one who treads these paths. The purpose of these methods is not to gain spiritual vision, and surely it will be detrimental to one who uses spiritual vision as a way to see and foretell things. The goal is to reveal the soul, and expanding the senses is only one of the paths to get there. We can say that it is quite possibly a dangerous path of *avodah* for one to take.

Fortunately, there is an alternate path to take, which is much more truthful and even more calming: exertion in the study of Torah.

### 13. In Summary and In Conclusion

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We will briefly summarize. In this chapter, we mainly discussed ways to use the spiritual sense of vision, with regards to seeing the material world (*Yeish*).<sup>29</sup> Spiritual vision is really a view that comes from the *neshamah*. The person is viewing it from his physical body, but it is really the *neshamah* which is seeing; it is just cloaked by the physical eye.

In order to awaken and reveal the *neshamah*, we have brought several examples from the words of our Sages, of how to awaken the soul's light that is within man. Understandably, we are only at the very beginning of this. There are different paths to take when it comes to each of the soul's senses, and even in the details that were explained there, there is still much more that can be discussed. We have only scratched the surface of the general paths which open the soul's sense of vision.

The common denominator between all of these paths is that their purpose is to bring us to outwardly reveal the soul's abilities, which can be deemed as the "offspring" of the soul. From there, we can reach the actual essence of the soul, and then we can go on to reach the One Who said that this world shall be.

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<sup>29</sup> The next chapter will discuss methods of seeing "ayin" ("nothingness", the non-material)

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## 04 / Seeing Ayin-Nothingness

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### I. Transitioning From Physical Vision To "Ayin" – "Nothingness"

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Until this point, we have explained how to use the sense of sight in relation to our material world, referred to as "*Yeish*" (physical substance), where we learned how to see things that are tangibly existing in front of our eyes. In this chapter, we will speak about a kind of sight which is used to see things that are "*ayin*", "nothingness" - meaning that it will be a detachment from physical vision.

We will be going from the sight of our עיין/*ayin*/eye (spelled with the letter ע which is transliterated as the word "*ayin*"), to the sight of our איין/*ayin*/nothingness (spelled with the letter א which is transliterated as "*aleph*").

First, we will provide a brief introduction. The word "*ayin*" can either be spelled with the Hebrew letters *ayin*, *yud* and *nun* (עיין), or it can be spelled with the letters *aleph*, *yud* and *nun* (איין). When the word *ayin* is spelled with the Hebrew letter *ayin* (ע), it means physical vision, referring to the two eyes of man. When *ayin* is spelled with the letter *aleph* (א), it refers to a power in the soul called "*ayin*", "nothingness", otherwise known as *hedaer*, "absence". Nothingness, or the absence of something, seems to imply that the thing does not exist at all [but we will later see that this is not true, and that it is an existing reality].

In different terms which describe the same concept, we have physical vision and we have spiritual vision, and our physical vision is a "garment" of our spiritual vision. Until now, we have explained how we can view from our physical eye and reveal the inner light of the soul, and thereby penetrate through to the light of the soul so that it can be shined within the body [all of those methods were about 'cracking' an opening through the body's physical hold, enabling the soul's light to shine through the body and thereby be revealed].

Now we will speak of a different way that can bring us to the revelation of the soul, and it is by removing ourselves from physical vision, turning עיין/eye/physical vision into איין/nothingness, and that by removing the physical vision of the eye, the "garment" that cloaks our spiritual vision, we can thereby gain access to spiritual vision.

Thus, there are two possible ways of how to reach spiritual vision. One way is by means of the "garment", which is to use our physical sense of sight, but from a spiritual perspective. In this method, we look at something physical and reflect on it, and through this, we can awaken our spiritual vision, via the means of our physical vision. Another possibility is by doing certain actions that detach us from physical vision, which thereby awakens spiritual vision.

In the previous chapter, we explained the first way: using our physical vision to see something physical in front of us, in a way that awakens our spiritual vision. From this point onward, with the help of Hashem, we will explain how to detach from physical vision, to remove ourselves from עיין (eye/physical vision) and to instead go to איין (nothingness/spiritual vision), of the *neshamah*. This topic will also subdivide into several other topics as well, but as our starting point, we have explained



the difference between physical vision (עיר) and spiritual vision (איר) and that we need to make the transition to the soul's ability of *ayin* by learning how to detach and 'remove' physical vision.

## 2. Reflecting On Your Root – A Droplet In The Brain

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We will begin, slowly, from the coarser examples of the concept, and then continue slowly into the subtler examples.

*Chazal* state that when Yosef was tempted by the wife of Potiphar, an image of his father came to his mind, and through this, he was saved from sin.<sup>30</sup> The depth behind this is as follows.

*Chazal* state that there are three factors which lead to sin: “The eye sees, the heart desires, and the tools of the actions complete.” In this statement, *Chazal* are teaching us how the body's physical lusts are strengthened.

If a person tries to prevent himself from sinning when he is already in the third stage, where the “tools of the actions” are beginning to do their work, he has already been pulled after his eyes' vision and his heart's desire, so he is not likely to succeed in overcoming the temptation to sin. When a person is at that point already, it is said, “*What shall the son do, so that he should not sin?*” (Of course, we cannot say that it is impossible for him at that stage to avoid sinning. He can still choose to retreat. But when he is at the final stage that leads directly towards sin – the “tools of the actions” – it is most difficult to stop).

The proper way of *avodah* in avoiding sin, then, is to begin avoiding it from the root, which is the first stage, “the eyes see.” When the eyes don't lay sight on the object of sin in the first place, the heart will not desire it, and in turn, there will be no “tools of action” that complete the sin.

When Yosef *HaTzaddik* was saved from sin, then, he started from the first stage, “the eyes see.” As soon as his eyes were being tempted with an improper sight, an image of his father was conjured in front of his eyes, and in that way, he was saved from sin. He rectified the stage of “the eyes see” and that was how he was able to avoid sinning. The *sefarim hakedoshim* write that it is not only Yosef *HaTzaddik* who can be saved by reminding himself of his father's image. Rather, any person who is in a situation where he is tempted to sin can use this advice of imagining the image of his father, and thereby be saved from sin.

From the above words of *Chazal*, we learn of an inner point about our vision, and let us explain what it is. Firstly, we need to understand: What is this ‘*segulah*’ of imagining the image of one's father? How exactly does it save a person from sin?

It is understandable that it could work for Yosef *HaTzaddik*, whose father was Yaakov Avinu, a great *tzaddik*; for we know that viewing or imagining the face of *tzaddik* can save a person from sin. But if that was the reason, then Yosef could have imagined his grandfather Yitzchok, or any of his other brothers, who were all *tzaddikim*. Why did he imagine his father's image specifically?

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<sup>30</sup> *Sotah 36b*

It must be that Chazal are teaching us that there is a specific gain in thinking of the image of one's father. And since every matter of the Torah applies to all people and shows each person the way in which he must go in (for Torah is from the word *horaah*, "guide"), this is a lesson that can guide every single person. However, how will this advice work for someone whose father was not righteous? If the father was not a wicked individual, then it makes sense that imagining his image would save the son from sin, but how can this method work for a person whose father was not righteous?

Chazal taught in *Avos*, "Look at three things, and then you will not come to sin: "Know where you come – from a rotten droplet."<sup>31</sup> A child first exists in potential form in his father's brain, as a droplet [before physical formation]. Therefore, when a child contemplates his father's image, there is a very deep point contained in this. It is not a superficial look at the physical image of his father; it is rather a means of looking at a very inner point.

If a person can only think of his father in physical terms, this is superficial, and it will not help him avoid sin at all. Sometimes, it can even do the opposite of helping him, leading him further to sin. It is actually spiritually risky to imagine the physical image of one's father, when trying to avoid sin. The physical image of his father may awaken negative feelings towards his father, if he imagines and contemplates it.

But on the other hand, there is a deep, inner point in this: "Know where you come from." A person comes from a droplet in the brain, which cannot be imagined in any physical form. Reminding yourself of your father's image is therefore a way to view your original state, when you existed only in potential form, inside your father, before you received any material formation yet.

If we wish to detach from physical vision of our eyes, to rise from physical vision to spiritual vision (turning עין into אֵין), Chazal are giving us advice on how to do this: "Know where (*m'ayin*) you come from." You come from "*ayin*" – nothingness. When you first existed as a droplet in the brain, this was like being in a state of *ayin*/nothingness. Afterwards, you were born and you received physical form, but in your original state, you existed as *ayin*. And one of the tools that can assist you in knowing that you came from *ayin* is by imagining the image of your father.

In order for this to work, it must be done with deep kind reflection, from an inner perspective. When one imagines the image of his father, he should view the physical image of his father as nothing but an external "garment" of something deeper. He should mainly be viewing the inner point that is contained in this matter, which is: to remember his original state of *nothingness* as he existed in the potential form in his father.

There are thus two kinds of *avodah* [of uncovering spiritual vision]. One kind of *avodah* is what we spoke about in the previous chapter: to gain spiritual vision via the means of our physical vision, by looking at something physical which can remind us of the spiritual. There is also another kind of *avodah*, described in this chapter, in which a person detaches from physical vision, by seeing "nothingness". The root method of how we can see "nothingness" is through imagining the image of one's father, which reminds you of "Know where you come from": We come from *ayin*, nothingness.

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<sup>31</sup> *Avos* 3:1

### 3. Reflecting On The Root of Souls, The Throne of Glory

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One of the 613 *mitzvos* is to wear *tzitzis*, and the Torah writes concerning this *mitzvah*, “And it should be *tzitzis* to you, and you shall see them, and you will remember all of the commandments of Hashem and perform them.”<sup>32</sup> The *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>33</sup> rules that a person should wear his *tzitzis* on the outside of his clothing, meaning that it should be visible to the eyes.

(Although there is a big discussion in *halachah* and in *kaballah* if a person should wear *tzitzis* outside of his clothing or to keep it inside, according to the opinions that require *tzitzis* to be worn on the outside, it is so that the *tzitzis* should be seen, in fulfillment of the verse, “And you shall see them, and you will remember.” Even according to the opinions that the *tzitzis* not be worn outside of the clothing, the *Poskim* still require that the *tzitzis* be taken out every so often, to fulfill “And you shall see them.”)

What is behind looking at *tzitzis*? Chazal state, “How is *techeiles* (turquoise) different than all other colors? Because *techeiles* is like the sea, and the sea is like the heavens, and the heavens are like the Throne of Glory (*kisei hakavod*).”<sup>34</sup> Thus, the purpose of looking at *tzitzis/techeiles* is to be reminded of the Throne of Glory. One can become spiritually elevated from viewing *tzitzis*, which reminds him of the sea, which reminds him of the heavens, which reminds him of the Throne of Glory.

Just as with all other sights, looking at *tzitzis* contains two aspects: *yeish/material*, and *ayin/nothingness*. Although most *Poskim* ruled that there is no requirement of *techeiles* in our *tzitzis* nowadays, there is still a concept of looking at *tzitzis*. Viewing *techeiles* is an aspect of “*yeish*”, for the turquoise color is closer to the physical realm. Viewing the *tzitzis*, however, which is white, is close to colorless, which is a representation of *ayin* (as explained in the previous chapter).

Looking at the turquoise wool of *techeiles* is to view something tangible. But when *techeiles* reminds a person of the sea, he is reminded of something that is unbounded and endless (at least to the human eye). The sea also reminds a person of the heavens, which is also endlessly expansive. In the previous chapter, we mentioned the methods of looking at the sea and sky, which are both examples of viewing something endless. But, taking this further, when looking at the sky reminds a person of the Throne of Glory, this is a deeper kind of vision.

What is the concept of being reminded of the Throne of Glory? Chazal state, “*Teshuvah* is great, for it reaches until the Throne of Glory.”<sup>35</sup> The word *teshuvah* means to return to the root, to the source – and the source of all souls is (in one sense) in the Throne of Glory. Thus, the depth of looking at *tzitzis* is to reach one’s root. The root of each thing is in its aspect of *ayin/nothingness*, as it is written in the verse, “And wisdom, from where (*ayin*) is it found?”<sup>36</sup> Looking at *tzitzis*, on a deeper level, is therefore to see and remember “Where you come from”, which is *ayin* (nothingness); to remember the root of one’s *neshamah*.

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<sup>32</sup> Bamidbar 15:39

<sup>33</sup> Orach Chaim 8:11, 24:1

<sup>34</sup> Sotah 17a

<sup>35</sup> Yoma 86a

<sup>36</sup> Iyov 28:12

(There are thus two levels of how to understand the concept of “Know where you come from.” One understanding of this is in the physical sense: man first exists as a “rotten droplet” in the brain. The other way of understanding this is in the spiritual sense: man comes from his soul’s root, which is the Throne of Glory).

There are two aspects in viewing *techeiles*. From a superficial perspective, it is to view a tangible sight, the color of turquoise. This is a vision within “*Yeish*”, the material realm. But when a person removes the physical layer of this sight and instead he contemplates the depth contained in the *techeiles*, he is reminded of the sea, then the heavens, and finally, the Throne of Glory. Thus, through inner contemplation in his mind, one needs to reach the point of “*ayin*” that is in the sight of *techeiles*, instead of focusing on the “*yeish*” (material) aspect of the sight of *techeiles*. That is how he can reach the root of the entire Jewish people, who are all one *neshamah* at their root, where there are no differentiated parts to view.

To illustrate this concept, on Rosh HaShanah, there are two views which Hashem sees His creations in. In one view, He sees each creation individually, where each creature passes before Hashem and is scrutinized by his Master.<sup>37</sup> There is also another way Hashem views the world on Rosh HaShanah: “in one full glance.”<sup>38</sup> In the second view, where Hashem views all of Creation at once, it is like a view which negates all [differentiated] vision. This is the reason behind the concept of looking at the sky and sea.

The physical eyes see differentiated parts, and they cannot see a unified structure. Even when the eyes see something that is whole, it is only seeing a detail, and it cannot see the larger picture of things. In this sense, it is said, “*For no man shall see Me and live.*”<sup>39</sup> Since the creations are all differentiated parts, in contrast to the Infinite (the *EinSof*) which is undifferentiated unity, Hashem cannot be seen, so to speak, because the eyes can only see differentiated parts. The physical eyes cannot be used to see the spiritual because they can only see differentiated parts, so its vision is limited. The eyes cannot see the all-inclusive; they can only see details and parts.

The depth of viewing *tzitzis* is to rise from a differentiated view to a more all-inclusive view, where there is nothing to be “seen”. It is a concept of nullifying the sense of sight, and it essentially mean to rise from a differentiated kind of view to an inner view that comes from the soul, reminiscent of how Hashem views the world on Rosh HaShanah “in one full glance” [where there is no place for differentiation and individual parts, and there is just a unified, all-inclusive view]. It is a way to view the world with the eyes open, yet the eyes are not focusing on the various details in front of it, and instead, the eyes are seeing everything “in one full glance”.

The *Gemara* discusses how a person may fulfill the *mitzvah* of gladdening a bride and groom, and in what case it may be permitted to carry the bride on one’s shoulders. The *Gemara* there concludes that if one thinks of the bride as if she is a beam (or some other inanimate object), it is permitted. The depth to this matter is that he understands that the bride is part of an undifferentiated unity and he does not view her in the individuated sense.

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<sup>37</sup> *Rosh HaShanah 16a*

<sup>38</sup> *Rosh HaShanah 18a*

<sup>39</sup> *Shemos 33:20*

Let us explain this further. The physical appearance of something, and its beauty [or lack thereof], its particular color and formation, its picture, is entirely an individuated, differentiated view. Once we focus on how it looks, we set it apart for its differences. When we focus on the details of something, we do not see it as part of an undifferentiated unity, but as something with an individuality to it. But when access the view of *ayin*, all that we will see is one. There, we nullify our physical vision; we turn עיך (eye) into אײך (nothingness).

As we continue, we will explain how we can reach this kind of view, but first we must understand the very concept, of nullifying the vision: it mean to leave an individuated kind of view that sees details, and to instead enter into an all-inclusive view that sees totality.

On a deeper note, anytime we divest ourselves of one world/dimension in order to rise to another, we are moving from differentiated parts into undifferentiated unity. Compare this to a father with ten children. When we look at his children, we see ten parts. When we look at the level above the children – the father – we see one part. In the same vein, whenever we rise from a lower realm of existence to a higher realm of existence, we are really unifying together the many parts and revealing a oneness to them.

Thus, looking at *techeiles*, and being reminded of the sea, the heavens, and the Throne of Glory, are not about viewing where “I” am found in the Throne of Glory. It is rather a perspective of viewing all of the souls in the Jewish people at once, who are all sourced in the Throne of Glory. If a person is reminded of the Throne of Glory but he is focused on how his own “I” is rooted in the Throne of Glory, he is not connecting to the Throne of Glory. For the Throne of Glory is depicted as “*All who call out in My Name, and in My honor I created, fashioned, and also made*”, and if one is focused on his own “I” he is not integrating himself into “*All who call out in My Name.*”

Let us continue the path here, which will gain a sharper understanding of as we continue to explain some more details, with the help of Hashem.

#### 4. Looking At The Sunrise and Sunset: Seeing A Beginning and End

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Let’s explain another way of how to divest ourselves from physical vision of the eyes, and to reveal the spiritual vision of *ayin*/nothingness (which, on a deep note, is actually above vision).

There are several sights which people love to view, such as: to look at tall mountains, a scenic landscape, the sunrise, and the sunset. From a superficial perspective, people love to view these things because they are simply beautiful views. But here we will analyze a deeper reason.

Anyone with a little bit of feeling, when watching the sunrise and sunset, will feel a deep experience in his soul. What is the root of this deep feeling that comes from watching the sunrise or sunset? The superficial reason is because it is a beautiful sight to watch. But for some reason, when a person looks at a picture of the sunrise, this does not cause him to have the same deep experience as actually watching it. It is because when one views the sunrise or sunset, he is really turning his vision into “nothing” – the concept we mentioned before.

The beginning of each thing in Creation has its source in *ayin*, nothingness. As Chazal state, “Know from where you come”, and the Hebrew term “from where” is *m’ayin*, which means “from *ayin*” – nothingness. It is also written, “*Wisdom, from where can it be found?*” The verse is saying that the source of all wisdom is in *ayin*, nothingness. All of Creation is built upon the cycle of *yeish* (the material and tangible physical realm) going to *ayin*/nothingness [and then the cycle repeats]. This is the general way to view the entire Creation. It also applies individually to each person, and it is also true about each individual day.

Each day, when the sun begins to rise, this is really a beginning. The day begins from its source, which is *ayin*/nothingness. The sun is called “*chammah*” in Hebrew, related to the word “*chochmah*” (wisdom), thus the sun parallels the concept of *chochmah*/wisdom; and the source of all *chochmah*/wisdom is in *ayin*/nothingness. Thus, the beginning of the revelation of something comes from its aspect of *ayin*/nothingness.

That is why if a person has deep feeling, he will look at the sunrise with a very deep and inner perspective. He doesn’t just see the sun’s rays beginning to light up the surface of the earth. The sunrise is really a revelation of a beginning of the source of light. The light that we have on this physical world has its main source in the sun, the luminary in the heavens which provides light for the earth. Light begins to become revealed on this world every day through the sunrise. Therefore, viewing the sunrise is to view a beginning, as it emerges from its source of nothingness. So on a deeper level, looking at the sunrise is a way to view a beginning point.

Of course, we cannot actually see the beginning point itself. Of the actual beginning point, it is said, “*For no man can see Me and live.*” But the sunrise is the closest point we can see to the actual beginning point. Therefore, the beginning is shining through in it, and that why is the soul can feel powerfully connected to it when it sees it.

There is a general rule that each thing in Creation wishes to return to its source. For example, children want to return to their parents’ home. The Gemara says that a newlywed woman will still want to go to her father’s home.<sup>40</sup> Naomi told her daughters-in-law, Rus and Orpah, after their husbands departed, that they should remarry and find serenity with a husband. Every creation yearns to return to its source and root. (This is also the secret of *teshuvah* (repentance): to return to one’s Source.) It is natural to a person to wish to return to his source, but if a person blocks this natural desire through all kinds of dirt, garbage, and impurity, he will not feel this natural desire. Whenever a person sees the revelation of the beginning point, there is a yearning to return to there.

As an example, we can see that when a child is born, usually, everyone who hears of the newborn is overjoyed. But the Sages state that instead of rejoicing for the child, we should actually feel some sadness for this child who has had to leave his Heavenly source and come down onto this world. Even if a person says that he is truly happy that now another Jewish soul has come down onto the world to serve the Creator, he is not being truthful, because if that was his reason, then why isn’t he overjoyed every time a person does a *mitzvah* and serves the Creator? We can see as well that even people who do not observe Torah and mitzvos, and gentiles as well, are happy when a child is born. This joyous feeling at a child’s birth is coming from above the plane of consciousness; it cannot be

rationally explained by any human reasoning and understanding. It is really because the birth of a child is a revelation of a beginning point.

Every beginning point, every start of a new revelation, speaks powerfully to a person. Why? It is because a person has a natural desire to return to his root, a beginning is a revelation of the root, of the source. That is why whenever something begins, people have a yearning for it. People love to swim by a spring of water. Besides for the external and superficial reasons for this, there is an inner reason for it. It is because it is a source where all the water flows from. Therefore, people feel a pull towards it, because it is a beginning, a source of something. It is the same with watching the sunrise. People feel a pull towards it because it is the beginning of light. There is a certain deep feeling in watching the sunrise, because it is watching the revelation of a beginning from which all the earth's light comes from.

If a person has this perspective as he watches the sunrise, he deepens his vision from it, and it will be a more inner and spiritual kind of vision. He will be receiving a sight that comes directly from the source of all sight (the sunrise). In this way, he integrates his natural physical vision of his eye, with its root, *ayin*.

Similarly, people enjoy watching the sunset. There is a rule that “the end is wrapped in the beginning”; whatever exists in the beginning point is also in the end point. Naturally, we cannot see this, because we see a disparate Creation in front of us, so we do not see the beginning in the end. When a child is born, we rejoice, and when a person dies, we are saddened, because it is the end of his life. But if we view Creation as a circle, the end point meets the beginning point. The inner view towards Creation is that the end and beginning are really one unit. Therefore, just as there is there a revelation of *ayin* in a beginning, so is there a revelation of *ayin* in an end.

*Chazal* stated, “Know where you come from...and to where you are going.” The deeper meaning of this, in relation to the above, is that we come from *ayin* (nothingness) and we also end at *ayin* (nothingness). Whenever there is an end, there is a revelation of *ayin*/nothingness. For this reason, at death, a person's body returns to the earth, to nothingness. In the physical world, returning to a state of nothingness has a negative connotation; death makes a person lose his body, whereupon the body returns to the earth, and now there is no more body [which is saddening to us, because all we see is the loss]. When it comes to the sunset, however, we are watching it disappear, but this does not make us sad, because we know it will return the next day. The sunset is therefore an example of an “end” which we can view as part of a cycle, where we are aware that it will lead to another beginning, and the cycle repeats. This is the deep reason of why people are drawn towards viewing the sunset – it gives a similar deep feeling of watching the sunrise.

In the physical world we live in, where something material goes lost and disappears, it is hard for us to view an end point, because we do not see an end as part of a beginning. We only see the end by itself. We see a plant that has begun to sprout, and when it rots, the plant has ended. Therefore, we identify with a beginning, but not with an end. To try to identify with an end is like trying to grapple with the fear of death. But the Torah says that when Avraham was elderly, “his days were complete.”<sup>41</sup> He had lived his life fully, and his entire life became like one completed circle. But this

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<sup>41</sup> *Beraishis* 24:1

is only for a person who has an inner perspective of the *neshamah*. Such a person will see the end and beginning as parts of a circle, which are each needed to complete the circle.

Thus, looking at the sunrise and sunset is a way to access the revelation of our root, our source, our beginning point [which, as we explained, is *ayin*].

Shlomo *HaMelech* said, “*There is no control on the day of death.*”<sup>42</sup> What is the revelation provided by a person’s day of death? Death reveals the actual essence of a person. During a person’s lifetime, he may have had “control”, in the sense of his relation to others, but at death, there is no more of this control. At death, the person will regard his relation to others as nothing but external and superficial, and only the person’s essence remains; this is why there is no more “control” at death. The only exception to this was Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who was the same in his lifetime as at death, because his essence was already complete in his lifetime. But for everyone else, it is death that reveals the essence of the person. At death, there is a view that comes from *ayin*. It is where the end (death) meets the beginning point (*ayin*) – an intrinsic essence which never ceases.

That is the inner way to view death, but since we live in this material world, we cannot normally have this perspective towards death, and therefore we view death as a loss, as an absence of life. It is therefore difficult for us to see how the end is part of the beginning point.

Viewing a beginning point, however, is something which we are interested in looking at. However, we are normally not aware of this deep reason when we are drawn towards a beginning point (such as the sunrise), and instead, we are fond of beginnings simply because they symbolize hope for the future, implying that there will be growth. But if we take the example of the joy upon the birth of a child, and we think deeply into why this makes us joyous, it is not because we have a hope that this child will grow up in the future. Rather, it is because there is a joy in the very beginning of this new child.

If one’s joy at the birth of a child is because he has a hope that this child will grow, his view comes from the lower perspective, עיך, “eye” [for he is looking at the physical outcome of the situation]. In contrast, if one is joyous about the child’s birth because he is experiencing a beginning point, he has the higher view towards this situation, which comes from איך, “nothingness”. Such a person, who has the view of *ayin* (איך), will also be able to rejoice as well when he contemplates an end [i.e. death], because he is aware that everything returns to the source, איך, *ayin*/nothingness.

## In Summary and In Conclusion

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Thus, looking at the sunrise and sunset, with a deep perspective, from the inner awareness that they are a beginning and end that are really one - is a kind of vision that nullifies our sense of sight and turns it spiritual. In order to gain from this kind of vision, one needs the ability of deep perspective and inner understanding. It will not suffice if one has a deep feeling in it. Rather, it needs to also come from inner perspective and understanding; from wisdom.

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<sup>42</sup> *Koheles 8:8*



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## *05 / Nullifying The Sense of Sight*

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### I. Expanded Vision: Looking At A Scenic View

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We mentioned in the earlier chapters that there is a spiritual gain in seeing a wide, expansive view.

People will spend a large part of their life, investing much time and money and effort, into traveling to places where they can go see a scenic view or landscape. Superficially speaking, a scenic view is simply pleasurable to look at. It is enchanting to view a scenic landscape of mountains, trees, or any of the other beautiful parts of nature. That is true, but it is only the physical aspect of vision (*yeish/material*). There is also an inner perspective one can have when viewing a scenic landscape. The wide expanse of space offers a person an unlimited, unbounded kind of view.

Contrast this with seeing a wall. When you look at a wall, you are seeing something very limited and contained. It is very unlike a scenic view. A wall has both a very limited shape and appearance. Looking at a wall limits your vision. But when you look at a scenic view, wide expanse of space, it is not just about the beautiful sight you are seeing. It is rather because your vision is becoming opened much further. You are taking leave of limited vision and entering into an unbounded kind of vision. That is the depth of why people enjoy looking at a scenic view [though they are not necessarily aware of this reason].

A person with a superficial perspective will look at a scenic view and focus on details: How a certain tree appears, how beautiful the mountain is, how wondrous the view is. Such a person, even if he would come to realize “Who created these”, he would only be recognizing the details involved. In contrast to this, a more inner perspective to this is that viewing a wide expanse of space is a kind of view where you do not see the end. Although we can indeed see where the view ends, it is breaking the limitations of normal vision, because it is a much wider kind of view than the norm, and thus greatly expansive to our vision. That is the depth of looking at a scenic view.

We are normally found within a contained system. Our eyes can see all around us, but there are walls and separations all over the place which prevent our eyes from seeing so much all at once, thereby limiting its vision. Therefore, when looking at a scenic view, if you want to spiritually gain from this, you should be aware that you are giving freedom to your vision and that you are letting it free from its normal constraints. This is a whole different way of viewing things, and it is difficult to express in the word. You can either see something because you want to see what you are seeing - or you can see something because you want to let your vision free from its normal limitations.

This is in contrast with an entirely different kind of *avodah* associated with our physical vision: to restrain the view of our eyes. It is brought in *sefer Shaarei Teshuvah* of the *Geonim* that one of the Sages, Rav, would not look to any of his sides, and not even in front of him. There is a spiritual gain of limiting the vision. But here we are explaining an altogether different kind of *avodah* with regards to our vision: to remove the limitations of our vision.

Understandably, this *avodah* is only to be done with permissible sights, and in places where it is possible. The point of this *avodah* is not to simply stare at something we see. Rather, the purpose is to let the vision free without restraining it. If a person has an inner feeling for this and he is somewhat connected to it, and he views a wide expanse with this perspective, he will slowly feel a calmness come upon his soul. As is well-known, lack of calmness comes from limitations. The more we lessen those limitations, the more freedom and calmness the soul will receive, when one sees a wide, expansive view.

Therefore, when seeing a scenic view, one should let the vision become unbounded. Do not focus your vision on anything particular that you see in the view, and then you will come to a certain feeling of freedom, through this kind of seeing. The more one persists with this, he will slowly receive a subtler sense of vision.

## 2. Focused Vision: Concentrating On A Point

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In this chapter, though, we will mainly explain the opposite kind of *avodah* than the above, which is: focused vision. These methods will involve focusing exactly on what you want to see.

In Kelm, there was a mode of conduct they would practice, that when walking in the street, one would avoid looking either right or left. This was not about avoiding improper sights, for it is well-known that in Kelm, the men would walk on one side and the women on the other. They were practicing focused vision, to keep their vision restrained from veering to the right or left. Although it was still possible to veer off tracking even when walking in a straight line, they wanted to make sure that at least their eyes don't veer to the sides, as the eyes normally do.

Let's explain the depth behind this practice. Earlier, we explained that rising from one realm to another realm is essentially to leave a disparate view and to enter into a unified view. The material world is called *alma d'piruda*, a "world of separation". Seeing from the *neshamah*, however, is a unified mode of vision, and the deepest level of it is when "all are seen in one full glance." When one wishes to leave physical vision, remove it, and reveal the spiritual realm, he needs to 'unify' his vision and avoid scattered vision. He needs to remove the disparate way of viewing things from within his sense of sight, and reveal a kind of vision that is more all-inclusive.

How can person do it? Firstly, a person must try not to look at that which he doesn't need to see. This is not only true about avoiding improper sights, but even about anything that a person simply doesn't need to see. Secondly, a person should then focus his vision on something.

This follows the basic design of Creation, in which there are actions we do, as well as actions we refrain from. Just as we need to fulfill the positive commandments and avoid the negative prohibitions, we also need to avoid looking at things we don't need to see, which is like a 'negation' of our vision, and that is the basis, for we first need to avoid the negatives before doing the positives. Then, we can focus on our vision on something, which is the 'positive' use of our vision.

Let us explain more about the concept of focusing. When a person is learning a *sefer*, he should be focusing only on the words of the *sefer* in front of him. When a woman is baking a cake in her kitchen, she needs to focus only on making the cake. In anything we do, we must focus on what we

are actually doing, and on nothing else outside of it. We should not be doing several things at once. In our generation, there is a destructive habit where people have lost the art of staying focused while looking at something. A person can be sitting behind an office desk and viewing three people in a zigzag, all at once. This makes a person lose the soul. The soul cannot be revealed when there is so much scattering taking place, when there is no focus on anything.

Part of the problem with technology is that all of the gadgets, from the smallest to the biggest of them, contain a flood of digital images, where everything changes so quickly and is replaced by new images, one after the other, in direct succession. This totally kills a person's power of focused concentration, and especially if the digital advertisement keeps scrolling down the page quickly, overwhelming the vision by causing the eyes to speedily process all the words they are seeing.

The nation of Yisrael is known to the rest of the nations of the world as “*am hasefer*”, “people of the book”. The depth of this is because a *sefer* contains written letters that do not move anywhere. The letters of the *Luchos* were carved onto the tablets, because in the way that the Torah is given, the letters do not move to any of the sides. The depth of this is because we are supposed to keep our vision focused on an unmoving point. In light of this concept, we can now understand the detriment of all of the technological gadgets of today, which cause us to lose our subtlety of focus (besides for all of the physical damage that they do to the eyes, which we are not even discussing).

In the *avodah* of improving our visual focus, there are two ways – a deep approach, and a more superficial approach.

The superficial way to do it is by looking exactly at what you need to see. If you open a book/*sefer*, look exactly at what you are reading, and don't let your eyes dart to the right or left of the page. This goes further than not looking outside of the *sefer*/book: Even when you are learning Gemara, try not to glance to the side where the commentaries of *Rashi* and *Tosafos* are, and instead, look precisely at the words of the Gemara in front of you which you need to see. When you finish looking at the words you needed to see, you can then look at the words of *Rashi*, and now focus solely on the words of *Rashi* [without looking at *Tosafos*. Then, when you are finished viewing *Rashi*, do the same with *Tosafos*].

The deeper way is to take one word and keep your eyes focused on that word. After a few minutes, try focusing on one letter, and after another few minutes, try focusing on one point, and let your vision stay focused there.

This practice is also written about by the Vilna Gaon, in different terminology. The Vilna Gaon said that the entire Torah is hinted to in the beginning of the Torah, which recounts the six days of Creation, and that the entire Torah is even hinted to in the first verse of the Torah. Taking this further, the entire Torah is also hinted to in the first word of the Torah, “*Beraishis*”, for it has six letters, parallel to the six days of Creation; and the dot inside the letter *beis* is parallel to the seventh day, Shabbos. Even more so, the Vilna Gaon says that the entire Torah is hinted to in that dot in the letter *beis* of the word *Beraishis*, and therefore, if a person focuses his vision on the word *Beraishis*, concentrating on it with absolute focus, he can attain an understanding of the entire Torah. Those are the words of the Vilna Gaon.

We have just learned from the above words of the Vilna Gaon that an understanding of the entire Torah is contained in the dot of the letter *beis* of the word “*Beraishis*”, which is just one point. The

problem is, however, that we are usually not that involved with this little dot. What's more, we don't pay too much attention to the letter *beis* in the word *Beraishis*. In the best situations, a person pays attention to the word *Beraishis*, for the *Tikkunei HaZohar* is a collection of teachings that deals entirely with different combinations of letters of the word *Beraishis*. But even there, there are only a few teachings about the letter *beis*. As for the little dot in the letter *beis*, usually a person does not give it any significance when working with his soul. But this causes us to lose out on the root of inner vision.

The Vilna Gaon has written that the entire Torah is contained in the dot that is in the *beis* of *Beraishis*. It is the very beginning point of the Torah. The Torah ends with, "I", which speaks of the giving of the Torah, of which it was said, "You see that it is from Heaven that I spoke with them". Thus, the entire Torah is contained in the concept of "you see", in vision, and vision must begin from a point.

The depth behind this practice is, as explained earlier, because there is an inner task to leave behind disparity and instead reach our unified beginning point, which is a kind of *ayin*/nothingness.

In the Zohar it is written, "The Torah comes out from *chochmah* (wisdom)." The Torah came from the *chochmah* – and, in light of what we have seen earlier, this *chochmah* is essentially the dot of the letter *beis* in the word *Beraishis*. That is the Torah's root, and if that is the root, that is what we will need to focus our vision on, if we want to reach the spiritual dimension of *ayin*. The beginning of our vision is contained in *ayin*, and this *ayin*-nothingness is essentially contained in the dot of the *beis* in the word *Beraishis*.

If a person reflects into the first verse of the Torah, and then he focuses on the first word, *Beraishis*, and then on the first letter, *beis*, and then on the dot - focusing his vision there and concentrating with all his energies, on the letter *beis* and on the dot inside it, slowly he will divest himself of physical, disparate vision, and in its place, the root of vision will be revealed to him. His Torah learning after that will be with an inner understanding of the entire Torah. (This is only on the condition that he meets all the requirements for this. We are only describing here the source).

This is essentially an *avodah* to see one's entire way of life, of which the main root is study of the holy Torah, as contained in the first point of the Torah (the dot of the *beis*). The word *Beraishis* means "beginning", and the 'beginning' of this beginning is in the dot in the letter *beis*. So it is not something we should skip. If we want to have a spiritual intellect, we need to uncover its source. That source is the letter *beis* of *Beraishis*, and the dot in this *beis* is where the very root of all spiritual understanding is.

This *avodah* can also be done with any point as well; a person can focus on a point on the wall and concentrate his vision on it. But it is not as spiritually effective, because it is not the root of vision. However, since it is still a point, there is what to gain in focusing on it. But if a person wishes to reach *ayin* [through vision], the best place to reach this through any vision is through the dot in the letter *beis* of *Beraishis*.

If you do not have a *Chumash* on you, you can still imagine the word *Beraishis* and focus on it in your mind. If you can't do this, you can still try focusing on any point in front of you for some time, though it is not ideally recommended. Ideally, we want to gain spiritual vision from the holy Torah, through the dot of the letter *beis* in the word *Beraishis*.

In summary, there are two stages of gaining focused vision: general, and specific. General focus is to avoid looking at things we don't need to see, not to let your eyes dart to the sides, and not to look at something you aren't involved with. Specific focus is to focus your vision on one point (preferably in the Torah). From there, a person can reach the inner point of vision.

### 3. Focused Vision: Closing The Eyes

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Up until now, we generally learned about revealing the soul by way of the sense of sight. We explained that this divides into two types of sight: (1) Seeing something physical which can awaken our soul to the spiritual and thereby open our spiritual vision. (2) Seeing something which nullifies our physical vision [which, in turn, reveals spiritual vision]. But there is also a third kind of vision: non-sight.

In clearer terms, non-sight is the act of closing the eyes. This is a very general definition, however. It is possible for a person to keep his eyes opened and yet remained “closed” [he is very focused on something deep or spiritual] and it is also possible for a person to close his eyes and yet his eyes are opened [i.e. he is imagining something].

“The eyes see, the heart desires, and the actions complete.” A person may see something and then close his eyes, but he continues to “see” it [in his imagination]. A person may be sleeping in his bed at night with his eyes closed, but he is fantasizing in his dreams (which are a twisted form of prophecy). Even with closed eyes, a person can continue to see what he has just seen – not with his physical eyes, of course, but in his mind, for the image has been imprinted onto his mind.

We should understand that through closing the eyes, a person can negate the mode of vision altogether. We will begin to explain this concept using simpler examples, and then continue into deeper examples of the concept.

On a superficial level, closing the eyes is to simply close your physical eyes from looking at the physical world in front of you. The prophet says, “*He closes his eyes, from seeing evil.*” One is obligated according to the Torah to avoid seeing improper sights, and to close his eyes in order to avoid these sights. When a person closes his eyes and avoids looking at something improper, he draws holiness from Above upon him, for he has nullified his physical desire to stare at forbidden sights, and in turn, he gains spiritual vision. This concept is explained in the holy *sefarim*, such as in *sefer Reishis Chochmah* and in the *sefarim* of Reb Aharon Roth zt”l.<sup>43</sup>

It is well known that the Chozeh of Lublin was given the title of “*Chozeh*, “seer”, for his strong sense of spiritual vision. It is said that the main reason for this was because he placed a cloth on top of his eyes for seven years and didn't see a thing during all that time. Truthfully, we can quite possibly say that this was a very extreme path, which most of the other *Gedolim* throughout the generations did not take, and the other *Gedolim* had other ways of how they reached spiritual vision. But this extreme path that the Chozeh of Lublin took was actually the clearest path that leads towards spiritual vision.

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<sup>43</sup> The main *sefarim* of Reb Aharon Roth zt”l are *sefer Tabaras HaKodesh* and *sefer Shomer Emunim*

So far, we have explained the simpler aspect of closing the eyes, which is to close the eyes in order to avoid seeing something which our eyes don't need to see. [The source for this practice is in the following words of the Gemara.] The Gemara says on the verse, “*He closes his eyes from seeing evil*” – “Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said, this is referring to one who does not look at women when they are standing [by a waterfront] to do laundry. What is the case? If there is an alternate path to take, he is wicked. If there is no other path, he is innocent. Really it is referring to a case where there is no other path, and even so, he should be careful.”<sup>44</sup>

From these words of the Gemara we see that firstly one must be careful to keep the *halachah* of not walking into a place of inappropriate sights (and if one does go there, even if he closes his eyes, the Gemara says that he is still called wicked). Secondly, even if there was no other path to get around the inappropriate place, although there is no obligation to close his eyes, closing his eyes will still be spiritually beneficial to his vision. So there are places where one is forbidden to look at, and there are places which are not forbidden to look at (meaning that they don't cause a person to have lustful thoughts) yet one should still be pious and refrain from looking at.

All of this is but the lower, simpler aspect of closing the eyes, and when one employs it, he nullifies physical vision and reveals spiritual vision, for when physicality is weakened, spirituality is strengthened.

## 4. Focused Vision: Avoiding Dirty Sights

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A deeper aspect in closing the eyes is contained in the concepts of “good eye” and “bad eye”, as Chazal taught: “[One who has] a ‘good eye’ is of the students of Avraham Avinu, and anyone who has a ‘bad eye’ is of the students of the wicked Bilaam.”<sup>45</sup> Although the ‘good eye’ and ‘bad eye’ are not physical vision but are rather a mental kind of vision, laying eyes on something that is very coarse, dirty, or disgusting can be detrimental to the soul's refinement, even if one the thing one is looking at is not forbidden to see.

If a person lives in a very dirty place, although this is not forbidden, it brings the soul down to the level of the body. The body is made of materialism and therefore it is coarse, whereas the soul is refined, subtle and pure. When a person regularly sees dirty things and enters into unclean places, he is causing his own vision to become coarser and more physical. In contrast, the more a person accustoms himself to looking at clean things – not only things which are spiritually clean from sin, but even things which are physically clean and neat looking – he is refining his vision in the process.

One of the stages of the spiritual ladder of growth laid out by the sage Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair is *nekiyus*, “cleanliness”, which the *Mesillas Yesharim* explains about at length. But we are not talking about that right now. Here we are talking about basic, physical cleanliness.

It is well-known that many *tzaddikim* were very careful about being physically clean and neat. This is because when there is cleanliness and no dirtiness, there can be purity. There is coarse dirt

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<sup>44</sup> *Bava Basra* 57b

<sup>45</sup> *Avos* 5:19

and messiness, and there are also subtler kinds of messiness. The soul, at its root (especially at its highest level, *Atzilus*), is a place where there is no evil. There is no place there for dirtiness – not in the spiritual sense, and surely not in the material sense. Thus, part of purifying the vision is to be careful not to look at things which awaken physicality, or which are dirty or messy.

The Baal Shem Tov said that a Jew should not stare at the face of a gentile. The Sages already said that one should not look at a wicked person, and the Baal Shem Tov added that this does not only include the wicked, but that one should even refrain from looking at a person whose thoughts are not connected to the Creator.

The depth of this is because although it is not forbidden to look at someone who isn't a Torah scholar, and although the person may not be a sinner – as the *sefer Tanya* teaches, that there are three levels: a gentile, a wicked person, and the in-between level, a person who does not sin, who is called a “*beinoni*” – still, the *beinoni* is not attached to holiness, to Torah, to the Creator. The Baal Shem Tov therefore said that one shouldn't even stare at the face of a *beinoni*. It is because looking at someone always affects the looker somewhat. Sometimes the looker will feel it less, and sometimes he will feel it more.

When a person looks at a materialistic being or thing, whether it is a gentile, or a wicked person, or a person who isn't connected in his thoughts to the Creator, looking at such a person will dull his own vision and cause it to be more coarse and physical. Thus, closing the eyes is not only a concept of avoiding forbidden sights. There is also a concept of closing the eyes when it comes to avoiding seeing something that isn't spiritually refined and pure. Just as looking at something holy can awaken the soul's vision, so is the true in the opposite sense: looking at something forbidden or materialistic, or anything which isn't connected to holiness, strengthens the physicality of vision and weakens spiritual vision.

## 5. Not Seeing Anything Even With The Eyes Open: Seeing Nothing

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We will continue further along this path and explain subtler ways of turning the vision spiritual.

In the introduction to *sefer Lev Eliyahu*, there is a biography written about Reb Elya Lopian zt”l, told over in the name of Reb Shalom Shwadron zt”l, who heard a testimony from Reb Elya that even when he speaks in front of people and his eyes are opened, he does not even see even one person. Reb Shalom Shwadron asked him: “How is this possible?” Reb Elya answered: “You are already older. This is something you need to work on from a young age.” It is unclear how exactly Reb Elya reached this level, but there is definitely a concept here of opened eyes in which a person doesn't see anything.

Generally speaking, there are two ways to accomplish this: an inner way, and an external way.

The inner way to do it is to think something else while you are talking to the other person. The Rambam said that thoughts of sin cannot enter the heart of a person unless he is empty from wisdom of Torah. That is why one of the methods of advice in guarding the sanctity of the eyes is to be heavily involved in a thought. When a person is busy with his mind about something, his eyes will not stare that much at something.

The depth behind this is because the eyes are known as the outer layer of the brain; they are also called the “*malchus*”, the kingdom, of the brain. Therefore, when the brain is empty from thought, it will turn outward and it will see everything that the eyes lay sight upon. But if the brain is involved in a thought, it will not also think of a lustful or sinful thought, for the brain cannot think two thoughts at once (except for some rare individuals who have “two brains”, or who have the ability to simultaneously stay connected to both their subconscious and conscious). The eyes simply cannot focus on something while the brain is heavily involved with a thought.

The more a person is heavily involved with an inner kind of thought, the more he will naturally avoid looking outward at things. This is not a spiritual power. Compare it to the following. If a person goes to the bank and they give him very unpleasant news about his account status, he is so preoccupied thinking about this when he leaves the bank that he won't even notice his brother passing by him who says “Good morning” to him. He doesn't even know his brother is there, because he is so self-absorbed. This phenomenon can happen either when it comes to the physical or the spiritual. Whenever a person is preoccupied and deeply involved in a thought, he doesn't look around him.

This is the simpler method of how one can have his eyes open yet not see in front of him, and this level can be attained by anyone. A person can be deeply involved with an inner kind of thought, he can turn inward, and so he doesn't turn outward. He won't see anything around him, and even if he does, he will barely focus on it.

But in order to be able to do this, a person needs a strongly developed mind. With most people, this ability is only accessed when they are very busy preparing for a celebration or when they are wrapped up in a pressing issue, but on a daily basis, a person's thoughts will not be that focused on something and they will wander, and a person's eyes will then be turned outward. Only those who have developed an ability to listen to their heart, or a strongly developed mind, can live so much inside themselves that they don't look at anything around them. If one does not have such a developed mind or heart, he will feel empty inside himself and naturally turn his attention outward, and then he will see and stare at things.

The more a person fills himself with inner content, whether in his mind or heart (or both), the less he will turn outward, and naturally, the less he will think of what others are saying or thinking about. Even on a purely physical level, he will end up seeing less things around him, unless he very much wants to see something. Of Avraham Avinu, it is written, “*And he raised his eyes, and he saw*” – he had to look at the mountain, because since he was so connected to Hashem in his mind and heart, he wouldn't have noticed the mountain unless he concentrated on seeing it.

In summary, the ability to see with open eyes and yet not see anything in front of you is an ability that is acquired either through heavy involvement in a thought, or in deeply connecting to a heart matter. That was one way of how one can have his eyes open yet not see anything. Now we will explain a second way, which is the more inner approach.



## 6. Not Seeing Anything Even With The Eyes Open: Seeing Above Yourself

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Generally speaking, there is a way to see from **within** yourself, and a way to see from **around** yourself.

To illustrate the concept, one kind of person can be amongst his friends and he has shaped certain values and beliefs that are influenced by how his friends think, while another kind of person may be amongst his friends yet he thinks from the outside.

Most people, when they are found amongst certain sects or communities, only see a matter from within the view of their direct surroundings. They attribute these beliefs to be their own and they will see a matter based on how others around them are viewing the matter. But there is a way for a person to see something from the outside. His physical body may be present with everyone else, but he can view a matter from above.

When a person can only view a matter from the inside, he will most definitely be swayed by certain preconceived notions, and he won't be able to see the matter accurately. Only when someone sees the matter from above can he have a clear view of it. Compare this to a person who is in a city he doesn't recognize, and he wants to get to a certain place. He is confused about which direction he should go in. But if he is above the city and he sees the entire view of the city spread out before him, he can see the place where he wants to reach, and then he can guide himself there.

In the soul, there are two areas of viewing. In mystical language, these two viewpoints of the soul are known as *ohr makif* (enveloping light) and *ohr pnimi* (inner light). The view from the *ohr pnimi* (inner light) is how I see things from being in the inside of a matter, and the view from the *ohr makif* is how I see things from the outside of the matter. (Alternatively, *ohr pnimi* can be about something I can reach, while *ohr makif* is a level above me which is not within my current reach. This is a totally different approach in understanding the different views of *ohr pnimi* and *ohr makif*, and we are not dealing with it here.)

Thus, *ohr pnimi* is when a person sees something from his inside, whereas *ohr makif* is to see a matter from above. Let us explain these concepts further. In the view of *ohr pnimi*, a person has not risen above the matter, and therefore he sees it as a part of himself. In the view of *ohr makif*, a person goes above the matter, so he can view it from above. He can then enter the matter, leave it, and repeat the cycle.

[*Ohr makif* is described in the following Gemara.] “Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said, “I have seen those who ascend [spiritually], and they are few.”<sup>46</sup> The term for those who ascend spiritually, *bonei aliyah*, refers to those who regularly live above, but who occasionally descend, and then they immediately return to their place above. This is not in the physical sense, like a person who lives in the attic and sometimes comes downstairs and then goes back upstairs. Rather, it is referring to a power in the soul, in which a person can live above than the normal perspective, sometimes descending from his higher perspective into the lower perspective, but immediately returning to his base above. Since he generally lives above, he can see things from above, from outside of the matter.

To illustrate the concept, a mature adult is watching a bunch of children playing a game. He is observing how the children are involved in the game. Since he is an outside observer towards them, he is seeing what each of the children want, if they are being egoistic or selfish or kind; he notices qualities or weaknesses in their character. The child, however, has his own perspective in this matter. He is found inside the game, and that is where his viewpoint is.

As a general note, some people are closer in their soul root to the view of *ohr pnimi*, whereas others' souls are rooted in the view of *ohr makif*. Most people's souls are rooted in *ohr pnimi* – they see the flat surface of things, and therefore they do not “see” much. They won't see where a matter is leading to. From the verse “*The end of something is better than its beginning*”<sup>47</sup> there is a hint that one can learn about the end of something by seeing its beginning, but most people cannot see the end from observing the beginning of a matter. This is because most people are only viewing a matter from within the matter. But when one is found above a matter – in the same vein of the concept of *sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah* (the end of action is first in thought) – he can see an all-inclusive view of a matter.

This ability, to see from above, is not necessarily a purely spiritual level. There are people who have various powers, which do not stem from *kedushah* (holiness). They can see the auras in Creation, because they have the ability to see things from above, so they are not limited to a view from the inside. They can live amongst people, yet they are essentially living on a plane of existence that is outside of their surroundings; they are not stuck within their surroundings; their physical bodies are found amongst society, but their souls are viewing everyone from above. This is not a view borne out of conceitedness, of an attitude that “I am higher and better than everyone else, and they are all worthless!” Rather, it is just a view that comes from a different place in the soul, where they can step outside of a matter and see it from above.

As long as a person can only see things from the inside, he has no hope [in seeing an accurate picture of things]. We can compare it to a person trapped in middle of a stormy ocean. When a wave is heading towards him, if he lifts his head above the height of the wave, or if he ducks so low that he is completely hidden from the wave, he can be saved, but if his head is parallel to the wave, he is in danger. In the same vein, if a person lives above, he is above the danger of the ‘waves’, for all the ‘waves’ are beneath him. He doesn't flow along with the rest of this materialistic world, which is for the most part detrimental. (Although there are some good things that one may ‘flow’ along with on this world, most of them are spiritually harmful).

Thus, if a person has the ability to rise above the flat surface he is physically on, and he is faced with spiritually harmful influences which he is tempted to follow the crowd in, he has the ability to escape to outside of his surroundings, and when he sees something on this world that is worthwhile to pursue, he returns to below. He can keep repeating this cycle, of going above, then below, then above, etc. But if a person can only live below, he won't be able to leave any spiritually harmful influences when he is tempted to flow after them, because he doesn't have the ability to escape to somewhere outside. He can't keep jumping away from the crowd around him. Only if he has a base above, can he go there when he needs to. But if he is regularly found above, that means he can quickly jump back to his base above whenever he wants to.

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<sup>47</sup> *Koheles 7:8*

The ideal approach for a person to take is to be able to live both above and below. At times he should view a matter from within himself, and at other times, he should view a matter from the outside, and repeat the cycle.

All spiritual attainments are built upon this fundamental. If a person does not access this ability to view the world from outside himself, he is drowning in the “Greek cement” – where there is no hope for him, so to speak. The basis for anything is to be able to go outside of a matter. When Hashem told Avraham to leave his land and go outside of it, He was hinting to him that he did not belong to the surface level of the earth, and that he did not have to flow along with the rest of the world around him. As a result, he transcended the laws of nature. Naturally, he could not bear children, but after his name was changed from Avram to Avraham, he had children.<sup>48</sup>

The depth of this power, of seeing from the outside, means that one is not connected to what happens here on the surface level of the earth. A person may be here physically, but in his soul, he is viewing the world from above. One will need to descend back onto this world in order to love others and identify with them, but as soon as he feels a need to disconnect from this world, he disconnects, and goes back above.

In order to learn how to acquire this perspective of seeing things from the outside, of not flowing along with the rest of the surroundings when they are doing something which you feel is not appropriate, one has to reflect on the fact that he is essentially a stranger to this earth, like a person who has come to a foreign country he doesn't recognize. When a person has revelation of the *neshamah*, he will feel “*I am like a stranger in this land.*”<sup>49</sup> As long as a person can only identify with the physical body, he will feel that his true place is to be here on this world, on this materialistic world which is a place for the physical body. But when a person has some inner revelation of the spiritual, he must know that this revelation is not enough, and that he must actually perceive life through a spiritual view, living outside of this material world.

Hashem took Avraham outside of his land and told him, “*So shall it be for your children.*” This meant that the Jewish people, the descendants of Avraham, must become aware that they do not exist solely on this earth. Chazal said that Yaakov and Esav divided between themselves who would inherit which world: Esav took This World as his portion, whereas Yaakov took the Next World.

This does not mean that Yaakov doesn't have This World at all, for as we know, there were many wealthy Jews, such as *Rabbeinu HaKadosh* and others, who were rich both in the physical and in the spiritual. What, then, does it mean that Yaakov only received the Next World, and not This World? It meant that he could feel that he does not exist here, and that even when he is here, he is not really here. A person may be in a diamond bourse, or in some other materialistic place, yet he is not there [his physical body is there, but his mind and heart are elsewhere]. This doesn't mean that he closes his ears and eyes and shuts out his senses. He can hear and see everything which is going on around him, but he can know that he is not found here. In his soul, he can view the matter from outside of himself, as opposed to from inside himself.

We should really say a lot more about this concept, for it is the basis for a deeper and inner kind of life. A person who can only see from inside of himself, and never from outside and above himself,

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<sup>48</sup> *Midrash Rabbah Kobeles 5*

<sup>49</sup> *Tebillim 119:19*

will not be able to connect to a higher dimension. The basis for spiritual growth is to be able to live outside [of the surroundings]. One should practice this in the external sense, in order to conceptualize it. Therefore, one should have set times every day where he leaves society. Even when he returns to society, his soul must remain outside of society, and he should only return there in the physical sense.

We will now return to discussing the soul's sense of sight. When a person steps outside and he views into the inside of a matter, he can see all the details of the inside. Furthermore, because he is on the outside and looking in, he can see all of the details with one full glance, and he can see the interconnectedness of the details as one structure.

To illustrate, a non-religious Jew sees all Chareidi Jews in Israel as being one big infrastructure, and he doesn't see that there are different sects of Jews who have radically different approaches, customs, and beliefs. From the perspective of an irreligious Jew, all Chareidim appear to be the same. But if a person enters into the inner circles of Chareidi Jewry, he will see that there are all kinds of different types of Chareidi Jews. He will enter into one sect of Jewry and discover 70 different factions there, with differences in the styles of *peyos*, dress, etc. Similarly, a person may see a certain family and think that all of the siblings are alike, but the parents know well that there are huge differences between each of their children.

When a person has the outsider view, everything in front of him will appear to him as one structure, because when one is found on the outside of a matter, he will see a bunch of details in front of him as all being the same. When a person has the insider view, though, he sees the differences in the details. There is certainly a disadvantage to the outsider's view, who cannot see the differences of the details. But if a person can see a view both from the inside and outside of a matter, he will be able to see into the inside from the outside, and then he can see how all the similarities [and then he can reach a general view where he doesn't focus on details], and then he won't see anything [because there are no details to focus on].

The truth is that these words are brief about the topic, but these are very deep words about a power in the soul, which one needs to reveal. One must firstly reveal the ability to see from the outside of a matter [*ohr makif*] then the ability to see into the details of a matter [*ohr pnimi*] and then a general view which is all-inclusive and which sees the entire picture [an integration of *ohr makif* and *ohr pnimi*]. After reaching such a mode of vision, when a person wants to see the details, he will see them, and when he doesn't want to see them, he will instead see the general view.

Just as we understand that a person can guide his hand in any direction he wishes, so can a person guide his soul in any mode of vision he wishes to see through. And just as a person can guide his eyes to see something or to steer away from seeing it, so can a person guide his own inner vision. A person can direct his thoughts to either be superficial or deep, and it is the same with vision – a person can guide it and direct what it will see.

Of course, if a person doesn't feel a connection in his soul to any of these concepts, this will all seem like a closed riddle to him. But with the more inner of a life a person lives, slowly he will be able to reveal deeper and subtler modes of vision. He will be able to uncover a detailed view (*ohr pnimi*) as well as a general view [*ohr makif*]. When he goes to a place where there are improper sights

and he doesn't want to see these sights, he will be able to see it all as nothing but a beam in front of him. He can see it all as one structure, and he won't focus on the details in front of him.

To summarize, there are two approaches in closing the eyes. One way is to simply close the eyes, and another way is to not see anything even when the eyes are open, and this is accomplished either through deep mental concentration on something (which prevents the eyes from staring at anything), or through gaining an all-inclusive perspective in which one can see all the details as one full structure, in one sweeping glance.

## 7. Focused Vision: Looking At The Dark

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It is written, "*Weep incessantly at night.*"<sup>50</sup> Why is the nighttime a more ideal time to cry, as opposed to the day? On a superficial level, it is because the nighttime is quieter (at least in previous generations) and more ideal for personal reflection. When a person is alone with himself and his thoughts are calm, he can be easily brought to tears. Even just being alone can easily bring a person to tears, for it is written, "*How is it that I weep, alone*" and soon after there is a verse, "*Weep incessantly at nights*", which implies that being alone can bring a person to mourn and weep.

There is also a more inner reason why nighttime is the more ideal time to be brought to tears. The sun's light accompanies the daytime, where nighttime is a time of darkness. The daytime is thus a time for sight, whereas the nighttime is a time for non-sight. By day, a person naturally can see, but at night, either a person does not see at all, or he can see unclearly. It would seem that if we cannot see at nighttime, there is nothing to see at night, and that there is nothing to gain from seeing the dark.

The eyes are the 'tools' of vision. Just as a person does not open his mouth while he is eating or when he is silent from talking, so it seems that our eyes do not open at a time when we cannot see, like when it is dark. Why, then, do our eyes need to remain open at nighttime? Certainly it is uncomfortable to shut our eyes all the time whenever it is dark, but that cannot be the complete reason for why our eyes are meant to stay open at night when we are in the dark. If we are in the dark, does it make a difference if we close our eyes or if we look at the dark, when we anyways cannot see anything?

But, in truth, there are two kinds of vision. As explained earlier, there is a mode of our vision which sees physicality, and there is a mode of vision in which we detach from physical vision. We can see physical sights during daytime. But at night, there is a [level of] detachment from seeing the physical. There are two different ways of how there is detachment from vision at night. In the dark, a person may close his eyes because there is nothing for him to see, and in not seeing, the physical sense of vision is nullified. But there is also a deeper way to nullify the vision: by staring at the dark.

What is there to see when looking at the dark, if we cannot see anything in the dark? But there is an *avodah* precisely to look at the dark. A person can sit in the dark and stare at the darkness.

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<sup>50</sup> *Eichah* 1:2

Let us explain this. When a person gets used to shutting his eyes, he learns how to nullify his vision. He gets himself used to the idea that the eyes are not always in a state of seeing. Indeed, Hashem has created the daytime for us to see and do action, and the nighttime is a time for sleep (at least for part of the night). By daytime, usually people do not close their eyes, unless they are going to sleep, but going to sleep by day is frowned upon by the Sages. Hashem created the nighttime for sleep. In deeper terms, Hashem created two modes for man – opened eyes, and closed eyes. The time to naturally open the eyes is by day, and the time to naturally close the eyes is by night, when going to sleep.

Thus, nullifying the natural vision is achieved through shutting the eyes, either through going to sleep, or through willfully shutting the eyes. Nullifying the vision is thus by closing off the source of the physical vision. The eyes are like a crack, a window, to the revelation of the *neshamah*; but the eyes are also capable of physical vision [the antithesis to the soul's spiritual vision]. When a person closes his eyes, he removes the physicality of his vision, for he cannot see physicality with his eyes closed. This is one kind of nullifying the vision – through closing the eyes.

Another way of nullifying the vision is through staring at the dark. Let us explain the advantage of using the method of looking at the dark, versus the method of closing the eyes.

Normally, a person keeps cycling between vision and closing the eyes, which is nullifying the vision on some level, because when the eyes are closed, a person does not see the material world in front of him. However, as soon as he opens his eyes, he is back to seeing materialism again, and therefore, even when he closes his eyes later, there is an imprint left on his soul from what he has seen, even when his eyes are closed. Thus, any nullification of vision attained through closing the eyes is an incomplete nullification, for it does not remove the imprints left from the sights one has seen.

If a person would be seeing this world for all 24 hours of the day, he wouldn't be able to disconnect from this material world, for "the eyes see, the heart desires, and the actions complete." Therefore Hashem created man in a way where his vision will not be constant, where he only sees by daytime, and at night, his eyes are closed and his vision ceases. But, while this is true, it is not enough to nullify physical vision, because in the end, a person opens his eyes again and he continues to see this material world, and the cycle repeats.

The spiritual benefits of closing the eyes are therefore only during the time where the eyes are closed, and it can only have a minimal spiritual effect on a person's vision when the eyes are open, which will not be enough to nullify one's physical vision and turn it spiritual.

Here is where the *avodah* of looking at the dark comes in. Looking at the dark is an additional stage of progress in nullifying the physical vision. It is a deeper way for a person to open his eyes and look, yet he isn't seeing a thing.

Let's explain the gain of this method. Usually when a person is in the dark, although he can still open his eyes and see, his vision is weak, so he cannot see anything in the dark. This trains the eyes to a mode of vision where a person is looking and yet he is not actually seeing anything.

Contrast this with the following. When a person is waiting at the bus stop and he sees the bus coming, his curiosity gets the better of him and he wishes to see the number on the bus, so before

the bus gets close, he scrutinizes his vision so that he can make out the number. This is a very focused kind of vision. Another example: a person is looking for a house with the address of 101, and he is passing by the houses, he concentrates carefully on the numbers of the houses, noticing that the numbers are descending, until he finds 101. This, too, is a very focused kind of vision.

But when a person is in the dark, there is no need for him to carefully scrutinize anything with his eyes. He just looks simply at what is in front of him, because there is nothing for him to see. Why, then, does he keep his eyes open in the dark? It is because it is uncomfortable to keep the eyes closed constantly. For example, when taking the public bus from Jerusalem to Tzfas, a person looks out the bus window and he keeps his eyes open, watching nothing but darkness go by (at least in previous times, when there wasn't traffic on the highways and there was nothing to see). He is not looking at anything specific, and he is just keeping his eyes open because it's uncomfortable otherwise. Since he is not consciously focusing on the darkness, he will not derive any spiritual gain from it.

The inner *avodah* of looking at the dark means that one concentrates on the dark with a focused kind of vision. As we explained earlier, there is an *avodah* to focus one's vision on the dot in the letter *beis* of the word *Beraishis*. Similarly, when a person is in the dark, there is an *avodah* to concentrate with the eyes and to try to focus on a certain point in the dark. Of course, he does not actually see this point. But although he cannot actually see this point, because he is in the dark, he can still focus his vision [and concentrate on a point in the darkness in front of him].

The *avodah* of looking at the dark, then, is essentially a way to use the power of vision and “not see” anything with it. If a person gets used to sitting in the dark and focuses his vision on some point in the darkness in front of him, with concentration, he will open a more inner faculty in his vision – he will reveal within himself an ability of being able to “see” how to “not see”.

Concerning idol worship, there is a verse, “*They have eyes, and they do not see*”.<sup>51</sup> As is well-known, there is a rule that for everything negative that exists in the side of evil, there is a parallel concept in the side of holiness. Just as in the side of evil there are idols, which have eyes that cannot see, so does this concept exist in the side of holiness, in which a person can have his eyes open and yet not see anything. A person has the inner ability to open his eyes and look at point in front of him, and yet not see anything in front of him.

As we are explaining here, this power is achieved through looking at the dark. If a person gets used to repeatedly sitting in the dark and focusing his vision on a point in front of him in the darkness, he trains his vision to be focused and yet not see anything.

This is an even higher kind of *avodah* than focusing on a dot [in the *beis* of *Beraishis*]. Why is the most superb kind of vision? It is because the deepest thing one can see is when one takes uses his power of vision to not “see” anything with it.

The eyes are the outer layer of the mind. The eyes are called *einayim* in Hebrew, similar to the term that described the mind's power of thought, which is *iyun*. The *sefarim hakedoshim* say that the reason for this similar terminology is because the eyes [vision] are a revelation of the power of thought [the mind]. The eyes are called the “kingdom of the mind.” However, “the purpose of

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51 *Tebillim* 115:5

knowledge is to know that we do not know.” A person has a mind which contains the power of *daas* (logical understanding), but the purpose of all knowledge is to “not” know. It is the same with vision – the purpose of seeing is to see a kind of sight in which we do “not see”.

Therefore, there is an *avodah* to strongly focus the vision and concentrate as much as one can on the darkness in front of him, and this trains one’s vision to get used to the mode of “not” seeing.

The depth behind this is because there is a verse, “*No man can see Me and live*”<sup>52</sup>, and this implies on a deeper level that if a person wants to reach *d’veykus*<sup>53</sup> with the Creator, he needs to go above the perspective of vision. Not only must he divest himself of physical vision (as we are now explaining) for this, but he must even divest himself of his [spiritual vision of] *neshamah!* Man has an inner *avodah* to reach a point where he does not see. If something can be seen, it is limited and it has an end to it, but the Endless (the *EinSof*) cannot be seen. Thus, the depth of concentrating on the dark is for a person to bring his vision to a point where it does not see.

The prophets, who are also called *chozim* (seers), saw visions and prophecies which pertain to the first 6,000 years of creation. [They saw their prophecies through a higher mode of vision.] In contrast, the prophecy of Mashiach will be on a level that is above vision. In our own personal *avodah*, this higher level of prophecy is expressed, to some degree and our own level, by taking our sense of sight and learning how to “not see” with it.

## Rectifying The Vision

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The concept of rectifying our sense of vision thus has two facets to it.

1) There is the concept of “*He closes his eyes from seeing evil*”, to avoid seeing any inappropriate sights (which belong in the category of the “three impure *kelipos* (husks)). Furthermore, one may close his eyes to avoid seeing the material world at all (which belongs in the category of “*kelipas nogah*”), for the Zohar says that even viewing this world causes a person to be drawn after physicality. There is also a level of rectification achieved just by simply closing the eyes.

2) There are also higher and subtler ways of closing the eyes, which we have elaborated upon here, in which a person learns how to see and “not” see: Either through seeing everything in front of you as one, undetailed structure; or, the higher level, by looking at the dark, training the eyes to see how to “not” see.

As we know, there are four colors contained in a person’s eye, but sight itself is viewed through the black pupil of the eye. Why is it this way? There is much depth to it. But with regards to our current topic, it is because seeing through the black part of the eye reveals the mode of vision in which a person sees from within darkness, as opposed to seeing amidst the light. (If we were meant to only see amidst light, we would see from the white part of the eye.)

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<sup>52</sup> *Shemos 33:20*

<sup>53</sup> *attachment*



It would seem that when “seeing amidst the darkness” means that a person is found in the dark and he can only see a little bit of light, and he tries to identify things in the dark, using the little light that he has. This World is compared to the nighttime. We are trying to find some illumination of light amidst all the darkness. When we consider the fact that we see through the black part of the eye, the superficial perspective towards this is because we are found in a world of darkness, and therefore we are looking for a light amidst all the darkness.

But there is a greater depth of why we see through the black part of the eye. It is because the root of our sight stems from seeing darkness, in which we “see” that we do “not see”. This does not mean to simply not see. It means that we are meant to bring our vision to a point where it does not see. This kind of “not seeing” is not the same thing as not being able to see something that is far away. Rather, it is a kind of sight in which a person sees that he does not see.

It is in the same vein of “The purpose of knowledge is to know that we do not know.” The level of “not” knowing does not simply mean an absence of knowledge. Rather, there is a deeper level of knowledge in which a person knows that he does not “know.” With vision as well, the deeper mode of vision is to see a kind of vision where we are not seeing anything. That is the concept behind looking at darkness. It is not simply an absence of sight – it is rather a kind of sight, of seeing darkness, where we see a kind of sight in which we do not see anything.

In the design of Creation, first there is evening, which is darkness, and then there is morning, the light. The Torah writes, “*And it was evening, and it was morning, one day.*” Why is this the order? We may answer to this that darkness represents the evil *kelipos*, the “husks” of the side of impurity, and there is a rule that “the shell precedes the fruit”, so perhaps darkness comes before the day because first there is impurity which precedes the holiness (of daytime). However, this cannot be reason – let us explain why.

Regarding the first day of Creation, the Torah does not say that it was “the first say”, but rather, “*And it was evening, and it was morning, one day.*” The Torah calls it “one day” rather than the “first” day. Rashi on this verse of the Torah cites the statement of Chazal that it was the day in which Hashem ruled alone, where he was One, in His infiniteness (*EinSof*). Therefore, there could not have been any existence of *kelipos* on the first day of Creation. The *kelipos* were only created after the first day, for on the first day, there was only one reality – the Infinite Light (*ohr EinSof*) of Hashem, which illuminate the world from one end to the other, which did not allow for any *kelipos*.

Therefore, we return to our question: Why does night precede the day?

We are currently in the era of the first 6,000 years of Creation, in which our perspective is that night must precede day – in other words, concealment always precedes revelation – and therefore, we must remove the concealment. As the Sages said, “If someone says “I toiled and I found, believe him”,<sup>54</sup> meaning that only after a person puts in the effort of trying to remove the barriers, the darkness, he will then find light. This is all, however, only from our current perspective. But there is a higher perspective which we can access. On the very first day of Creation, when Hashem made evening and day, the evening was not an evil kind of darkness, *chas v’shalom*, but a morning intertwined with evening, a way of seeing through darkness.

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54 Megillah 6b

We need to understand that when the Torah says that the day follows the night, this is not just for the purpose of knowledge, but to show us where the root of vision is. What difference does it make to us if the day comes after the night or not? From the fact that the Torah tells us that the evening preceded the night, we learn that this is not coincidental. It is to teach us that darkness must precede light, because the light is really found through darkness!

When the Torah says that evening preceded the day, this was not just to tell us the order of events. It was to show us that since darkness preceded light, all light is therefore contained in darkness. The meaning of this is that when you see, you are meant to see darkness. Just as a person sitting in a house sees a house, so is it with light: since light is found in darkness, a person sees darkness [even when he is looking at light].

Thus, there are two kinds of seeing. After Hashem made the separation between light and dark, we cannot see in the dark and we can only see in the light. But before Hashem made this separation between light and dark, Chazal teach that “the light and dark served together, in a mixture.” This refers to a deeper kind of vision, where a person can be in the light yet he sees darkness.

The *avodah* of looking at the dark is, on a deep level, a return to the first day of Creation. On the first day, there was only one thing alone – the “Individual” of the world. If a person looks at the light and all he sees is light, and if he cannot see anything in darkness, he cannot reach the Creator, because he has not yet handled the dark, and when he is in the light, all he can see is whatever he sees, but the Creator cannot be seen. But when a person gets used to looking at the dark, he can arrive at a state of being divested from physical vision, and then he can rise above the level of “*No man shall see Me and live.*”

Thus, the deep way of nullifying vision is to look at the dark.

## 8. Purifying The Vision Through Crying

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Since we mentioned earlier the verse of “*Weep incessantly at night*”, we will touch a little upon the idea of reaching inner understanding through the power of crying.

Tears purify the vision. Tears are like a *mikveh*, which a person immerses in and he becomes purified from any spiritual contamination. Tears are essentially the “*mikveh*” of the eyes. Tears divest one of physical vision, and they are a part of spiritual vision. If a person cries incessantly, at some point he will not be able to see, because the moisture in his eyes becomes dry through crying, leaving him temporarily blind.

Therefore, on a deep level, crying is a way to nullify the vision. Through incessant crying, a person can reveal a more inner point in his vision.

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## *06 / Seeing Through The Five Layers of the Soul*

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### Introduction: The Five Levels of Sight In The Soul

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The soul consists of five spiritual areas, which are called [in order of lowest level to highest and most spiritual level]: *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*. We are currently discussing the soul's sense of sight, and this really divides into five kinds of spiritual sight: seeing through the *Nefesh* part of the soul, seeing through the *Ruach* part of the soul, seeing through the *Neshamah* part of the soul, seeing through the *Chayah* part of the soul, and seeing through the *Yechidah*. We will speak about each of these now in detail, one by one.

### 1. Seeing Through "Nefesh"

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The "*Nefesh*" level of the soul is used to view the "container" of each thing in Creation, and the "container" of each thing is actually the "*oisiyos*" - the Hebrew letters of the *aleph beis* - from which all of Creation is made up of.

As the earlier sages taught, each thing in Creation is built from letters of the *aleph beis*. There is a well-known rule that the "container" of the higher realm is "light" of the realm beneath it. Therefore, on this lower realm, the letters of the *aleph beis* are a spiritual "light" to this world, but with regards to the higher realms, which is more spiritual than this world, the letters of the *aleph beis* are merely "containers". The 22 letters of the *aleph beis*, then, are essentially 22 "containers" to hold the spiritual light that enters them.

When are learning here of how to see spiritually, and we will begin from the first level, which is to see from the "*Nefesh*" part of the soul. Seeing from the "*Nefesh*", as we have begun to explain, is to see the letters of the *aleph beis* in something. When it comes to see the spiritual, seeing from the letters of the *aleph beis* is how we see from the *Nefesh*, for the letters of the *aleph beis* are the "containers" for the spiritual, and the *Nefesh* is the "container" of the soul.

All of Creation is built upon the secret which the Zohar states: "He looked into the Torah and created the world."<sup>55</sup> This is understood based upon another statement of the Sages: "Betzael knew how to combine together letters [of the *aleph beis*] which heaven and earth were created from."<sup>56</sup> The actual building of something is its "*Nefesh*" aspect which upkeeps its existence, and this is referring to the letters of the *aleph beis* which are empowering each thing in Creation. Thus, there is an *avodah* to see from the "*Nefesh*" part of the soul, which is to see the letters of the *aleph beis* in something.

We will explain. The ability to see the letters of the *aleph beis* in something divides into several kinds of sight, starting from the lowest level, of seeing it on a physical level, and into more inner

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<sup>55</sup> Zohar Shemos 161a

<sup>56</sup> Berachos 55a

levels. Seeing the letters of the *aleph beis* on a physical level means, simply, to look at these letters. This is referring specifically to seeing the letters as they appear on a *Sefer Torah*, *tefillin*, and *mezuzah*. The Hebrew letters in something is its “*Nefesh*” aspect, and when one views them, he is essentially seeing the spiritual light of “*Nefesh*”.

There is a well-known saying, “Seeing the letters [of the *aleph beis*] makes one wise.” The meaning of this is that the Hebrew letters contain spiritual illumination, so when one stares at the letters, he draws forth holiness from them.

For this reason, there were many who were very careful to only learn Torah from *sefarim* which were written with Hebrew letters as they appear in a *Sefer Torah*. In *halachah* as well, there are opinions who forbid bringing in any material with Hebrew letters into a place with a foul odor, such as an established lavatory and the like, if they are written in *ksav ashuris*, (the way that Hebrew letters look in a *Sefer Torah*), even if the words are not describing *divrei kedushah* (holy matters of Torah). There were also those who were careful not to learn from any *sefarim* which were not printed by *tzaddikim*, because then the Hebrew letters in such *sefarim* were lacking in their holiness.

Thus, looking at *oisiyos* (Hebrew letters as they appear in a *Sefer Torah*) is the spiritual ability of sight that is viewed from the “*Nefesh*” area of the soul. One may access this view either through looking at a letter by itself, or by looking at a complete word.

An additional aspect of this concept is mentioned in *Sefer Yetzirah*, which describes the concept of *tziruf oisiyos*, combining the letters of the *aleph beis*, as well as counting the numerical value of the *oisiyos*, as well as switching the letters for other letters. One can see a combination of different spiritual properties when viewing more than one Hebrew letter. To give an example from our physical world, in a cup of coffee, we may add water and sugar, and the drink becomes an integrated combination of the properties of coffee, water, and sugar. In the same vein, different letters of the *aleph beis* combined together will mean a certain integration of spiritual properties.

On a deeper level, even an individual letter of the *aleph beis* (called an “*os*”) contains several spiritual properties, for there are several dimensions in the letter: length, width, and depth. Each Hebrew letter contains all of these dimensions, so each Hebrew letter is really a combination of different spiritual properties. Thus, simply looking at Hebrew letters [as they appear in a *Sefer Torah*], especially when done with focused concentration, provides a person with the spiritual vision of “*Nefesh*”.

There are many layers contained within this *avodah* of looking at *oisiyos*. We have so far mentioned the concepts of looking at the combination of Hebrew letters and words. There is also a concept of rearranging the letters of the names of Hashem, which include the rearrangement of the letters in the name of *havayah* and in the name of *adnus*, and these combinations are printed in the *Siddur*. The writings of *Kaballah* are filled with these combinations of letters, describing either the designs of any the spiritual realms, or of the Hebrew letters, or of the numerical value of the Hebrew letters. Much of this is explained in detail in the writings of the Arizal, as well as in writings that preceded the Arizal, and in those who came after him.

There is also a concept which is not mentioned that much in the writings of the Arizal, and that is the *avodah* to study the shape of the letters. This is mentioned in the *sefarim* of Rav Abulefia, which were discovered more recently.

This is a lengthy topic itself. So far, we have mentioned the general aspects of the *avodah* in seeing Hebrew letters: seeing a letter individually, seeing the combination of letters, and seeing the shapes of the letters. An additional aspect we mentioned, which is involved in seeing Hebrew letters, is to see the numerical value of the letters. Each Hebrew letter has its own corresponding number. There are many different meanings to each of these numbers. When a Hebrew letter is translated into its numerical value, this is a kind of revelation of the spiritual light contained in that letter. The letter itself is the “container”, and its numerical value is the spiritual illumination of the letter.

Thus, there were many who delved into the study of *gematria* (numerical value of Hebrew letters), such as the *sefer Baal HaTurim*, a commentary on the Torah, which is mostly composed of identifying *gematria*. Although the Sages said of *gematria* that it is merely “dessert for wisdom”<sup>57</sup> [implying that it is a secondary kind of Torah study which should not become the primary form of Torah study], still, this “dessert” is certainly a part of Torah wisdom. Thus, studying the numerical value of the Hebrew letters is a kind of study which brings spiritual illumination.

Within this as well, there are other additional aspects to study. There is a system in which each of the Hebrew letters corresponds to another letter, such as *atbas* *”h* (אתב”ש) and *alba* *”m* (אלב”ם). There is an entire array of different possibilities of switching Hebrew letters with each other. (Here we will not delve into all of the possibilities, because it is a complete study in and of itself.)

In summary, there is an *avodah* to see the Hebrew letters individually, to see the combinations of different letters and words, to study their shapes, their numerical value, and their design, as mentioned in early writings such as *Sefer HaKaneh*, and in others. We have explained here in general terms of how the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul corresponds to the Hebrew letters of the *aleph beis*, with all their details, as taught to us by our earlier Sages. We have explained this entire topic here only very briefly.

## 2. Seeing Through Ruach

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The “*Ruach*” level of the soul refers to inspiration. *Ruach* also means wind. The wind moves things, but it cannot build anything. It is the same with inspiration. A person may be inspired by something, but inspiration does not build anything. Inspiration, at best, can spur a person on to make a decision to build himself, but inspiration by itself cannot build a person on its own. At best, inspiration awakens a person.

It is explained in *sefarim hakedoshim*, in the sefarim of the Baal Shem Tov and in the name of the Chofetz Chaim, that whenever a person sees a world event or natural disaster, whether it is something in the physical world or in his own personal event, he should see how it can serve as an awakening to serve Hashem. The Rambam<sup>58</sup> writes that the purpose of a challenging time is to awaken a person to do *teshuvah*. This does not only include trying times. Any time, any situation, and any change, is a form of spiritual awakening, to awaken a person to serve his Creator.

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<sup>57</sup> Avos 3

<sup>58</sup> Rambam Hilchos Taanis 1:1

This is what it means to see from the “*Ruach*” part of the soul: in whatever a person sees, he learns from it a lesson, of how he can be awakened to improve in his service to the Creator. For example, if a person sees a person die, he can be awakened to reflect on the fact that a person’s life eventually comes to an end, and that we should utilize our time to its fullest. If a person sees that another person has won the lottery, he should remind himself that the true wealth and happiness is found in the internal, not in the external. There are countless examples of this idea.

It is possible that a certain event will happen, and ten people will react to it differently, each of them being inspired in a different way. This is because each soul is designed differently and will have different reactions and perspectives towards the same situation. But in any case, the concept stays the same – that a person can learn how to see any event as a form of spiritual awakening, to improve in his service to the Creator. In summary, seeing from the “*Ruach*” is to see the inspiration in something.

### 3. Seeing through Neshamah

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Seeing through the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul means to see the “*neshamah*” [the soul] of each thing. How can we see the *neshamah* in each thing? If a person has reached a high spiritual level in which he can see *neshamos*, this part is very clear to him. But if a person is still at the level of physical vision, how can he know what it means to see the *neshamah* in something? How can he awaken within himself the ability to see from the *neshamah*?

The root of all *neshamos* [Divine souls of the Jewish people] is in the *Kisei HaKavod*, the divine “Throne of Glory”. The *neshamah* itself is called *kavod*, “glory”, for, there is a verse “*So that glory will sing to You and not be silent*”,<sup>59</sup> and the Vilna Gaon explains that the word “glory” (*kavod*) in this means the *neshamah*. Hashem created the entire world to honor Him, for it is written, “*All has been called in My Name, and for My honor I created, fashioned and also made it.*”<sup>60</sup> Therefore, when a person sees how each thing in Creation contains the *kavod*/glory of Hashem, he sees the *neshamah* in each thing.

If a person looks around at each thing in Creation and tries to see how the “glory of Hashem” is revealed in each thing, he is revealing the *neshamah* in each thing. A person can look at a table, a chair, a building, or a *Sefer Torah*, and see how each of these things reveals the “glory of Hashem”. When a person identifies each thing in Creation as being a vehicle that serves to reveal the glory of Hashem, he is seeing through the *neshamah*, which is rooted in the *Kisei HaKavod*, and that is why the *neshamah* is called “*kavod*”, for its entire purpose is to see the true *kavod* in each thing. When a person trains himself to seeing this perspective towards Creation, he reveals his *neshamah*.

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<sup>59</sup> *Tehillim* 30:13

<sup>60</sup> *Yeshayahu* 43:7

## 4. Seeing through "Chayah"

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Seeing through the "*Chayah*" level of the soul is described in many *sefarim* in the name of the Baal Shem Tov as the *avodah* of seeing the source of vitality that is revitalizing (*mechayeh*) each thing. (There are similar applications of this concept found as well in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*). First a person needs to believe, and then feel, that each thing is empowered through a source that gives it vitality. Meaning, a person should not view anything in Creation as being the same creation as the moment before. Rather, there is a renewal of each thing in Creation every moment, since each thing is being empowered by a source of energy.

When we view Creation superficially with our physical eyes, we can see how there are things in Creation which cease and which go lost, either naturally or because of natural disasters. But if we view Creation from the "*Chayah*" level of the soul, we are focusing on the constant renewal that takes place in Creation, as we say every day in the morning prayers, "*He renews, in His goodness every day the act of Creation.*" Every moment (throughout all 1,088 parts that are in each hour), Hashem is renewing the entire Creation. Meaning, there is a Source of vitality that is renewing each thing in Creation every moment. [Thus, when you become aware of the constant revitalization of Creation, you are viewing Creation through the *Chayah*].

In the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we state, "*You are trustworthy to revive the dead.*" Although *techiyas hameisim* (the resurrection of the dead) is an event of the future, we state "*You are trustworthy to revive the dead,*" which is in the present tense, implying that Hashem is reviving the dead even in the present moment. Thus, there are two kinds of *techiyas hameisim* – one that will take place in the future, and one that takes place each day.

If a person mentally reflects on this concept that all of Creation is being renewed every moment, and he connects to this concept with his heart, he receives the ability to see from the *Chayah* level of the soul. Seeing through the *Chayah* thus means to see the renewed vitality of Creation which takes place every moment. Understandably, this is an experience of the soul, for *chiyus* (vitality) is something that is experienced.

As a result of contemplating this concept, a person will see an entirely different perspective towards the creation in front of him. Without the view of the *Chayah*, the events of life have less meaning to them. A person may go through a predicament or a troubling time, and he will react superficially to it, without giving it meaning. A person may suffer the loss of a child, G-d forbid, and he is an average person with a superficial perspective, he will feel simply, "I don't have my child anymore". But if someone is aware of the constant *techiyas hameisim* that takes place in Creation [the view of the *Chayah*], he will actually feel that every moment, his child can get up again.

That is the kind of perspective that can result from feeling and being aware to the concept of the constant revitalization of Creation that takes place every moment, and there are many other resulting perspectives as well which it may produce, but it all begins from feeling this constant renewal in Creation. One can feel that at any moment, he may die, and he can also feel that any moment, he is renewed.

*Tzaddikim* were able to feel that at any given moment, they might pass on to the World of Truth. They didn't just firmly fix in their minds that every person eventually dies. We all know that

everyone dies, but this knowledge is superficial and doesn't change us. When a person reaches the view from the *Chayah*, he feels that there is new *chiyus* (vitality) each moment, as in the verse, “*And the chayos (angels) run and retreat.*”<sup>61</sup> It is to receive renewed vitality, then the cessation of all vitality, then to feel again the renewal of vitality, then cessation of vitality, and to keep repeating the cycle.

If a person deeply connects himself to this concept [through contemplating it and then feeling it], he becomes tangibly aware that there is a “death” to all of Creation each moment, and this is just knowledge to him, but an actual perspective which he views Creation with. He will feel how there is a constant renewal in Creation, and how it all ceases the next moment.

There is partial cessation in Creation [death] and there is also the general cessation [of all of Creation]. A person who can feel the constant cessation that takes place each moment can also easily be aware of death. The *Orchos Chaim L'Rosh* states, “Place the day of death opposite your eyes.” This does not mean to simply remember that there is death, nor does it mean to become morbid (though there is definitely some place for contemplating death if one can handle it emotionally). Rather, it means to become aware of the perspective that a person can experience the constant cycle of renewal and cessation of Creation.

One can feel each moment that there is a Source that is renewing Creation each moment, and then he can become aware that he receives *chiyus*/vitality from this, and then he can easily feel the *chiyus* being taken away from him – and he thereby connects himself to the Source of all vitality and life.

There is a lengthy *avodah* brought in the *sefarim* of Reb Abulefia, regarding breathing, where one focuses and becomes aware of his inhale and exhale. (As is the way of the world, the gentiles have taken this from the works of the Sages of Yisrael, but it has really been described first in the *sefarim* of Reb Abulefia as a lengthy form of *avodah* in which a person focuses and becomes aware of his inhale and exhale.)

On a superficial level, this *avodah* is seen as a relaxation technique. Anyone can feel, upon becoming clearly and consciously aware of the breath, that it is calming. When you become aware of the inhale and the exhale, it provides you with a sense of orderliness to your breathing, and this itself is calming, for a person cannot be calm when he is unfocused and internally scattered [and therefore, the way to become calm is to provide a sense of inner orderliness]. This is the external and superficial aspect of breathing, and it is this aspect practiced by those who meditate on their breathing.

But this external act of focusing on the breathing is not the “*Chayah*” level of the soul in which becomes aware that he is constantly receiving renewed vitality. At best, getting used to these breathing exercises can be a step of training in order to reach the perspective of the *Chayah* – as we will now explain.

The inner aspect of breathing [the *avodah* described by Rav Abulefia] is that when a person is inhaling, he feels the Source of the breath, meaning that he feels that he is breathing in *chiyus* (vitality) from the Source of this *chiyus*; and, upon exhaling, he feels that his *chiyus* is leaving him, feeling that this loss of *chiyus* is like death.

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61 *Yechezkel 1:14*



Thus, building the “*Chayah*” level of the soul is to actually feel the Source of all vitality; to feel the renewal and cessation of all life. It is not just an external act of focusing on the inhale and exhale. It is a more inner experience of the breathing. At the inhale, the avodah is for a person to feel the Source of the life that is being given to him as he breathes in, and upon exhaling, the person feels that he is dead, that he has returned his vitality to its Source. One then repeats the cycle. That is how a person can receive life-giving energy from becoming consciously aware of his breathing.

People love to drink water from a spring, “mineral water”, as opposed to drinking water from the sink. What is the reason for this? It is really because people can feel how spring water is “living water”, water straight from the source. In the soul as well, there is also an inner wellspring of “living water”, which is the Source of all vitality. When one reaches that source, he will always find himself in that inner wellspring, and he will feel that it is the Source of all his vitality, for he will feel each moment that there is a constant cessation and renewal to his life, as in the verse, “*And the Chayos run and retreat.*” There one can feel the constant cycle of life, death, life, death.

## 5. Seeing through “*Yechidah*”

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The “*Yechidah*” part of the soul can only see things in terms of oneness. It is called “*Yechidah*” because it is the tool through which a person can see the “*Yachid*” (Individual One) of the world, so to speak.

Although it is impossible to see the actual essence of Hashem - being that Hashem has no physical properties and there is nothing physical at all that He can resemble [as the Rambam codifies in the 13 principles of belief in G-d], and He cannot be physically seen at all - still, the soul can see His Infinite Light (the *ohr EinSof*). Seeing the Infinite Light is essentially what it means to see through our *Yechidah*.

Previously, we explained how one sees through the soul levels of the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah* and *Chayah*. These are all limited kinds of vision. Although there is much depth in each of these kinds of vision, they are ultimately limited in their view. By contrast, the view from the *Yechidah* of the soul is the tool to get to the *Yachid* of the world, Hashem, and therefore, the *Yechidah* only sees one thing: the light of the Infinite.

The Infinite Light, which a person can see [through the soul], at first can be imagined with the regular, external kind of imagination that we are familiar with, where a person imagines the Infinite Light filling all of existence. (This will be further explained in the next chapter). After that, a person can see the actual Infinite Light; the Ramchal describes this in *Sefer Mareh HaNevuah*, that a prophet would see the endless light of Hashem filling everything. However, this was a limited kind of view, because it makes use of the imagination, which is limited. Although a prophet had a purified kind of imagination which was able to see very far, imagination is still a human perception, so its view is limited.

Thus, seeing through the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah* and *Chayah* are limited kinds of vision, whereas the vision of the *Yechidah* sees the light of the Infinite, which is unlimited.

Seeing through the *Yechidah* can be accessed via two different approaches. One way, as we mentioned, is through a purified kind of imagination. However, we explained earlier that this is dangerous to use, because a person might get carried away with his imagination and imagine things that don't exist.

Another way, which is the inner way, is that a person receives the light of the Infinite from within, and then he can see the actual light of the Infinite. This is the true ability of sight which is viewed from the "*Yechidah*" part of the soul.

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## *07 / Seeing The Infinite*

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### I. Connecting Oneself to the “Ohr EinSof” (The “Infinite Light”) of Hashem

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In the previous chapters, we explained the details of the sense of sight in the soul, which included seeing the physical [in a more spiritual way], as well as non-sight, which also included nullifying the sense of sight. Thus, we have so far traversed two general steps. In the first step, we learned how to view “*yeish*” (material), in which we attempt to reveal the spiritual through our physical sense of sight. The second step was to turn our vision into “*ayin*”, “nothingness”, in which we negate our physical vision through various means, as we explained at length in the previous chapters.

We will now come to explain, with the help of Hashem, the third step, which is: to see the Infinite (the “*EinSof*”).

The root of this concept is brought in the words of the holy Baal Shem Tov, who wrote that man has the task to picture himself as being surrounded by Hashem’s endlessness, to feel that he is within it, and surrounded by it.

We will explain the implication of these words. When we discussed the sense of sight of the soul, we explained that there is physical sight as well as visualization, which makes use of the imagination. When we come to explain about the concept of seeing the *EinSof*, however, there is clearly no way to see it with our physical eyes. It is experienced solely through using our power of imagination, in which we can conceptualize it.

We already explained at length in previous chapters that we can “see” through our imagination, but it is limited, because it is still within the limits of physicality. We explained all kinds of visualizations that are limited kinds of vision: visualizing the *Beis HaMikdash*, or Menorah lights, or anything holy. We also explained how to visualize the upper realms, such as what it’s like to be standing in the Heavenly court, what it’s like to be in *Gehinnom*, what it’s like to sing with the angels. (The structure of the upper realms is described in *Sefer Eitz Chaim*, and we explained how to visualize them).

However, all of these visions are seen through imagination, which can only see limited visions. Although the upper realms are vast, at some point, there is an end to them. There is an end to all creations, including the upper realms. So everything in Creation has its end, and thus everything in Creation is limited.

The Baal Shem Tov revealed a new depth which adds a whole new dimension to anything we have explained until now.

Until now, we explained how to see limited kinds of visions, whether it was physical vision or whether it was through imagination, or whether it was non-vision. These were all modes of seeing limited things. Even seeing darkness is seeing something limited, because darkness is also limited, being that it is a creation.

The Baal Shem Tov revealed that it is man's task to use his sense of sight to see the light of the Infinite (the *ohr EinSof*). It is simple and clear to any sensible person that this does not refer to seeing with our physical eyes, because no one can see it with their physical eyes. What the Baal Shem Tov meant, then, was that in order to see the light of the Infinite, one can use his power of imagination.

However, it is a different kind of imagination than we discussed in the past. Previously, we discussed how our imagination sees limited kinds of vision. Now we will learn about a higher kind of imagination: to imagine that one is surrounded by the light of Hashem's endlessness, and that one is within it.

It is written in our mystical teachings that before Creation, there was nothing except for Hashem's Endlessness (the *EinSof*). Hashem emptied out a space to make way for Creation, and then He filled the hole with the Creation. But that original endless light still exists, and it continues to surround and fill every realm. The Arizal describes it in these metaphorical terms, and it is not to be understood so literally. (Elsewhere we explain this topic, and here is not the place to delve into these matters.)

The depth of the Baal Shem Tov's words is that a person can take his power of vision and use it to see the Infinite Light. First we will explain the general idea of this: how we can use his vision to see the Infinite Light.

Any of the kinds of vision we have explained until now were all explaining limited kinds of vision. The Baal Shem Tov revealed a very important concept that has infinite value. It is for a person to use the imagination to envision the light of the *EinSof* enveloping all of your surroundings, and that you are standing in its center. The depth of his words is that man can ascend from this limited realm into the realms of the unlimited – to the light of the *EinSof*. It is for one to envision - using the power of the imagination - that the light of the *EinSof* is being shined onto him.

Compare this to a person who climbs into a barrel of oil; after he emerges, much of the residue is sticking to him. Or, a person who submerges himself in water and then climbs out of the water; although much of the water is now gone, he is still very much wet from the water, for it continues to cling to him.

When a person imagines the light of the *EinSof* surrounding him, and that he is within it, this is not an issue of physics, such as where the *EinSof* is exactly, and how close or distant the person is to it. It is rather a perspective of the soul: "This reality, the reality of the *ohr EinSof*, is surrounding me, and I am within it, thus I am inside the *EinSof*; I am connected to it."

## 2. Nullifying Oneself To The Infinite Light

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Now we will proceed to discuss a deeper and subtler concept of the *avodah* in seeing the *EinSof*.

In the beginning of sefer *Tzetil Koton*, it is explained that when a person has time, he should fulfill the *mitzvah* of sanctifying his life in honor of the Name of Hashem, by visualizing himself jumping into a fire in order to die in sanctification of Hashem's Name. However, the author of

*Tzetil Koton* cautions that one must be earnest when he does so, for Hashem knows what his real intentions are; the person must sincerely be ready to do this, just as many Jews did so in the past.

We will use the words of *Tzetil Koton* as a parable to the concept we are currently discussing. One can imagine a fire in front of him and that he is jumping into it, and he knows that doing so will mean death. (Although Avraham Avinu merited to be saved when he jumped into the fire, and so did Chananya and Mishael and Azarya, this was a miracle, and this does not happen to every Jew. Most Jews who jumped into a fire to sanctify Hashem's Name gave up their lives in doing so). When one is mentally preparing himself to jump into the fire, he should not think like Haran did, who jumped into the fire *hoping* to be saved. Rather, one has to mentally be prepared that *he will die* if he jumps into the fire, with an acceptance.

In the same vein, let us apply this idea to the concept explained by the Baal Shem Tov, of imagining that one is within the light of the *EinSof*. This is a different kind of soul vision than what was discussed until now, because it involves submitting my "I", which by essence is limited, to the realm of the unlimited. Part of the vision here involves the limited – my "I" – and part of the vision involves the unlimited, which is the *EinSof*. But although I am limited, I can still receive a partial degree of the light of the *EinSof*. It is a way to leave all limited visions, both physical and spiritual, and ascend into a new mode, the light of the *EinSof*.

However, one cannot actually envision the *ohr EinSof*. One can envision that he is merely *surrounded* by it, and that his limited "I" is *within* it. So this is not yet a total level of transcending the limits, because ultimately, our "I" is involved. Nevertheless, the experience of this visualization does provide us with a partial degree of entering the unlimited, because it is involving the light of the *EinSof*.

Before we proceed to the next step, we will first summarize the first two steps. We must go in order. The first step is to use the limited kinds of vision of our soul, which was explained in previous chapters. The next step is the step we have described so far in this chapter, the words of the Baal Shem Tov that a person can envision the light of the *EinSof* surrounding him and that he is in its center. So far, the visions are still limited.

### 3. The Third Step: Nothing But The "EinSof" Alone

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The third step is for one to envision nothing else except the light of the *EinSof* itself, without wondering how the "I" is involved with it.

In order to conceptualize this, let us return to the words of the *Tzetil Koton* in which one should imagine throwing himself into a fire in order to die *al kiddush Hashem*. When one jumps into the fire, it is because he is nullified to Hashem, for Hashem is everything. The person recognizes that he is nothing and thus subordinates his entire being to Hashem. So too, the light of the *EinSof* fills all of existence, and every Jew's soul is a spark of that endlessness [and is therefore nullified to it].

In the second stage, a person is receiving the light of the *EinSof*, but he is still remaining within his limits. He is below the *EinSof*, for he is limited, while the *EinSof* is the unlimited; but the *EinSof* can be drawn onto him. The 'above' realm can be shined onto the 'lower' realm and illuminate it.

Compare this to a father teaching his son, who expands his child's knowledge; or a teacher with his student. Although the child and the student are still remaining at their level, their understanding is being expanded, as they are taught.

But if we want to conceptualize the third stage, in which one is totally nullified to the *EinSof*, take the parable further: Imagine if the father teaches his son how to be a father, or if the teacher would teach the student in a way that will allow the student to one day be a teacher. Here, the father or the teacher is not merely trying to expand the knowledge of the child or student – he is trying to elevate the status of the child or student, to bring him higher.

## [Summary of the Three Steps of Seeing the Infinite]

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To summarize the *avodah* of seeing the *EinSof*:

The first step is to envision that one is within the light of the *EinSof*. In this stage, we want to expand our spiritual vision. We are still remaining within the limits of our “I” in this stage.

The second stage is to take this further and apply the words of *Tzetil Koton*, which is to envision oneself jumping into a fire in sanctification of Hashem's Name; to nullify oneself to the *EinSof*.

It is now clearer how we can ascend to the third stage: envisioning the light of the *EinSof* alone. Here, one does not envision how it will relate to him, which was the first step, nor does he think that he is giving himself up to it, which is the second stage. There are no thoughts about the self in the third stage. It is to imagine the *EinSof* alone.

## [The Final Level of Seeing the Infinite: Non-Imaginative Recognition]

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This third stage is not the end of this *avodah*, though. The end of this *avodah* would be to recognize the light of the *EinSof* even without even imagining it. We have explained it here as the final stage in developing the soul's vision, but of course, it is not the end of our *avodah*. We will stop at this point, for the purposes of the current discussion.

The end of our *avodah* is when one bonds with the Creator within himself, when it is not done through any means of spiritual vision or through refined imagination. It is a recognition from the *neshamah* of being aware of the Creator.

We have explained here the three stages that are within the level described in the words of the Baal Shem Tov [on seeing the light of the *EinSof*], which is part of our discussion on developing the spiritual sense of sight.

## 4. In Conclusion

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[To summarize what we have been through thus far]:

In the beginning of this *sefer* (in the end of Chapter Two), we explained the general path that we are taking throughout this *sefer*, the system of the Baal Shem Tov, in which there are three levels: *Olamos* (Realms), *Neshamos* (Soul), and *Elokus* (G-dliness). It was explained that *Elokus* refers to *keilim* (“vessels”), *Neshamos* refers to *oros* (“light”), and *Elokus* refers to the *EinSof*, the “Endlessness”.

We have explained how to develop the spiritual sense of sight, in the order of “vessels”, then “light”, and then “G-dliness.” We need all three levels in order to fully develop the soul’s sense of sight. We first explained “*yeish*”-vision [seeing the spiritual in the physical] and then we explained “*ayin*”- vision [negating our physical vision and thereby turning our vision spiritual], and the step after that was to reach the light of the *EinSof*.

If we want to fully develop our soul’s sense of sight, it first needs to go through the stages of *Olamos*/vessels, then *Neshamos*/light, and then *Elokus*/G-dliness. As we explained, this means that one first has to reveal his soul, then to reveal his soul’s bond with the Creator, and then to reveal the Infinite.

We have explained all of these steps with regards to our soul’s sense of sight. All of these stages will have to be explained as well when it comes to the other senses of the soul, which we will hopefully get to, with Hashem’s help. We have seen that there is physical sight and there is spiritual sight. Upon revealing the soul, a person uncovers his spiritual sight.

Higher than this level is to reveal the bond with the Creator through using spiritual vision, as we explained in the words of the Baal Shem Tov. The first stage of this was to bond with the Creator, for it included imagining oneself within the light of the Infinite and bonding with it. The second stage of it described the level of *Elokus*: to visualize only the *EinSof* alone. It is to envision *havayah* (reality) itself. Of course, the *EinSof* cannot actually be seen, *chas v’shalom*. It is all being experienced and envisioned through the power of imagination.

To conclude, we have seen how we can use the sense of sight throughout all the stages of *hisbodedus*: Through physical vision, then through spiritual vision of the soul [*yeish*] then through the negation of vision [*ayin*], and then through seeing *Elokus* (G-dliness).

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## *08 / Introduction To The Power of Thought*

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### 1. The Connection Between Sight and Thought

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The bodily senses are not disparate from each other; they are interrelated. Therefore, whenever we analyze a particular sense, we always meet up with other senses that inevitably are intertwined with it.

The four senses all work in tandem with each other. We have learned that the sense of sight, as well as seeing through the thoughts – via the imagination - is connected with the power to use our mind for analytical purposes. If you reflect, you can notice that sight is connected with analytical thought; they are really one matter.

So before we continue to explain *hisbodedus* through using the senses, we will first learn about the inner essence of the power of sight, which is the power to analyze (*iyun*). It is also known as *machshavah* (thought). As we have done in the past, we will try to take each sense and see how we do *hisbodedus* through them, beginning from the lower stages and progressing higher, until we arrive at the highest point, which is to arrive at revealing the very essence of the soul (*havayah*).

We will begin by learning about the power of thought. Physical sight and mental visualization are interconnected matters, as we have seen in the past; therefore, we will begin with the point in how they are connected, and then we will focus on the power of thought alone.

### 2. Seeing The Wisdom In Each Thing

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In Chapter Six, we explored the “*Chayah*” dimension of the sense of sight. We will now add on another point to that topic. Rebbi Nachman of Breslav said, “A Jew needs to see the *seichel* (intellect) that is found in each thing.”<sup>62</sup> A person can see the essence of something, or he can see how something awakens him to serve the Creator, or he can see how the glory of Hashem is somehow revealed through it. But higher than any of these perceptions is for one to see the *seichel* intellect that is in something. It is written, “*All of Your creations, You made with wisdom.*”<sup>63</sup> The *Chayah* point in the soul represents *chochmah*, wisdom. “*Wisdom sustains its owner.*”<sup>64</sup> A Jew must see the “*seichel*” in something - meaning, he must learn how to see the wisdom that is in each thing.

What is the *seichel*, or the *chochmah*, that is hidden in each thing?

Understandably, to see the *seichel* in each thing is the very depth of learning the holy Torah. In each thing in Creation, there are many ways to see the *seichel* contained in it. There are the natural properties of each thing, its root, its effects, etc. These are explained in the wisdom of the *Kaballah*.

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<sup>62</sup> *Likutei Moharan: Torah: 1*

<sup>63</sup> *Tehillim 104:24*

<sup>64</sup> *Koheles 7:12*



But as a general outline, a person needs to see the *seichel* of each thing, and this refers to tracing everything back to its root element. There are four elements in Creation, as well as four realms, and each of these has its various effects. This is the wisdom itself - but the question is, how to apply that wisdom.

A person can know all of this wisdom, yet he does not see how it relates to reality. “A Jew has to see *seichel* in each thing”, meaning, there is an *avodah* to connect all of our knowledge and perceptions, to the reality in front of us. We need to see how all the wisdom we learn is actually manifest in the reality in front of us, as opposed to just ‘knowing’ that there is wisdom and not knowing how to connect it to reality.

In a cup of water, the cup is the container for the water, and the water is what we pour into this container. In the same vein, all of Creation are “containers” that hold wisdom. Each thing Hashem has made in Creation is a container that reveals *chochmah*/wisdom. Going back to the parable of the cup of water, when a person is about to drink the cup of water, he first looks to see if there is water in the cup. So too, all creations are a container to hold wisdom, and man needs to see not only the container in each creation, but to also see the *seichel* contained in each creation.

When one sees the *seichel*/intellect (or *chochmah*/wisdom) contained in each thing, he is revealing the “*Chayah*” part of the soul. A person who is found at the “*Chayah*” level will naturally see the wisdom in things. To illustrate, Reb Yisrael Salanter famously said that when a shoemaker walks in the street, he will see shoes, and a carpenter will see windows. Each craftsman will see his craft wherever he goes. In this same vein, a person who is at the “*Chayah*” level of the soul will look at each thing and focus on the wisdom contained in it.

There are a few individuals in every generation who see everything in terms of wisdom. Everyone else will see the same thing, but only those individuals who are at the *Chayah* level of the soul will see it in terms of wisdom, and they will not even have to reflect deeply in order to find it, because it is their natural way of thinking. Such individuals have revealed their *Chayah* level of the soul and they live with it. However, if a person has not yet uncovered the *Chayah* level of his soul and he wants to awaken it, he has the opposite task. He needs to first consciously reflect on the wisdom found in each thing, and from this inner awareness, he can eventually expose the *Chayah* level of the soul through this kind of reflecting.

Any time a person reflects into the wisdom of each thing, it is a tiny spark of revelation of the *Chayah*, but if this reflecting is not done in an orderly and natural manner, it is still far from revealing the *Chayah* level of the soul.

### 3. Chayah – An Enveloping Light Surrounding The Person

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It is explained in earlier works of our Sages that the *Nefesh* part of the soul is located in the liver, the *Ruach* is in the heart, and the *Neshamah* is in the brain. From those organs in the body, these parts of the soul extend into the rest of the body. But the higher parts of the soul, the *Chayah* and the *Yechidah*, are spiritual lights that surround a person (*ohr makif*), and they are also called “all-inclusive light” (*ohr kolel*).

The implication of *ohr makif ohr kolel* is that these spiritual lights are undivided. They are applicable to both the *Chayah* and *Yechidah* levels of the soul, but there are differences between the *Chayah* level and the *Yechidah* level. In the *Yechidah* level, there is no differentiation of this light at all, while in the *Chayah* level, there is some degree of differentiation, relatively speaking. But on a general note, the *Chayah* and *Yechidah* are called “undivided” spiritual lights, because since they surround the person, they cannot become divided.

In the levels of *Nefesh* (viewing the Hebrew letters in something), *Ruach* (seeing the inspiration in something) and *Neshamah* (seeing the glory of Hashem in something), these are all divided, partial views. But in the level of *Chayah*, there is all-inclusiveness, which is the implication of “*All of them, You made with wisdom.*”

#### 4. Constant Thought – The Way To Reveal The “Chayah” Level of the Soul

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It has been explained here that the *Chayah* level of the soul corresponds to *chochmah*, wisdom. Therefore, in order for a person to fully reach the *Chayah* level of the soul, one needs to bring himself to a level in which his power of analytical thought is constantly active. As the Ramchal writes in *sefer Derech Eretz Chaim*: “The wise go and think and constantly.”

We must understand the implication of this statement: “The wise go and think constantly.” We might understand it superficially that the wise sages have an ability to think, and that they sometimes use this ability and sometimes they don’t. But the statement is implying that the wise are constantly thinking.

Another thing we should understand is: How do we reconcile the statement of “All of them You made with wisdom”, which implies that the wisdom (*chochmah*) is everything, with the verse of “*All is called in My Name, and for My honor I created it, fashioned it and also made it,*”<sup>65</sup> which implies that the *kavod* (honor of Hashem) is everything?

*Kavod* (honor), to our perspective, is only called *kavod* when it is revealed. If something honorable isn’t revealed, we don’t see it as honorable. Sometimes, the *kavod* of Hashem is more revealed in Creation, and sometimes it is not. There are some people today who do recognize the *kavod* of Hashem, while others do not. When people don’t recognize the *kavod* of Hashem, that itself is a deficiency in the *kavod*. Therefore, to our perspective, the *kavod* of Hashem is incomplete today.

In contrast to this, the *chochmah* of Hashem spans all of Creation and it is everything. *Chochmah* is the essence of something: “Wisdom sustains its owner.”<sup>66</sup> The wisdom behind something is its existence. If a person wants to reach the root of something, he must reach the wisdom in each thing. In terms of our soul, it means to always think – as the Ramchal says, “The wise go and think constantly.”

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<sup>65</sup> *Yeshayahu* 43:7

<sup>66</sup> *Koheles* 7:12

Revealing the *Chayah* level of the soul is for a person to reach the point where he is always thinking, without interruption. For this reason, the *Chayah* level of the soul is barely reached by any person completely. A person may touch upon it at times, and to experience man's actual power of thinking. But there is almost no one who reaches the *Chayah* completely. It is the level of the loftiest *tzaddikim*, who reach complete *d'veykus* in the Creator, who never interrupt their thoughts from Him for a moment – meaning that their power of thinking is constantly active, without interruption. That is the *Chayah* level of the soul.

## 5. Naturally Thinking All The Time

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The goal of analyzing the “intellect” found in each matter is to reach a point where one's intellect is always active. When the intellect is constantly active, one can then see the “intellect” [wisdom] that is found in each thing. It can be compared to a magnet. In order for a magnet to work, it does not need to be turned on like a machine. It does not become broken like a damaged machine, nor is there a button on it to press which stops it from functioning. Rather, it contains a natural force which pulls things toward it.

This concept, of seeing the “intellect” in each thing, is not an “*avodah*” (a spiritual task) to work on. It comes from the nature of the human intellect which yearns to see the wisdom in each thing. Just as the eyes see what is in front of them, so can the intellect see wisdom. It is just that if a person's intellect is not always active, he will not see wisdom in something in front of him. He is like a person with closed eyes, who will not see any object we pass in front of him. It is the same with the “eyes of the intellect”. If the “eyes” of the intellect are sometimes opened (activated) and sometimes closed (inactive), the person will see the wisdom in something only when his intellect is active, but not when his intellect is inactive.

When the “eyes of the intellect” are opened, a person will naturally see the wisdom in everything he encounters. There is always wisdom that can be found in each thing, and the only question is if a person's eyes are open to see it or not.

When it comes to the physical eyes, there are times when they are naturally open, and times when they are naturally closed. When a person sleeps, usually the eyes are closed, and when one is awake, the eyes are usually open. But of the Creator, it is said “*Behold, He does not slumber and He does not sleep, the Guardian of Yisrael*”.<sup>67</sup> Not only doesn't the Creator ever sleep, but His Divine Providence as well is never asleep, for Hashem is constantly watching over all of the Creation, without exception. When a person connects to this level, to the root of all conduct, which is *daas* (also termed *chochmah*), one reaches the inner point in the soul where the intellect is constantly active.

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<sup>67</sup> *Tehillim 121:4*

## 6. Control Over The Thoughts During Sleep

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When one's intellect is not constantly active, and he tries to gain control over his thoughts when anything improper enters his mind, he may be able to succeed somewhat, but not on a constant basis. However, the real problem will be when he goes to sleep. During sleep, the intellect is weakened, and with most people, the imagination will dominate. When the intellect is not in control and it is weak, it will be inaccessible, for the most part.

The average person barely makes use of his power of intellect (and this is the situation of most people today, as it is well-known that we do not even use 10% of our mind). If the intellect isn't in that much control while a person is awake, it certainly won't be in control when he's asleep, and for this reason, a person will fantasize about all kinds of dreams at night when he's asleep. (If a person merits it, he won't imagine about things that are forbidden.)

When a person is living at the Chayah level of the soul, his intellect is active, so that even when he is asleep, his intellect will be able to overpower the imagination that takes over his sleep. While the imagination will still be present, it will be subservient to the intellect. The person will maintain his power of awareness even while he is asleep. The power to remain aware even while being asleep is an ability that can only stem from a strong intellect, which is constantly active, to the point that it doesn't stop even while a person is sleeping - the time when the intellectual abilities are usually weak.

If we check, we can discover that as long as a person has not yet reached some degree of an active intellect, he wastes a large part of his life. Why? Because normally, we sleep about 5-8 hours a night (depending on each person), which takes a large percentage of our life. Our day consists of the time when we are awake, and the time when we are asleep. When we are awake, we certainly must make the most of our time. But for all of the time we are asleep, we are losing much of our time – when it is all being spent without an active intellect. Although we simply need our sleep, so that we can have energy to wake up energized the next morning in order to serve the Creator – which is certainly true – that is only a preparation.

How indeed can a person utilize properly the time when he is asleep? Let us understand that this is not just about how to make the most of our time. While it is certainly important to utilize our time properly, there is much more depth to be gained from this. It is so that we can reach a point where our intellect is active even while we are asleep.

The Vilna Gaon said that whatever a person cannot comprehend during the day, he can comprehend at night. The reason for this is because we are built of a soul and body, and the soul hears sounds from Above and sees heavenly visions, but the body, which is materialistic, darkens the soul's senses so that a person will not hear or see the spiritual. This is true at daytime, when the body is in full force and prevents the soul's senses. But at night, when the body rests, the soul is more revealed, enabling a person to receive senses for the spiritual. This is the depth in the words of the Vilna Gaon. Why is it, then, that many people feel the opposite? Instead they have good thoughts at daytime, and at nighttime, they have fantasies, or worse. Why does this happen?

The answer to this is because the hold of their body is very strong, much stronger than their soul, and therefore at daytime they are led by a coarser kind of intellect, at nighttime when the imagination takes over, their soul enters into a worse situation than it was by daytime.

If one's imagination is subservient to his intellect and he never allows it to dominate him, then even at night when his physicality is weaker, his imagination will still be subdued and he will be able to receive an illumination from the soul. But if a person's intellect is weak during the daytime, he is naturally dominated by the imagination, and at nighttime the imagination will only dominate him more. The little amount of intellect that he was using by daytime, like when he had to use his mind in order to take care of something, is not active at night, and therefore his mind becomes totally dominated by imagination when it's nighttime, completely darkening the soul's senses for the spiritual.

In order for a person to penetrate through to his soul, the best time for this, ideally, is during the time when he is asleep. By daytime, when a person is physically active, the body is strengthened and the soul is weaker. Only when a person goes to sleep, and his physicality weakens, can the soul naturally become revealed.

**But that will only work for a person who isn't dominated by imagination.** If a person is dominated by imagination even during the day, and during the day he has fantasized about various things that he wants (which is what normally happens to anyone who doesn't strengthen his intellect), when it comes nighttime, his intellect weakens and his fantasies will dominate. Not only won't his soul be revealed then, but it will even become darkened.

When we are learning of how to see the "wisdom" in each thing, we are learning how to penetrate through to the light of our *neshamah*. This does not only mean by way of the intellect during the time when we are awake, but mainly during the time of sleep! When the prophets would receive their prophetic visions, they would fall on their faces, which was a degree of sleep. Then they would enter into their imagination and from there, they would receive their prophecies. Their prophecies came from their imaginative faculty, and not from their intellectual faculties. This is explained by the Ramchal in *sefer Pischei Chochmah*.

What we see from this is that **when the imagination is purified through a strongly developed intellect**, a person can then ascend to the highest realms, by way of this holy imagination. But if the imagination hasn't been purified through the intellect, it is a mixture of truth and falsity, and such an imagination prevents a person from reaching any truthful comprehensions when he is asleep.

The Rambam says that a person acquires most of his Torah learning at night.<sup>68</sup> The Sages said that the night was not created except for Torah learning.<sup>69</sup> This is true both on an external level as well as on an inner level. On an external level, the night is a calmer time, which enables a person to learn Torah without the noisy disturbances of the day. On an inner level, though, the nighttime is a time when a person sleeps and has dreams, which offer him the opportunity to reach most of his true understandings.

## 7. Weakening The Imagination – Through Receiving A Higher Intellect

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<sup>68</sup> Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:13

The current topic we are discussing – gaining control of the mind, by strengthening the power of the intellect – is essentially the root of penetrating through to the *neshamah*, the Divine soul.

The sefarim hakedoshim explain that there three factors to the intellect: (1) **The *maskil*** – the one who is intellectualizing the matter. (2) **The *muskal*** – the idea which is being studied and analyzed. (3) **The *seichel*** – the power of the intellect, which comes from the light of the *neshamah*.

When the *seichel* shines within the *maskil*, the *muskal* then becomes *ruach hakodesh* (lit. “the holy spirit”, an enlightened state of mind which is influenced from Above), where the person is receiving his *seichel* from the *neshamah*. Understandably, there are many levels within *ruach hakodesh* itself, but generally, *ruach hakodesh* is when a higher intellect shines within the person who is thinking, where the idea being analyzed is not coming from his own thinking, but from Above.

When a person has developed a constantly active intellect, he has prepared his mind as a “container” to receive the light of the *neshamah*, which is the source of a higher intellect. It can then weaken the negative parts of his imagination, opening up a ‘crack’ for him to enter deeper into himself and reach the light of the *neshamah*.

This ‘crack’, once it is accessed, will be expressed in all of a person’s actions, both by day and by night. During the day, it will be accessed due to the strongly developed intellect of the person, which makes him eligible to receive a higher form of intellect. At night, it will also be accessed, for his imagination has been purified through a strongly developed intellect. When the imagination has been purified, a person can then ascend to the higher realms, via the power of the holy imagination which has now been made available to him [since he has developed his intellect].

## 8. A Purified Mind

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The *avodah* which we have described here is, in essence, an *avodah* to reach a clearer power of thought. Purifying our thinking is actually the most important area in our inner spiritual task.

We have an inner *avodah* regarding our heart, which refers to our inner work of perfecting our character. But at the same time, we also have an *avodah* to build our mind, to develop an ability of constantly active thought, which is also purified from the imagination. Building our power of thought is a slow, step-by-step process, which will be outlined in the coming chapters, with the help of Hashem. There are two “kings” in man: the heart and the mind. The *avodah* we have with our heart is to attain “purity of heart”, which includes repairing our character traits. We will get to explaining this as well, with Hashem’s help. But in the coming chapters, we will explain the path of how to build and develop our thoughts – step after step, beginning from the “*Nefesh*” part of the soul all the way until the “*Yechidah*” part of the soul.

The depth of building our power of thought – which, as mentioned earlier, is really a way to “see” from the “*Chayah*” level of the soul - is essentially to develop the power of the intellect and purify it, so that it can receive from the higher source of the intellect. This, in turn, will purify the imagination, enabling one to receive higher levels of comprehension at nighttime [in his dreams].

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## ***09 / Thoughts of Nefesh – Basic Awareness***

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### **I. Building Our Power of Thought**

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Until now, we explained at length about the [soul's] power of sight. As mentioned before from the *sefarim hakedoshim*, the eyes' vision and the mind's thoughts are both rooted in the same faculty. An analytical kind of thought is called *iyun*, which is from the word *ayin*, "eye", for the mind can scrutinize and thereby 'see' a matter. The power of thought (*machshavah*) corresponds to the "Chayah" level of the soul, which is the soul's power of inner *chochmah* (wisdom), in the sense of "seeing" a matter by way of the mind.

Before we proceed to discuss how we build the power of thought, we will first mention the three general stages in *hisbodedus*, as mentioned in the beginning of this *sefer*, as they apply to our world of thought:

1. Using the power of thought to reflect upon man himself: the Creation in general, and specifically, on one's private self.
2. Using the power of thought to reflect on the bond between the creations with their Creator in general, and specifically, one the private bond between my "I" with my Creator.
3. Using the power of thought to reflect and recognize the existence of the Creator, Blessed Is He.

Until now, we explained how these stages are accessed using the soul's sense of sight. Now we will enter a second step, which will involve the power of thought.

Thought will involve the three above stages as well. There are thoughts we can have about the creations in general, and about our private self specifically. There are thoughts we can have about the bond between the creations with the Infinite, with the Creator, Blessed Is He. And there are thoughts we can have about that are just about the truth of His existence, regardless of how this relates to the creations. We will try to explain each of these three stages, with the help of Hashem, in an orderly progression, and to explain what they are about.

Just as we divided the soul's sense of sight into the five areas of the soul – the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah* – so it is with thought. Thus, there is a power of thought in the *Nefesh* level of the soul, in the *Ruach* level of the soul, in the *Neshamah* level of the soul, in the *Chayah* level of the soul, and in the *Yechidah* level of the soul. These are five different levels of thought.

Generally, the power of thought corresponds to the "Chayah" level of the soul (as explained in the previous chapter), so when we discuss thought, we are really discussing the "Chayah" level that is either within the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* or *Yechidah* levels of the soul. In this chapter, and in the coming chapters as well, we will try to explain each of these steps, with Hashem's help.

## 2. The “Nefesh” Level of Thought

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The “*Nefesh*” level of the soul is always the *kli*, the “container”, of something. We explained about this earlier when we discussed the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul’s sense of sight, which is to see something as being made of the letters of the *aleph beis*. The “*Nefesh*” level of thought means to perceive reality as it is – to simply recognize what the reality is. On a general level, it includes recognizing the reality of the world as it is, and on a private level, it is to recognize the reality of our own existing self.

We do not mean that a person has to know everything going on in the world. A person does not have to know anything that he doesn’t need to know about. Rather, what we mean is that a person needs to generally be in touch with reality – and only that which is necessary for him to know. Thus, the “*Nefesh*” level of thought is when one is simply aware of necessary facts; to know the actual reality of something.

On a personal level, the “*Nefesh*” level of thought the simple awareness of one’s very reality - his existence. What does it mean that a person must know himself? We are referring to a basic level of self-knowledge, as opposed to knowing one’s emotions and thoughts, which are the more advanced levels. The basic level of self-knowledge, which is the “**Nefesh**” level of thought, is **to know one’s natural abilities**.

## 3. The World of The Soul is a Clear World

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Let us first give a brief introduction.

The Gemara tells a story of Rav Yosef, who became deathly ill. His soul left his body, and after some time, his soul returned to his body. We refer to this today as “clinical death”. When he awoke from this “near-death experience”, his father asked him: “What did you see?” He answered, “I saw an inverted world. The more elevated ones (those of important status on this world) are below (are not as important in Heaven), and the bottom ones (those of lesser status on this world) are above (regarded as important in Heaven).” His father said to him: “My son, you have seen a clear world.”<sup>70</sup>

What is the depth of these words, “You have seen a clear world?”

The physical body clouds a person from seeing the spiritual vision of the soul. This World is compared to darkness, which distorts a person’s vision and doesn’t let a person see clearly. The *Mesillas Yesharim* states that when a person is walking in the dark, he will trip over objects because he can’t see, and he will also confuse objects with each other. In the same way, our clarity on This World is obscured by the physicality of our body, which causes us to stumble and confuse things. In contrast to this, the *neshamah* (soul of a Jew) is a spiritual light, and it allows a person to see things with clarity.

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<sup>70</sup> *Pesachim 50a*



There are all kinds of phrases today, which show that people aren't clear about things. One example is the phrase, "As if". A person may see, "I saw something as if..." Why does he say "as if", if he clearly saw it? Because he is not clear about what he saw. Another common word today is "About" ["for example, I'll be there at about..."]. This is an inability to be precise.

Now, if this problem would only exist when it comes to words that people say, it would only be half of a problem. But the disturbing reality of today is that we have acquired thinking patterns which are imprecise. Everything is simply off-mark. You make up to meet with someone at 9:00, and he shows up at 9:20, without any apologies about his lateness. A habitual latecomer thinks that 9:00 and 9:20 are the same exact time. To him, there's no difference!

Reb Elchonon Wasserman (may Hashem avenge his blood) had a *chavrusa*<sup>71</sup> every day at 9:00. Once his *chavrusa* came a minute late. The Rav asked him: "What happened to you? Did you have a pressing circumstance beyond your control which you had to take care of?" Today, when people hear such a story, they may think that Reb Elchonon shouldn't have been so tough on his *chavrusa* for coming late. But they would be wrong. What was Reb Elchonon's perspective? It was because he lived in a "clear world" [where precision and punctuality matters].

[In reality, there is no way around precision. If you aren't precise, damage occurs.] If a person is driving a car down a narrow street, and the car is as wide as the street, if he isn't careful and he veers off the street by even 10 centimeters, the wheel will hit the curb and his entire car will be totaled.

When it comes to time as well, we also need to relate to it with clarity and with precision. If a person is always coming a minute later, he does not regard that minute as important. This shows that he does not live in a "clear world" in general, because it is not only the value of time which he disregards; by being careless with time, it is a sign that he does not bother to be precise about anything else.

The concept of living in a "clear world" is, for the most part, nonexistent today. It exists as an ability that is deep within all of our souls, but in the world which we are found in today, when someone says he will do something, he doesn't even intend to do it.

(We don't even have to mention how this problem exists in the business world, which revolves around unpredictability and where nothing can be clearly defined). That is the way the world lives today, and we all recognize this well. This is a degree of falsity which has become part of the normal way of living today.

A person may learn the Gemara, and he is not clear about he learned. The clarity which he is missing is the very fact that learning Gemara is unclear to him – not only is his learning unclear to him, but his issue is that he is not even clear about the fact that he is unclear! When does he realize that he is not clear about the words of the Gemara he has learned? When questions are asked to him on the material, on the different points in the Gemara, and he slowly realizes that he does not understand what he learned.

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<sup>71</sup> study partner

Many times a person will say something in a conversation, and two minutes later he says something that contradicts what he said earlier. He didn't do this because he was trying to lie. He simply wasn't paying attention to what he is saying, because he wasn't clear about he was thinking. If his thoughts aren't clear to him, his words [which are the expression of his thoughts] will also not be clear to him.

#### 4. Getting Used To Clarifying: Taking Apart Information

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The problem of our life, in one word, can be called "*irpul*" – where everything is cloudy and unclear. The world today lacks clarity. We are not clear about even the external matters in the world, and certainly not about inner matters. It's all unclear to us. We have general definitions, but in order to enter inward, we must know that the task in our life is to live in a "clear world" where we see things with clarity. Therefore, we need to learn how to define things **clearly**, with precision.

To define things with clarity does not mean that we must know, with absolute certainty, where each thing belongs to and doesn't belong to. There is no way to know this with certainty. Rather, what we mean is that we can take something and clarify it. For example, we can analyze something and wonder: Is this a good thing, or a bad thing? There is a point to it which is positive, and a point in it which is negative. There is a point in it which is good, and a point in it which is not as good.

For example, when we encounter other people, can we know if a person is a *tzaddik* (righteous person) or a *rasha* (wicked person)? This is not on a black-or-white discussion, because even a *tzaddik* has parts to him which are still wicked, and even a *rasha* has parts to him in which he is a *tzaddik*. We need to clarify which parts of him are *tzaddikim*, and in which parts are of him are *reshaim*.

When a person lives without clarity, he only lives in a world of the physical body. For this reason, most people in the world today do not have minds that think clearly, because their minds are bound to the view of their physical body, and since the body is mixed with good and evil, their minds see a mixture as well.

The power of clarity is really the inner understanding of a person, which is the revelation of the *neshamah*. Therefore, the first step a person needs to do is get used to clarifying things.

Here is an example. A person goes on vacation in the North for a week, and then returns. He is asked: "Was it good?" And he answers: "It was very good." Another kind of person in the same situation will say, "It didn't work out." We can analyze each of these responses, instead of taking them at face value. The person who said "It was very good" is really saying that in general, he had a good time, but there were some parts to the vacation which didn't work out. The person who said "It didn't work out" is really saying that the vacation for the most part didn't turn out well, but there were some parts to it which did work out.

We do not mean that the person should have answered with a whole list of the things that went well and the things that didn't work out. Our point here is that if a person wants to live a more inner kind of life, he needs to get used to clarifying things. We so far brought a few examples that were very superficial, but if we delve deeply into them, we can understand the idea.

Returning to the example of the vacation, if a person wants to get used to uncovering this power of clarity, he should try the following. After he comes back from his vacation, he should clarify to himself which parts were good, and which parts were not so good. Of course, the purpose of this clarifying, of course, is not so that the person should pick a different vacation spot next year, which doesn't have the issues he had last time. The purpose of this thinking exercise is to get used to taking apart what happened.

The person should make a list of which parts were good, and which parts were not good. He can then conclude if the vacation was worth it or not, but even if he concludes that it was worth it, he should not just say "It all worked out very well". That would not be truthful, because he would be mixing reality with fantasy.

We have grown used to mixing reality with fantasies. If 99% of a certain situation was good and 1% was not good, a person sees it all as being very rosy. But that is a kind of fantasy. When one has a mind that sees with clarity, he is aware that there was 99% which was good, and 1% which was not good, and he understands that it is not possible to have anything 100% good. He is happy with the 99% that is good. The purpose of this thinking is not, *chas v'shalom*, to dampen the happiness and satisfaction that a person feels in any given situation. Rather, the purpose is to become clear, of the reality here. One must be clear about the 99% that is good, and the 1% which was not good.

This is really an idea which one should ideally get used to already from childhood: to get used to living with clarity, by clarifying the reality at hand, by taking apart a matter.

## 5. Knowing Your Personal Capabilities and Limits

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We can give more examples as well, to help us relate to this idea.

Some people are more capable of others, when it comes to certain jobs. A person may take a certain job, which is heavy work and which takes a lot of his energy. After two months, he tells his boss that he is ready to quit, because he can't handle the hard work anymore. What happened?

Simply speaking, the answer is because he didn't know what the job would entail. He applied for the job only because he was motivated by a desire to earn money, and therefore he fooled himself and thought he could handle the job. Although that is true, that wasn't the root of the problem. If a person would get used to living with clarity, he would have known from the start what his true capabilities are, and what his limits are. Then he would have seen what he could handle, and what he could not handle.

Of course, a person cannot know what his exact capabilities and limits are, but had he gotten used to living with clarity, he can become clearer about what his capabilities and limits are. This concept of living in a “clear world” does not mean that a person can have 100% clarity. It is not possible to be 100% clear about anything. Rather, what we mean is that a person needs to reach more and more clarity.

So, for example, if a person takes a job in which he will have to work for several hours, and it is not within his natural capabilities to work for that amount of hours, he must know before he takes such a job that he will be overworking himself, and that he simply does not have the strength for such a job. If he didn’t clarify this before taking the job, he will find out later that he didn’t have the capabilities for it. Usually, when that happens, it is because he never bothered to clarify what his capabilities and limits are. Until now, he had succeeded in various jobs and tasks whenever he took them upon himself, and therefore he naturally thought he could do anything. But had he tried to learn about himself a bit, he would have seen what his limits are, and then he would have clarified if he could handle the job or not.

Sometimes a person is asked to do a *mitzvah*, and he resolves to do it, but in the midst, he abandons it. If he is asked, “Why did you stop in the middle?” He answers, “Believe me, I really wanted to do it. But I feel like I have no energy left anymore!”

Why did this happen? It stems from the fact that he didn’t learn about what his capabilities are. He applies himself with all his energy and then feels tired, so he stops. That is how it is in the world. When a person begins doing something and then he realizes that he can’t finish it, he stops in the middle. That is why, usually, people don’t finish what they start. They did not think about it enough before they started the endeavor.

The lack of thinking is because the person never learned how to recognize his capabilities, so he does not know “Until this point, I can do. From a certain point onward, I cannot do.” He never learned how to draw that distinction. That is why he is asked to do something and he immediately resolves to do it – he thinks that it’s possible for him to do anything, so he immediately begins to do it, and if he realizes at some point that it’s difficult, he stops and leaves everything unfinished.

Thus, **one must recognize what his simple physical capabilities are** – the limits of what he physically can or cannot do.

There are people who, every month and a half or so, become too exhausted from their job, so they take off three days from work. They are straining themselves physically, beyond what they can really handle, they weren’t getting enough sleep, and in the end they are falling apart. What is the cause of this? It is because they aren’t living in an organized, clear way. If a person recognizes his capabilities and his nature, **he knows how much relaxation/rest he needs to get, and he makes sure not to neglect his physical needs.**

When most people are asked “How much sleep do you need to get?” the answer is something like this: “I don’t know. I go to sleep whenever I can. Sometimes I am prevented, and sometimes I get to sleep on time – it all depends on how things work out for me.” Every night, the average person goes

to sleep at a different time and wakes up at a different time, than the day before. Eventually, he feels exhausted because he isn't getting enough sleep, and he needs to take off from work for a few days, so that he can refresh. This cycle keeps repeating, until the next time he falls apart. In worse situations, the person takes vitamins, blood tests, etc. until he is back to normal. And this is an average situation of most people.

This is not an issue that begins when a person becomes sick and bedridden for three days. That is not the issue we are aiming at here. We are clarifying here that a deeper point – the fact that person does not recognize himself on basic level [what his physical needs are].

If we have a room which measures 4 meters long and 4 meters wide, and we try to stuff 20 tons worth of packages in it, there is no way to get in the 20 tons of packages, even if we have the best wishes in the world to do so. We all understand that a narrowly sized room cannot hold 20 tons. This is a simple example which we can all clearly understand that there are natural limitations, which there is no way around. But for some reason, when it comes to our own life, we don't know how much we can handle and how much we cannot.

Today, it is common to witness the following occurrence. If a person is moving into a new apartment and he hires a mover to transfer his furniture, the mover may try to move a large amount of furniture and get it through the door, and it doesn't fit. He tries to push it in and it doesn't go, and he tells you, "I thought it would fit." What is that supposed to mean? Why didn't he first check if it would all fit and give you a clear answer?

Our life is usually a situation in which we don't do enough research and clarifying. Instead, everything is done in an unclear manner. We try to do something and then we see that there are problems. In the best situations, people seek solutions about what to do, but in worse situations, when they realize that there are problems, they abandon everything in the middle and nothing gets done.

In contrast to this, a person can learn how to live life in a clearer manner. A good example of this is to take a calendar and write down what has to get done this year. See the beginning of the year and the end of the year. Of course, even with all your planning, there can still be unexpected changes throughout the year, and those changes may be inevitable and beyond our control. But in spite of that possibility, we still need to organize our schedule for the year to begin with.

The following is another example. When a person buys an apartment, and he is told by the contractor that it will be ready in 12 months. The contractor must write this down in a personal calendar, and then he needs to write down a plan of how his workers will split up their work over the next 12 months, to have it ready by then. There might be delays which push him off schedule, but he needs to have the plan to begin with.

That is how things should be, ideally. But if anyone is familiar with the real estate industry, we know that for the first 8 months, the workers are being dreamy and they haven't even started, and 4 months before the deadline they begin to do everything, where the work is very stressful and accompanied with yelling and screaming.

Why does this happen? It is because they never came up with an organized plan of how everything should work out properly. Only later, when it is near the end and they have no choice of laying it off anymore, do they begin to realize that there's not enough time to keep the commitment they made. So they begin to do everything when they are tight for time, forcing themselves to meet the deadline and working overtime, with everything done in a stressful manner.

We should understand the root of the problem when it comes to these kinds of issues. It is because we are not living life with clarity. We are not even discussing how this issue affects *avodas Hashem* or even how it affects us emotionally. We are simply addressing an issue that affects the basic reality in front of us, and how to properly develop the external aspects of our life. In all of the actions which we recognize - whether it the way the government deals with the country or the way that people deal and behave with themselves – is 98% done without sufficient organization and planning. People begin to do something and they just see how it will turn out, and if it doesn't work out, they make detour from it, either to the right or to the left...

Thus, the first thing to realize is that the root of all success in everything is the idea of living in a “clear world” [where we plan and organize things from beforehand].

## 6. Becoming More Truthful

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When a person makes a *neder* (vow), does he have to fulfill “just about” what he says, or must he fulfill **precisely** what he said?

There was a person wanted to print a *sefer*, and he needed to borrow a certain amount of money in order to get it printed. When he was given the amount of money he requested, he said, “No, no, I didn't mean this amount exactly. I meant *around* this amount.” This is a true example of becoming accustomed to living without clarity. What does that mean that “I didn't mean this exactly?” He committed himself to taking a certain amount from funds of *tzedakah*, and each word is precise. A person cannot retract from those words – he has made a vow, and according to halachah, he must keep to his every word. But such a person might say, “Fine. If that's the case, let me annul the vow.”

From where does this behavior stem from? It is because people are used to living with imprecise definitions. There is really no such thing as “just about” – rather, everything we must get used to living with exact, precise definitions. Of course, there are some things which we cannot predict, because Hashem can have other plans in store for us. A person may obligate himself to do something, but then he can become sick and he can't do it. There are certainly pressing circumstances beyond our control – but that is also an ‘exact’ definition.

Again, we shall repeat that living with exactness and precision does not mean that we can be 100% precise. Only Hashem can do that. We see this from the fact that Moshe *Rabbeinu* said to Pharaoh that he will be leaving Egypt at “around” midnight, but Hashem redeemed the nation precisely at midnight. Yet, although we cannot be totally precise, we need to aspire to reach as much precision as we can. We can never reach the level of the Creator's precision - the was the only One

who could redeem us “precisely” at midnight – but even so, we must try to draw closer to this perfect level of precision.

If we want to reveal the *neshamah*, which is “a portion of G-d, from above”, we should understand that this is based on the ability to be precise. The lifestyle of the world around us is built upon lack of precision, whereas the inner world is built upon precision. We must know that the ability to be precise is not only needed for the development of our inner world, but even for the development of our natural, physical, and material aspects of life.

How does a person come on time when he has a meeting? There are some people who are habitual latecomers – they will never come on time, whenever they are expected to arrive at a certain time. What is the reason for their behavior? It is really because they have a problem of not being precise. If a person would really want to be on time, he doesn’t have to change reality – all he has to do is change the way he acts. Just like he knows how to always come 10 minutes late, so can he move his thoughts to get himself to always come 10 minutes earlier than what he was used to.

Dovid *HaMelech* describes a perfected person as “*He who speaks truth in his heart.*”<sup>72</sup> The Gemara says that an example of this was Rav Safra, who never diverged from the thoughts in his heart.<sup>73</sup> We see from this that it is not enough just to speak truth. That is only the external part to being truthful. To “speak truth in his heart” is the ability in a person to be precise on an inward level – to live with clarity.

Falsity is not only if I say I will do something and I don’t do it, or if I said I won’t do it and I did it. The main kind of falsity is if I am living in an unclear world where precision doesn’t matter. As is well-known, the truth is the reality, whereas falsity is non-existent, as the Sage state, “Truth exists, falsity does not exist.” The meaning of this is that truth lasts, but falsity does not. When a person lives with anything unrealistic, this is falsity on an inner level.

We have had to elaborate specifically on this point, because it is an inner, deep point, because it is the root of the failures of every person, each on his own level. All of us have this problem, without exception. All failures in our life really come from a lack of being precise. It is the very idea that people are used to living with estimations that are not exact - the mere fact that a person does something slightly off the time he is supposed to do it.

If we would live with more precision and exactness, we would be more connected with truth, and from that, we would be more connected to the “seal of truth” of the Creator. The more a person is truthful with himself, the closer he is to the Presence of the Creator, “Who is truthful, and Whose seal is truth”.

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<sup>72</sup> *Tehillim 15*

<sup>73</sup> *Makkos 24a*

## 7. Recognizing Simple Reality

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In order to build and develop our power of thought, it is essentially about developing the power to be exact and precise. It is about recognizing the reality as it is. There are levels to how well we can recognize the reality. Just as there are layers to reality itself, so are there layers to how accurate we can recognize it.

Let us now return to what we began to discuss in the beginning of the chapter, that the “*Nefesh*” part of the soul is the part we use to recognize the simple, material reality in front of us. If we ask the average person if he recognizes himself, he will answer in the affirmative. But if we look more deeply into it, we would discover that most people are mistaken about this. In order to recognize reality as it is, one needs to learn about that reality, and then recognize it, and then translate this understanding into acting *exactly* upon that reality.

### [Example 1 – Money Management Today]

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Today they have entire organizations which help a person manage his finances. You have to tell the person in charge all of your income and expenses, and he gives you an exact amount of how much you are allowed to spend. You are not allowed to spend even a little more than the budget limit, without their express permission. That means that an adult, who is at least 30, 40, or 50 years old, is being told that he is not allowed to spend even 200 or 300 more shekel than he is allowed to, unless he has their permission! This sounds bizarre, but it is has become the reality today.

Why do people go to such organizations? It is because they believe that they cannot control their spending habits, so they are getting into all kinds of debts and overdrafts, and they have come to the conclusion that they do not know how to properly manage their finances. So, they use a means from the outside in order to make them responsible, so that they will be able to balance their expenses according to their income.

How does a person get into such a pitiful situation?? If we were talking about an 8-year old child, it makes sense that the child must not be allowed to spend more than a certain amount, because children are not in touch with reality, and they spend their money as soon as they get it. For a mature adult to do this, it is illogical behavior. He knows that money cannot just be spent thoughtlessly. He is aware that he if he spends his money today, he might not be able to purchase bread and milk for tomorrow. So how can it be that a mature adult gets into such a financial mess, that he needs to go to an organization which doesn't allow him to spend more than a certain amount, as if he is a child?

We are not speaking about an abnormal phenomenon. There are several such organizations which earn their livelihood from these problems. They don't try to find the person an additional source of income (and they are right, because that is not the goal!) Instead, they show the person how his expenses must match his income, and this is all the information they give to those who turn to them. A person who goes to these organizations has come to believe that he doesn't have any



control over his financial situation, and intentionally puts himself in a position where he has to get permission over the telephone every time he is about to spend money. It is clear that the organization doesn't own his money; the money belongs to the person who is coming to them for financial advice. So how does a person get himself into such a situation....?

## [Example 2 – Living On Credit]

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As we explained until now, a person today lives in a totally unclear world. Here's another example.

A husband and wife are walking through the street and they see an advertisement. They look at it and they say, "How nice". One of them says, "It looks good – maybe we should buy it?" The other says, "Where will get the money to purchase it?" The other responds, "What's the problem? It says that you can pay in twelve monthly installments." Everything today is in monthly payments! What is this new form of payment today? It is a way to lose reality!

If a person wants to get used to living with clarity and to avoid losing touch with reality, a good example of this is the plan that they have today in banks which doesn't allow you to purchase on credit. We are not coming here to give financial advice, only to take an idea from this. There is not even one extra shekel to spend, if you don't have it in your account. This way, there's no possibility of having an overdraft. It is way of living with precision, where you can only withdraw exactly what you deposit, and not a cent more. If you don't have anything to withdraw, you must deal with that reality.

Living based on credit is like living in a fantasy. Rav Dessler said that if a person is always thinking about the future, he is living in a fantasy. The same can be said of spending unearned money and withdrawing money which you never deposited yet. It is living based on a future which didn't happen yet.

If a person decides that he wants to become more realistic, the first thing we have to say to him is: If you have money in your account, spend it, and if not, don't spend it! This was already said by the Rambam: "A person must spend money based on his income."<sup>74</sup> We don't need to be the Rambam in order to understand this. Any sensible person can understand it.

But in reality, the lifestyle of the world today is the opposite than this. A person has a desire to buy something, so he buys it on credit, and this removes him from reality. We all know that people get overdrafts on their credit in the bank, where the bank collects heavy interest from the person, and the person doesn't know how he is going to pay the overdraft. We all know about this yet we continue to live a kind of lifestyle which is out of touch with reality.

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<sup>74</sup> Rambam Hilchos De'os: 5

The credit card of this generation seems to be the best invention ever. You have a card and you can buy whatever you want with it, even when you don't have the money for it. Where does this lifestyle come from? It is because people are used to living unrealistically.

## [We Cannot Enter Inward Unless We Are In Touch With Our Basic Material Reality]

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This *sefer* is not about the practical world of action which we live in, but we must understand that this point is where we must begin from, for **it is not possible to enter into the *neshamah* inside us if we are not beginning our *avodah* from a basic understanding of reality.** If one wants to build the area of thought in the soul, the first has to be balanced when it comes to the mundane aspects of daily life. Only after that can he enter inward.

There are people who wish to enter into inner *avodah*, but if they are confused about the material parts of their life and they aren't responsible, they cannot enter the clear world of the *neshamah*, since they do not live the basic parts of their life with clarity. There is no way to get in touch with the clarity of the *neshamah* if a person is unrealistic in the mundane aspects of his life. It must start from the most basic level of balance, which includes: **Being responsible about expenses of the home, about work, about getting enough sleep** – a simple understanding of the daily aspects in our life.

Understandably, we can elaborate upon more details about this topic, of recognizing the simple reality in front of us. We have been lengthy about this topic and we brought many examples, in order for us to get an idea that in order to enter inward, which is a “clear world”, we first need to be clear about the simple, mundane aspects of life. The examples included were: To get used to the idea of precision; to avoid living on credit; before taking on any kind of work or undertaking, we need to see what it will require from us, and if it is unrealistic to do or not. If something seems too risky, we should stay away from it.

## 8. The Balance Between Disconnection and Connection To The World

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Thus, the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul corresponds to being in touch with reality. This is the first step one needs in order to enter into his own inner reality, but it is also needed in the broader sense – one needs to simply know absorb reality as it is.

One must know that there is a minimal amount of knowledge he needs to have about the general reality of the world today which he is found in. A person should not be totally disconnected from the reality that of the world around him. A person should not have the attitude of “What do I care about what happens in the world? I am only living in the world of Torah learning, *avodas Hashem*, and *chesed*. What else do I need more than this?” Obviously, we are not advising that a person should listen to the news flashes every half hour. That is not what we mean at all. Here we mean a totally different point: the idea that one must be alert when it comes to his worldly affairs.

For example, if a person *davens* in a certain *shul* in the community, and he knows another person who normally *davens* near his seat who hasn't come to *shul* in a while, he should be concerned about what happened to the person. He should not be totally immersed in his own life who doesn't care and who doesn't pay attention to his surroundings.

What should the person be attentive to? He should be attentive if perhaps his friend requires help with something. If he hasn't seen his friend come to *shul* in a while, he should wonder that maybe there is a problem, and find out what happened. That is only the external part of what he must do. The more inner part of his job is to simply become aware of the reality as it is, for the purpose of developing his soul.

When a person isn't in touch with the reality around him, he may become so self-immersed that he doesn't see or hear anyone else around him, and he doesn't know anything about anyone. He is just living his own life, completely absorbed in himself – his life doesn't go beyond himself, his wife, and his children. He is not concerned about even one more person besides for his direct family members. Such a person, when he needs help with something, will try to be take care of everything himself, so that he shouldn't have to become involved with others. He tries to live a life totally independent of others.

Here we come to a very deep point. There is a very thin line between having proper boundaries, of knowing when to have healthy disconnection from the rest of the world, with becoming disconnected from reality. We are not even referring to the damage that comes upon a person as a result from being disconnected from reality, such as carelessness about his physical health and his finances. Our aim here is that a person must be in touch with reality, and he must also know how to be disconnected from reality, in a balance. He must “advance and retreat” from these two modes: between connection with the world and disconnection from the world.

On one hand, if a person cannot have any disconnection from the world, he will become too materialistic and he will not be able to reveal his *neshamah*. On the other hand, if he is always disconnected from his surroundings, at a certain point he will become delusional and forget about his physicality. He will simply get used to never seeing or hearing anyone else, never analyzing the world around him, which will cause him to become out of touch with reality. There is a very subtle balance in the soul which he must learn. On one hand, he needs to absorb the reality around him, and at the same time, he must not feel connected to it at all. This is a very subtle kind of inner work.

Usually, when a person absorbs the reality around him and he is very in touch with it, he becomes connected to it. If he knows what's happening in the world of politics, he is drawn towards it. If he knows what's going on in the market, he is drawn towards investing his money in the right places, and so forth. On the other extreme, if a person never knows about anything happening in the world, he will become completely disconnected, and he will not even feel his own physical reality. And it is impossible to clearly define what the balance should be.

Rav Yitzchok Hutner [zt"l] would read the news, in order to know what was happening in the world. Once he was away from the country for a few days, and when he returned, he asked for all the newspapers of the previous week. When asked what the point of reading old news was, he said "I don't care except about what's happening right now. But I want to know what people in the past were experiencing." This was the way of thinking of one of the leaders of the Jewish people.

But we need to know that this was only a mode of conduct for a leader of the generation, who had the task of absorbing well the reality around them, so that they could lead the generation. A leader of the generation needs to know what's going on in the world, and indeed, he must take this to an extreme, in order for him to properly guide the generation. But this kind of worldliness is only to be practiced by a leader, who needs to guide the generation. As for anyone else, who is not in a position of leading others, he only has to know a lot less about the world.

One needs to have a subtle balance in his soul, of how much he needs to know about the world without becoming connected to it. One can pray for assistance from Heaven when it comes to this. Thus, it is a very subtle point to absorb reality as it is, without becoming connected to what takes place within it.

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## *10 / Thoughts of Ruach – Emotional Intelligence*

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### I. Thoughts of The “Ruach” – Recognizing The World of Emotion

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The “*Ruach*” level of the soul corresponds to the world of emotion that is within a person.

Recognizing the world of emotion is far more complex than recognizing one’s natural abilities. As explained in the previous chapter, the task of recognizing our natural abilities is not either easy or simple. These matters cannot be on a surface level. Rather, it is an ongoing study, in which a person must continuously seek to understand his abilities.

Our work of self-recognition can be compared to a newlywed couple. It takes a long time until the spouses become familiar with their personalities. They learn about each other with time, and it is a subtle learning process which takes an entire lifetime (understandably, it is only for those who are willing to learn). It is the same when it comes to understanding oneself. For all of one’s life, a person learns about himself.

During childhood, a person is not used to this kind of studying. Only when he gets older and he reaches maturity, does a person begin to become aware of his emotions, and then he slowly recognizes the various aspects of his personality. First one recognizes the general aspects of his personality, and then the more detailed aspects.

For example, some people are drawn towards bashfulness. Others are easily saddened, and others will easily become angry. Others are drawn towards a conceited self-image. There are all kinds of tendencies that different people have in their various personalities.

Let us make it clear that we are not discussing character improvement (*tikun hamiddos*) right now. We are referring to a stage before that, which is: to recognize the very natures of our personality.

We can compare it to an educator who walks into the classroom on the first day, and he sees 35 students in front of him. He must become familiar with each of them, as opposed to treating them all with the same exact manner. He must learn each of their personalities, “*Educate the child according to his path*”,<sup>75</sup> and to get to know what each student is like, and educate then according to their individual needs.

It is the same when it comes to how a person must relate to his own self. On a practical level, a person must learn about himself – the various tendencies that his personal soul is drawn towards, both the good and the bad. We will once again repeat and emphasize that at this elementary stage, one does not yet work on his *middos* (character traits). In the first step of self-recognition, one must simply get to know his soul, and after that he can begin the stage of the *avodah* to improve the *middos*.

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<sup>75</sup> *Mishlei 26:6*

## 2. The Four Physical Elements In The Soul Are The Roots of One's Personality

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Rav Chaim Vital explains in his work *Shaarei Kedushah* that there are four physical, natural elements: fire, water, wind and earth, and that each of these elements produce positive attributes in a person's character, as well as negative attributes.

One needs to first recognize his inner "fire", "wind", "water", and "earth" that are all within him. To give a general description:

1. **Fire** is the power of human growth and ascension. When one rises properly, this is like the verse, *"And his heart was high in the ways of Hashem"*. When one rises in the negative sense, this is the trait of being conceited.
2. **Wind** is the root of a person's speech.
3. **Water** is the root of pleasure – whether holy pleasure, such as *"My soul yearns and pines for the courtyards of Hashem"*, or whether evil pleasure.
4. **Earth** is the root of sadness and laziness. Sometimes sadness can be constructive, but usually, sadness is a negative character trait.

Here we will not explain all of their roots and branches, because it merits its own discussion. We only mentioned here a brief description. The main point we are dealing with here is that a person must learn to recognize his personality. One needs to learn what his **best** dominant element is, of these four – what his best element is, and what his **worst** dominant element is.

### [Figuring Out Your Main Element]

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Here we come to the question of all questions: How can a person know what his dominant element is?

Generally speaking, when a person is going through a period of [spiritual] descent, it reveals what his personality is like. Whenever a person feels somewhat down, he has some "shelter" that he "runs" to for relief.

We can see that some people, when they are going through a rut, they will lock themselves in a room and lay in bed, depressed. Others in the same situation will react differently, and they may want to grab some people and dance with them. Another kind of person in this situation will look for a person to chat with, whereas another kind of person in this situation will pursue various physical desires.

**Any person can identify which of the four elements is his most dominant one, by examining where he falls to, when he feels somewhat down and uninspired.**

If he falls into some level of sadness or melancholy, it is sign that his main element is earth. If he finds himself drawn towards fulfilling various physical desires, his main element is water. If he finds that he wants to chat excessively, his main element is wind. If he tries to act controlling towards others or to release his anger on them, his main element is fire.

One also needs to see the positive side, which can be discerned during a time of spiritual progress. During a time when a person is doing well, he should see which element he is drawn towards, and this is also necessary in learning about oneself.

- If a person feels that he is generally drawn towards a healthy kind of confidence about himself, in which he feels inspired to grow (as in the verse “*And his heart was high in the ways of Hashem*”), his main element is **fire**.
- If he knows that he is drawn towards inspiring other people, by speaking to them, his main element is **wind**.
- If his main interest is to give love to others and to become more connected with them, his main element is **water**.
- If he is mainly a person who is very organized and orderly, and he emphasizes being a “realist”, his main element is **earth**.

The very power that aids your success is also the very same power that can bring you down when you are falling, because Hashem has created an equal counterbalance of forces in everyone’s personality. Therefore, your strongest “positive” element when you are succeeding, is also your strongest “worst” element when you are in a rut.

## [Figuring Out Your Secondary Elements]

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After learning what your strongest element is, the next stage is to figure out what your second-to-strongest element is.

In one person, fire is the main element, and after that is his water, then his wind, and then his earth. In others, the order of which force is most dominant and least dominant will be different. So besides for knowing your strongest element, you also need to know your second-to-strongest element, your third-to-strongest element, and your fourth-to-strongest [or weakest] element.

However, at first, as you begin to work on knowing this, usually you will not be aware of yourself as the element is manifesting itself while you’re acting. Only later, after you’ve acted, can you sit down with yourself and review what happened, and then figure out, slowly, what your main element is, and what your weakest element is.

For example, if a person finds himself in a rut (and he hasn’t had time yet to stop himself and think, so he is currently not aware to himself) and he finds himself pursuing some physical desire, and he feels unfulfilled so he goes to fill his emptiness with something else – when he returns to becoming consciously aware of himself and he stops himself from pursuing another desire, he should sit down and review what happened. He can then discover that his first impulse was to pursue some physical desire, so his main element is water. Since that desire wasn’t fulfilling, he went to fill his void with something else – what was that something else? By knowing it, he can figure out what his second-to-strongest element is.

This is the first step: to get to know one's own personality. The truth is that it's easy to talk about this, but to really recognize oneself is a process that takes several years, simply speaking. Of course, a person cannot spend his whole life trying to figure himself out, but the more a person tries to learn about himself, the closer he comes to self-recognition, and to identify his internal forces.

### 3. Taking Notes On Yourself

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Since self-recognition is a long, drawn-out process that can take years to know, it's easy for a person to dismiss the details that go by in his day-to-day behavior, and then he cannot figure out what his dominant element is. When a person never keeps track of his progress, he will never be able to recognize his personality and to have self-awareness.

For this reason, the advice that is recommended is, for a person to take brief notes about himself. Let's explain the nature of how this note-taking should work.

Here is an example we will start out with, to better understand the idea. One of the greatest leaders of our people, the *Chida* (Rav Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai), wrote a *sefer* titled "*Maagal Tov*", a book that is entirely notes about his travels. In every place where the *Chida* traveled to, he wrote down whom he met there, what he saw there, and what happened there.

For several years, I wondered: Of what purpose did the *Chida* write this *sefer* for? Why did he spend so much time writing down all these stories and events, when instead he could have been learning Torah during all of the time it took to write these events? Who needs to know about all of these travels? But there is a deep point about the soul contained here.

When a person learns about a certain field of study, he needs to cover all of the material on the subject, from beginning until end. Usually when a person enters a new field of study, he is not familiar with the material, and much is unclear. If he tries to learn the material slowly, so that he can learn it on a fundamental level, there is an advantage and a disadvantage to this. The advantage is that he will learn the material slowly and patiently, so he will better absorb the information. The disadvantage is that usually when a person learns slowly, by the time he finishes Chapter 2, he has already forgotten Chapter 1, and when learning Chapter 3, he has forgotten Chapter 2. The reason for this is simple – a person's memory is weak (except for a few people, who have exceptional memory), and people do not remember everything that happens to them throughout life.

Even someone who can remember a lot of Torah is not able to remember all of his life's experiences. There are just vague imprints of memories. A person vaguely remembers his wedding, the joy he experienced upon the birth of his first child, and, G-d forbid, a painful experience or tragedy that he remembers his whole life. But the daily occurrences are forgotten. No one remembers any of that, because there is too much information entering the brain to remember.

When a person wants to learn about his own personality, slowly and patiently, he is like a person learning *Mishnayos* in-depth, that by the time he is into the second *perek*, he has forgotten the first *perek*. A person cannot remember so many *Mishnayos*, when he learns each of them slowly. Chazal say that in order to retain one's Torah learning, one has to learn the material at least four times, then review it for 101 times, in order for the material to remain with him.



It's clear when it comes to learning Torah that we easily forget what we learn. We see that we cannot remember all the material, and therefore we understand the need to review it. But when it comes to learning about our own souls, this much is not clear. If we take a 30 year old, for example, and we ask him if he remembers what has happened to him since he was 18, all he will be able to do is tell you some things that he vaguely remembers, general memories. Usually, the memory of a person's life is lost.

It is written, "*This is the book of the offspring of man*" – there is a "*sefer*" called "*Toldos Adam*", "offspring of man", (one's own personal history), and this *sefer* is written in our own hearts. The Magid of Mezritch said that the "three books opened on Rosh HaShanah" are found in our own hearts. We all have a *sefer* in our heart – in one person's *sefer*, it is written that he will live for 70 years, and in another person's *sefer* it says he will live for 80 years. The problem is that we are opening only one page of this *sefer* every day of our lives, while the earlier pages of our personal *sefer* are long forgotten, and we don't remember anything of them.

If a person wants to learn about himself, he must take notes on himself, of how the days of his life are going by and how he is experiencing them. The point of writing a personal diary is not to write in it "Today I went to the store, I bought two bottles of milk and three loaves of bread, and there was no yogurt there, so I didn't get to buy yogurt." The point is to write down your perspectives.

This is a subtle point, which many are mistaken in. Many people keep a diary and write in it, "Today I was happy", or "Today I was sad". They remember the feelings they experienced during the day and write them down, but there is not much use of this. We mean here that a person should write down more of a soul perspective concerning the day. For example: If a person was happy during the day, he should write down what caused him to be happy. If something made him sad, he should write down what caused him to be sad.

What does a person gain from this kind of writing? The results can be seen at a later date, when he compares notes. For example: "Today, on the first day of month of Kislev in the year 5767, I was happy, because...." He should write down clearly what reason made him happy. A year later, he might discover that what made him happy a year ago no longer makes him happy.

Another example: If a person lost 1000 dollars and he was sad because of this, two years later, he may find that he has matured since then, and if he loses 1000 again, he might find that he now accepts this more calmly, whether naturally or because he has worked on his *emunah* since then. When comparing notes in the diary to last year's entry in the diary, a person can see how much he has grown since then. Two years ago, losing 1000 dollars caused him great anguish, and now, when it is two years since then, a person sees that he is less frazzled by this, and he sees how much progress he has made.

Another example: if a person got angry that day, he should write down what reason he thinks is the one that made him angry. After a year, he can re-read the entry, and he may see that whatever made him angry a year ago is exactly what makes him angry now as well, and nothing has changed.

This is all what it means to learn about oneself. The point of writing these notes in a personal diary is not just to write about what you did or felt that day. The point is to uncover the motivations behind what you did and felt.

When you want to examine your progress, open up the diary right before Rosh HaShanah and review the entire diary, from last year until now, and learn about yourself. This will take time, but it enables you to compare the beginning of the year with the end of the year, what motivated you a year ago and what motivates you now, and your ups and downs in the past year. Slowly, you will be able to learn about yourself. Make sure to read all of the entries in the diary since it began, and not just a year's worth of it. In this way, you can examine yourself throughout the years.

This is the "*sefer Toldos Adam*", all that has transpired upon you, written in a diary, forever there for you to see and study. When a person dies and his soul returns to Heaven, he is shown his entire life, like a videotape. In this world, nobody videotapes a person's life for 70 years, and therefore, a person has to 'videotape' his own life by writing down a diary that describes himself throughout the years.

We want to build our inner selves, and to reach a point where we are building ourselves step after step. But we need to first build the first floor, then the second floor upon it, and then a third floor upon that. Usually when people try to build themselves, they try to build their upper floors before building the first floors, and what happens? The upper floors collapse, because nothing is holding them up.

In order to learn about our own souls, one must first keep a diary of notes about himself, taking these notes slowly and calmly, and he cannot expect after 2 weeks to know himself. He must be patient when it comes to this. A person needs at least half a year of writing these notes in his diary until he can begin to learn about himself.

One should regard his personal diary as the most valuable item he owns. It is the most precious thing he has in his life, because it can teach him how to recognize his soul.

When a person begins to take notes about himself in a personal diary, after some time, he will slowly discover things about himself which will make him realize that he never recognized himself at all until now. Before keeping a diary, if we ask a person, "How do you describe yourself?" he may have said, "I get angry a lot", "I am shy", "I feel that I am better than others", etc., and these are all generalities, which do not describe the subtleties of the soul.

We can compare this to a taxi driver, who works for 10-14 hours a day, and sometimes for even 16 hours straight. Does he care about everything that transpired to him throughout the day? All he cares about is how much money he made at the end of the day. He is not thinking about the fact that he travelled in all four directions of the earth that day. The same can be said of ourselves. Our souls are really going through so much, and we need to learn about all of its travels, where it has gone to, and these are not just memories of yesterday which we never think about ever again.

Rav Dessler once said that after he returned from a flight, he reviewed all of the new things he learned since the start of the flight until the end. Then he thought about which of this information is needed, and which is not. That is an example of a person who made sure to learn about himself.

But generally speaking, people look at their lives only with regards to results, not about what happened until then. A materialistic kind of person will think about how much money he made, or how much honor he received. A more spiritual person will think about how many pages of Gemara he has learned, and how much of it he remembers. Although this is worthwhile for a person to

examine and remember, if a person remains at that level, he has missed the main point. He is missing the main thing to know, which is: the knowledge about oneself.

We have been given 70 years to work on this. We need to think about what has transpired since our childhood, and of our adulthood, if we didn't utilize it properly until now; and from that point onward, we must begin to learn about our own souls, a continuous learning process which lasts a lifetime. If a person at the age of 30 or 40 hasn't discovered anything new about his personality, it is a clear sign that he has stopped trying to understand himself – or, it can be that he has never even begun.

One needs to learn about himself throughout his entire life. In our soul, there are layers upon layers. Until the end of our life, a person is never done learning about his soul.....

#### 4. The Proper Attitude Towards Self-Recognition: A Learning Process, Not An Absolute Knowledge

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There is also a certain fundamental approach which we need to have towards our souls, which is the proper attitude that we need to have, throughout all of this self-studying. It is illustrated through the following example.

At a certain point in one's life, he may desire to learn a certain profession, so that he can earn a livelihood. In some situations, he eventually goes out to work, after learning a profession, and in other cases, he does not. But it can also happen that two years pass after he has begun learning about a certain field, and suddenly, he feels a desire to learn about a different field.

As soon as he feels this new desire to learn about a different field, his newfound feeling is: "This is the real me! For the last two years, I was making a mistake, by learning about that other profession. I didn't understand who "the real me" was!" However, what he forgot is that two years ago, he also that the profession which he started to learn about is the "real me".

The proper approach he needs to have right now, upon feeling the wish to learn about the new profession, is to realize that he still does not understand who his "real me" is. Instead, he should have the attitude that he is amidst a learning process, of trying to discover the "real me", and the new profession which he will be learning about is only another step in this learning process, of discovering his true personality.

The *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* says that ever since it was decreed upon man "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread", Hashem has given each person different abilities and talents with which they can use to earn livelihood from. One person has a personality that is best suited to become a blacksmith, another person is better fit to be a shoemaker, etc. These areas of work are actually related to aspects of the unique personality that is in each person. A person's livelihood needs to come from an area of work which uses his main strengths, which are part of his natural inner makeup.

If a person doesn't merit finding a job which utilizes his true personality, and instead he works at a job which doesn't really suit his nature, this is a form of exile. An example is if a person is better suited to work in front of a computer in an office, and he can't find a job, so he becomes a taxi driver. Each person is given certain abilities which he can aid him in making a livelihood. Although earning a livelihood is the curse given to mankind, a person who needs to earn livelihood still needs to find a job which utilizes his own talents.

Usually, as soon as a person feels an affinity for something, he immediately decides that he must pursue it, as if "This is me". But if he would remember that in the past he also felt that way, and that he had been mistaken, he would simply realize that his newfound feeling is simply adding more to the learning process about himself.

This doesn't mean that he should ignore what he is feeling and stay away from anything that he feels drawn towards. It just means that he shouldn't be quick to decide that "This is who I am", and that instead he should add it to the learning process about himself. He should look at his new affinity as a passing stage, which is part of his journey of self-knowledge, and that it is another opportunity for him to discover where his true strengths lie.

What usually happens is that whenever a person feels an affinity for a certain job, he immediately pursues it, and after some time he regrets it. Some people, when reaching that point, will do some soul-searching: "Why is it that I want certain things, and after some time I always end up having regrets about it?" The root of the issue is because when the person first wanted it, he identified this desire as "This is who I am", so when he later regrets his actions, he says to himself: "I don't even know what I want from myself! Am I such a confused, mixed-up person??"

If he would have gotten used to the idea that his wishes do not represent his true personality, and that they are just part of the learning process about himself which aid him in discovering what he really wants, two weeks later when he loses his excitement for what he wanted, he can say to himself that it was only an external, superficial wish that he had, and that it wasn't a part of his actual personality to want this.

One needs to get used to recognizing that whatever he goes through in life is all part of the learning process about himself. Gradually, a person can begin to recognize what his genuine feelings are, and which feelings are accompanying him. As time goes on, he can reveal in himself deeper layers to his personality, digging deeper into his soul.

## [In Summary and In Conclusion]

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In summation, the "*Ruach*" level of the soul is, essentially, to learn about oneself. The Vilna Gaon said that a person's primary spiritual level is the "*Ruach*" point of the soul, because that is the part of the soul where free will is located. This is also the place in the soul where one learns about himself.

All that we have explained here is barely scratching the surface of this topic. Self-recognition is the main fundamental, upon which one builds and develops the potential of his soul. The basis of building our souls is through recognizing ourselves. Everything that we go through in life must become a learning process about ourselves. That is the "*Ruach*" level of the soul.

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## *// Thoughts of Neshamah – Building Your Torah Thinking*

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### 1. The “Neshamah” Level of Thought

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The *Neshamah* level of the soul corresponds to the analytical power of reflection, which in Hebrew is called *binah* (li. “understanding”) or *hisbonenus* (reflection).

The sefer *Derech Etz Chaim* says that “The wise go and constantly think.” The difference between a wise person and unwise person is not that the wise person is a thinker and the unwise person is not a thinker, or that the wise person thinks more and the unwise person thinks less. The common quality of all wise people is that they are always in a state of thought. Their minds are always active, and their thinking is always alert.

The difference between the wise person and the unwise person is, firstly, in the different topics that they think about, and on a deeper level, in their different thinking patterns.

In most people, it is the power of “**action**” which bears the most active role in their life. A small percentage of people are a bit more inward, and they have profound **feelings and emotions**, which plays a very active role in their life. (This doesn’t mean that they never act practically. It is just that their emotions play more of a role in their life, relatively speaking, in comparison to others). An even smaller percentage of people are mainly **thinkers**.

### 2. Alive Thought vs. Dead Thought

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There are many levels to thought. Generally, thought divides into two levels: A thought which is “alive”, and a thought which is “dead”.

In our generation today, there are many kinds of thought. In the technology field, there are computer designers, the electric company, car manufacturers, etc. These experts are not that focused on hands-on action; they are more into the thinking that goes into these things. However, although they are thinkers, their heavy use of thought is a “dead” kind of thought.

For example, if a person opens up a company, he may spend 8-10 hours reviewing the orders and request, inspecting his warehouse, coming up with solutions to problems, sending out technological assistance, thinking about the best ways to profit, etc. However, he is not really “living” that which he builds. The thinking that he spends on it is only superficial. When he is done putting together everything that has to get done, he is not more connected to it just because he has thought a lot about it. Even while the company is being built, it does not express the thoughts of his soul. It is just ideas and quick flashes of inspiration. Although he gets a building and a company from all of his

thinking and planning, these thoughts are not a representation of his essence. They are external thoughts, not a kind of thought that he is inwardly connected to.

There is nothing wrong with such thoughts, from a viewpoint of *halachah* (Jewish law). But we should understand that these are not the kind of thoughts which the Ramchal describes as “The wise go and think constantly.” The earlier philosophers would ponder thoughts that were closer to a “soul” kind of thought, and especially the thinkers who lived a little before 1000 years ago, and even after that, where people whose thoughts were closer to the soul. Whereas the thinkers of long ago were expressing thoughts that were “alive”, the thinkers of today are expressing thoughts that can be called “dead”.

When the Ramchal describes power of constantly active thought, this is not the same kind of thought as a person who keeps thinking how to make more money, or a person who is thinking of how to open a company. A “wise” thinker is rather someone who thinks a kind of thought that is constant and alive - a kind of thought that is vitality-giving and energizing, not a superficial kind of thought.

A person may spend the entire day in thought, thinking about various aspects of life, but these thoughts are not connected with his essence. Rather, they are “outside” thoughts. A person in charge of an organization has to think all day, answering phones from morning until night, but these thoughts do not represent his being. These thoughts are external to him, and they are not connected with his essence, with his soul.

### 3. Revealing The Soul's Power of Thinking

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The Ramchal's description of a power of thought that is constantly active is a kind of thought that comes from within a person's soul, from his inside. Why does the wise person think constantly? It is because he has revealed the power of thought.

Let us use the following analogy from our life, in order to understand this. If we ask a person why he constantly breathes in and out, what is the answer? Is it a spontaneous ability which escorts a person wherever he is? Is it an action that happens because he has no control over it? Clearly, that is not the reason why he constantly breathes. The reason why a person keeps inhaling and exhaling is because it is his very vitality. The same can be true of the power of thought. When a person has revealed the power of thought, he will think constantly, because thinking has become his very vitality.

The wise person [or Torah scholar] is constantly thinking because he is aware of the necessity to think, and that it is an act that keeps him inwardly alive, no less necessary than the act of inhaling and exhaling which keeps a person physically alive. Just as a person must breathe in order to stay alive, so do seekers of wisdom feel that they must always be in a state of thinking, in order to stay

alive. The Rambam rules that when a student goes into exile, his Torah teacher goes with him, for “to be without wisdom and without Torah is like death to them.”<sup>76</sup>

In other words, the power to constantly think does not stem from an intellectual perspective in which a person simply understands that life is about becoming a thinker. It is not the same thinking as the ideologists, who feel that people should become wise thinkers simply for its own sake. This is a perspective which comes from a superficial outlook towards life, which holds that a person who isn't an intellectual is a lowly, unsuccessful person, whereas a knowledgeable person is dignified and worthy of attention, etc. This is the superficial perspective of universities that values the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, which, even when achieved, is only an external level of knowledge that does not express one's inner being.

Such “wisdom” is even worse than the Torah learning of Doeg and Achitophel, whose Torah learning was only “from the lips and outward” – for they [the universities] are not involved with the soul's actual power of thinking, but with studying matters that are not connected with man's inner being. A person may ponder matters of science or anything else in the world, but with no internal connection to it. It is just a study of wisdom for the sake of wisdom.<sup>77</sup>

When a person studies medicine, biology, or any other field, this has no connection to his being. When he thinks and studies this kind of knowledge, it does not come from his true power of thought. Instead, he has the belief that it is a good to become knowledgeable about things, or perhaps even more so, because he is a natural thinker who is drawn towards various areas of knowledge, no less than how a person who loves to talk will be drawn towards talking. But this kind of thinking does not come from the soul's power to think. It is only some small spark of it [and hence not enough to make it spiritual].

The true power of thought, which comes from one's inner being, and which is constantly active once it is revealed, is only revealed to a person who realizes that his very vitality comes from thinking. [Understandably, there is also a higher source of vitality than this, but we are not dealing with that level here]. One who has the understanding can then reveal and awaken the power of thought within him, as a natural and constantly active ability. One can come to understand that the power of thought is a natural part of his system, just like he has a natural circulation of blood, a natural ability to inhale and exhale, a nervous system, etc. When a person reveals the *neshamah*, he reveals a natural power of thinking, from within him.

This was the difference between true scholars, with all other scholars. The scholars who possessed true wisdom were those whose thinking came from within them, whereas all other scholars got their thinking from the outside, and not from within.

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<sup>76</sup> Rambam Hilchos Rotzeiach 7:1

<sup>77</sup> Editor's Note: It is well-known that “wisdom for the sake of wisdom” was the Greek mentality and the epitome of the Greek exile which threatened the spiritual well-being of the Jewish people during the period of Chanukah.

## 4. Acquired Thinking Patterns – The Gain and The Drawback

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Our point here is not only regarding what the source of true thought is (which can only come from the soul, from inside the person, as opposed to any knowledge acquired from outside). That is, understandably, the root. But here we are aiming at how to identify the *results* of true thinking: It concerns the topic that one is thinking about, and, taking it deeper, it is about the way of thought [the thinking patterns].

Most people do not have their own independent way of thinking. It is almost nonexistent. Instead, they get their thinking from reading newspaper articles, and from their social circles which they are found in. Their way of thinking is generally coming from these outside sources, with only minimal thinking on their own, with some more and some less. This is especially the case in recent years, where people are connected with the media. Since most people are not disconnected from the media, their thinking is mostly coming from the world outside of them.

Avraham Avinu was the beginning of our nation. He did not receive his thinking from the outside. He estranged himself from the ways of thinking of his father Terach, and his thinking came from within him. The Sages state that at three years old, Avraham recognized his Creator.<sup>78</sup> This is because he would reflect from within himself.

**Thus, we can understand that although our own thinking patterns must also be built from outside of us – that is, from the knowledge we have received in a tradition from our ancestors and Rabbis – along with this, there is a corresponding task to build a way of thinking that comes from within ourselves [as individuals].**

The Sages praise one who does not say anything which he did not hear from his [Torah] teachers.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, the Sages state that every novel Torah thought of every Torah student was already received by Moshe *Rabbeinu* from the mouth of Hashem.<sup>80</sup> If one does not say any words of Torah which he didn't hear from his Torah teacher, what new Torah thoughts are there for him to say? And if he does state his own novel Torah thoughts, how can he do this, if he shouldn't say any Torah thoughts that he didn't hear from his Torah teacher?

The answer to this is because on one hand, we have the path of Torah thinking which we receive from our Rabbis [in a chain of tradition that has been passed down throughout the generations], and simultaneously, we also have a path of our own, individualized thinking.

We have seen this throughout the generations. When we learn the words of Torah which were taught by the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, do we see that they all had the same ways of thinking? When a person learns a section of Gemara with the commentaries of the *Rishonim*, and then he sees the commentaries of the *Acharonim*, he sees that there are different ways of thought, all the way until the

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<sup>78</sup> *Nedarim* 32a

<sup>79</sup> *Succah* 28a

<sup>80</sup> *Megillah* 19b



most recent generations. When one is familiar with the different styles of thinking in Torah learning that existed, he is well-aware that there are big differences between them.

Here is an example. Two or three generations ago, a large amount of the Jewish people lived in Europe. There were two different styles of thinking there: Vilna and Poland. One can tell the difference between these two schools of thought by examining the *sefarim* of Torah scholars who came from Vilna and Poland. The same question of *halachah* which was sent to two different rabbis, one in Vilna and one in Poland, would have two completely different responses. And had the question been sent to the Torah scholars who lived in Spain, there would have been a third response which was of completely different way of thinking.

We are saying here that there are different ways to think. If a person is born in Spain, naturally, his thinking will be like the traditional way of thinking in Spain. He was born there and he grew up there, so he is used to thinking like how they think in Spain. But he is not being truthful. Just because he was born in Spain doesn't mean that he has to think like those in Spain. Perhaps he is supposed to adapt the way of thinking that is in Poland! And the same is true for a person who was born and raised in Poland – it may be that he is really supposed to think like those in Spain!

The reality of today is that a person has gotten used to a certain way of thinking, which is based on where he grew up – and with that thinking, he lives his life. All of his thinking is based on the foundations which he received, and he hasn't yet parted from it. Even if a person tries to learn everything again from scratch, he wouldn't succeed, because his thinking patterns have already been set in a certain direction, and it is upon those thinking patterns that he will base everything on. It can be compared to a cup which contains some crumbs. Any beverage which we pour into the cup will have crumbs floating in it, because the crumbs remain inside the cup.

## 5. The First Step – Acquiring a Traditional Way of Thinking From Our Torah Teachers

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Thus, the definition here is that a person must examine the root of the very way he thinks. The question now is: How does a person reach it? There is an external method, and an inner method.

The external method is that a person needs to get used to learning the *sefarim* of the many different kinds of wise Torah leaders of the Jewish people. (This is in contrast to the behavior of the current generation, where each person only learns the *sefarim* of his particular sect of Jewry. This is one of the gravest errors which we can possibly find).

After a person has seen all the many different 'colors', he can then discern which 'color' he feels he is closer to. This is not determined by the place where one currently lives, or where he was born, or where he was educated, or which sect of Jewry which his father was connected with. (This does not contradict the honor to his father. His father is certainly precious and he deserves to be honored.

But the son is allowed to learn about where he personally belongs, and he is allowed to think in a different way than his father did).

In order for a person to recognize where he personally belongs, he needs to learn *sefarim* of many different ‘colors’, and slowly, as he learns more, he will begin to identify if he feels closer to a certain way of thinking. If a person begins to examine himself on the inside and he immediately feels that he is supposed to think like the way of thinking of the place he was born and raised in, it is very possible that he hasn’t yet examined well what he read and learned about. He is simply remaining in his ‘comfort zone’. But it is also possible that the particular way of thinking he feels drawn to is indeed the one that he truly belongs to.

Firstly, in order for a person to reach even the minimum level of independent thought, he must read the *sefarim* of our Rabbis, from the times of the *Geonim* and *Rishonim* through the times of the *Acharonim*, from all of the generations. After this studying, he should then see: “Where do I belong in all of this?” The purpose of this is not, *chas v’shalom*, to belittle or negate any of the paths which he doesn’t connect to. “*All of them are holy, all of them are pure, all of them are clear, all of them are pure.*” It is just that one needs to find where “I” belong to, amidst all of the different paths.

When people learn Torah exclusively with a certain way of thinking, this can be compared to a person who is asked to plant a wheat field, and instead he plants a grapevine, but the field isn’t meant for a grapevine. In the same way, it’s possible that a person will go his whole life using a certain way of thinking which is the wrong ‘color’ for his personal soul.

Our eyes can see that most people remain in the sect of Jewry which they were born into, and in the place where they were born. Understandably, many people returning to Judaism have uprooted themselves from their previous place, but most people in the world remain where they are and with their same ways of living and thinking.

If we have understood by now the need to build the power of independent thought, which must first be preceded with acquiring a way of thinking from our outside, it is by first reading and hearing all the necessary information of the holy Torah that there is for us to know, in all of its many ‘colors’ [the different accepted ways of thinking of the Torah]. Only after we have amassed this study can we identify which ‘color’ we are closer to, and to which particular sect of Jewry we belong more to.

Understandably, people can feel differently about where they belong to, depending on the particular time or period of the year. At one time of the year, a person will feel more connected to a certain point, and at other times in his life, he will feel that he more appropriately belongs to a different point. In order to know this, one should refer to the previous chapter, where we explained about how a person must know his personal world of feelings – one must learn about who he is, by examining his different feelings and perspectives. In the same way, a person must learn about his own way of thinking, by examining his thinking patterns.

In summary, first a person must learn a way of thinking which he acquires from his outside. We explained that this requires a person to read through many different ‘colors’ of Torah, many different ways of thinking in the Torah, which are all the ways of our teachers. After this, a person

can then begin to identify which way of thinking he feels closer to and more personally connected to.

Clearly, **we do not mean** that after one has discerned a particular way of thinking which he feels closer to, that he should only learn the same *sefer* again and again which reflects that style of thinking he mainly connects to. Rather, all it means is that he should now place his central focus on the particular way of thinking which he feels the most connected to, but in the meantime, he should certainly learn other *sefarim*, so that he can ‘complete the pieces of the puzzle’. But his soul will be getting vitality from the central way of thinking which he feels that he has found himself in.

## 6. The Second Step – Acquiring Independent Thought

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Until now we learned about identifying our personal way of thinking, through outside means. Now we will explain the internal ways of revealing our personal way of thinking, which comes from within.

In order to reach an internal power of thought, we need to simply **get used to thinking!**

One of the *Roshei Yeshivos* in Yerushalayim would present a question to his students and ask them what they have to say about it. There were several gains of this, but there is one particular gain from this approach, which is relevant to our discussion.

Consider the following example. Many people are familiar with learning *Chumash* with the explanation of *Rashi*. Often, *Rashi* asks a question and then gives the answer. If a person sees *Rashi*’s question and immediately proceeds to the answer, he will never reach his ability to have independent thought.

If one wishes to truly reach his ability of independent thought, he should make the following change to his style of learning. When he reads *Rashi*’s question, he should pause, and close the *Chumash*. Then he should think to himself: “What is a possible answer to this question?” He should think of all the possibilities, and keep thinking it over. If he doesn’t come up with an answer, he shouldn’t despair, and try the same thing again when he comes to the next question.

If he does come up with one answer to the question, or more, he should then check *Rashi*’s answer. If *Rashi*’s answer is the same as the one he figured out, it is a sign that he has reached *Rashi*’s way of thinking, from within himself! This is an inner revelation of the self.

Clearly, our intention in revealing the self should not be for the purpose of conceitedness, but to reveal the power of thought of the *neshamah* that resides within us. Through doing your own thinking into each question you come across, before seeing the answer, you begin to awaken the root of your *neshamah*.

*Rashi* was able to ask his question and answer his question because he had clearly revealed his power of “holy intellect”, which is the *neshamah*. Since he had revealed his *neshamah*, he was able to

know the answer to his question. From the very same inner place in the soul where *Rashi* was able to produce the answer, every person as well can reveal the answer to *Rashi's* question, from within his own soul. The soul is a “small universe”, which includes in it all of the existing aspects of the universe, and therefore a person must reveal his own independent way of thinking.

In our educational systems, from childhood through the teenage years, we can tell that there are many places where they teach people how to be robots. They teach the students that regarding a particular issue, there is a certain question, and they present the exact way that the question must be asked, along with three answers: according to *Rashi*, according to the *Ramban*, according to the *Ritva*. Then there is a test, and everyone has to write down these three answers to the question. This is a good approach if we want to teach students how to become parrots, but in order to teach them how to be a “person”, we need to bring him to a situation where he thinks!

When I was in *yeshiva* high school, there was a Rosh Yeshivah there who gave an in-depth Gemara *shiur*, as is the way of the *yeshivos*. But he would always tell us, “I request of you, please, not to believe me If I tell you something in the name of the *Ketzos HaChoshen*, open up the *sefer* and check it.”

What is the depth behind this approach? It is true that a person must have *emunas chachamim* (faith in the Torah sages), and he must believe that everything written by our Rabbis is true (and if he doesn't understand something that he comes across, he should mark it for himself that “I don't understand”); one should understand that all of their words are true and that it is just that he doesn't understand, and this is the basis from which we must start. But if we want to reach the *neshamah* within us, we need to awaken the power of thought which exists in each and every one of us.

Those who are found outside the world of Torah, who aren't involved in the holy study of Torah, are mostly not thinking. They are just taking life as it comes, without doing any thinking. Even when they learn a profession, which requires some thinking, this is just gathering information.

There was a young student in our *yeshivah* who memorized all of the phone numbers of everyone who lived in Gush Dan. It would seem that this boy should earn the title of “*gaon*” (an exceptionally brilliant person). But of what use is his knowledge? He simply memorized information. Computers can do a much better job at that today. Within moments, a computer can connect to all of information on every telephone number in the country, as well as the planet. But this is not called thinking, because it is just electronically stored information. If that is not called thinking, then what is? It's simple: a person has to become someone who thinks!

Some people, when they have a question about the weekly *parshah*, will quickly open up the *Chumash Mikraos Gedolos*, to see which of the *mefarshim* (commentaries) discuss their question and what they answer. They find their question and answer in *Rashi*, *Ramban*, *Kli Yakar*, *Ohr HaChaim*, or *Malbim*. This approach needs to be switched for a different one. *Baruch Hashem*, the person has merited to ask a good question about the holy Torah. So he should stop and think for 15 minutes, of how to answer his question, on his own!

If he can't think on his own for 15 minutes, he should try it for 10 minutes. If that is too hard, he should try thinking for 5 minutes. If he can't do even that, he should try thinking for just one minutes, or even half a minute! But he should start getting used to thinking!

The point of getting used to thinking is to bring a person to a revelation of the *neshamah* within him, through reflecting on each thing he comes across.

As an example, when a person is reading a verse in the *Chumash*, instead of immediately turning to *Rashi*, he should read the verse several times and keep asking himself: "Is everything clear here? Do I understand each word?" If something is unclear, he should begin to clarify what he understands and what he doesn't understand. He should think about what he doesn't understand about the verse, and try to come up with way to explain the verse. Only after that should he check the explanation of *Rashi*.

If he sees that his thinking matches the explanation of *Rashi*, it shows that he has revealed *Rashi's* thinking within himself. If *Rashi* has a different explanation than his own, he needs to think why *Rashi* gave this explanation specifically, and not the one he thought of. One should also realize that just because *Rashi* didn't explain it like you doesn't mean that your explanation is wrong. There are 70 facets of understanding to each verse in the Torah. Instead of rejecting your explanation because *Rashi* gave a different one, examine your explanation better and see if perhaps you were making a mistake about something.

Acquiring the ability of independent thought is more applicable to men, who have the commandment to study Torah in-depth, and hence less applicable to women. However, women also need to have a constantly active power of thought. The necessity to think is not an issue that depends on gender. Anyone who doesn't develop their ability of thought will become bombarded from the many different responsibilities of life, from running all over the place to take care of things, but with no time to ever think.

The power of thought must become constantly alert and active. One needs to get used to thinking about each thing he encounters. For a Jew, there is no shortage of holy topics to think about and fill the mind with. But one must also think about everything he comes across in the world. When we discussed thought on the level of "*Nefesh*", we gave examples from the world, in how a person can begin to develop his world of thought, beginning from the basic aspects of the material reality that found in front of us. From there, we can go further into the realm of thought, to the deeper layers of the *neshamah*.

## [Thinking About Your Emotions]

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[We need to think as well about the emotions we experience]. A person has a baby born to him. Everyone is happy for him and wishing him "*Mazal Tov*". Does anyone stop to think what the meaning of "*Mazal Tov*" is? Everyone is saying it, but do they understand what they are saying? When a person experiences the birth of a baby, this is one of the deepest experiences in life,

especially if it is his first child. Any new parent will feel tremendous joy. But does a person stop to think of *why* he is happy?

A person is about to get married. Does he ever think why he is getting married? Does he think of what his joy is? If people would think deeply into why they are getting married, it is certain that 70% of people would change their minds! But the reality is that not even one person thinks that deeply into it. (Even the 30% who would still decide to get married, even after realizing what marriage is, would only do so because they have made an inner decision to do so, and therefore they want to live up to their decision.)

The reality is, however, that every person getting married realizes only afterward that he had no idea what he was entering into. After being married, a person slowly realizes what it means to get married. Today, a person may consider the gains versus the drawbacks of getting married, and still decide to get married, but 70% of people, after considering this, would take a step back – not because they don't want to get married, but because they would simply become too afraid of the difficulties. In our times, there is a considerable amount of people who aren't getting married. Those who do get married are doing so either because they have great inner understanding about life, or because they do not think that much.

Marriage is a big step in life to take, and yet people don't think about it beforehand. A boy or girl who reaches marriageable age will immediately start looking for a match. But does anyone think at all of why they should get married? Perhaps one will say to this, "What's the question? Everyone is getting married, so why shouldn't we?" Nobody thought, "Maybe I shouldn't get married..." But if a person got married and he never even considered the possibility of "Maybe I shouldn't", this is like a goat which sticks its head into bucket of water in front of it, and immediately starts drinking.

Obviously, our intention here is not that people shouldn't be getting married. Our point here is that whenever a person is about to do something, before sticking his head into it, he should first think: "Should I do it, or should I not do it?"

If one is on a higher level, his intentions are closer to the sake of Heaven, and he will get married because he knows that there is a *mitzvah* upon a man to get married, and a woman has certain marital obligations as well (to some extent). But first, before getting married, one should think if he should do it or not. After he has thought about it, he should then conclude: "Does Hashem obligate me to do this? Yes." He can also recognize that he isn't getting married entirely for the sake of Heaven. After doing such thinking, he will be clearer if he should do it or not. He can weigh the options, of why he should do it and why he shouldn't do it, and then decide.

Once a *chassid* asked the Kotzker Rebbe, "How can I become a true, devout *chassid*?" The Kotzker responded: "When you get up in the morning, before you go to *daven*, think a little about the following: "After *davening*, I will be getting ready to eat breakfast – right? After all, the Gemara says that there is an obligation to eat bread in the morning. So, think to yourself: Who says that I should first *daven* and then eat? Maybe it should be the other way around – that I should first eat and then *daven*?" The *chassid* trembled and immediately countered, "But it's forbidden to eat before

*davening!*” The Kotzker said to him: “Pay attention to what you have just said. Perhaps the reason why you don’t eat in the morning before *davening* is because you are simply not hungry then.”

The point of this thinking is for one to first take apart a matter and to understand it more accurately. In the above example of the *halachah* not to eat before *davening*, one must first see that he does not wish to eat before *davening*, and then he should think this thought apart: What is the real reason that I am not eating before *davening*? It is because Hashem has said what the order of the day should be. First we must *daven*, and then we eat.”

Then, when he goes to *daven* and when he goes to eat, he should do so with this awareness: “I, personally, would like to eat before *davening*. Or, perhaps I don’t want to eat before *davening* (because I’m not hungry in the morning). But even if my personal preference is to eat before *davening*, I am holding myself back, because Hashem gave me a Torah to follow.”

Clearly, the Kotzker Rebbe’s words to the *chassid* were not only for the purpose of bringing a person to have intentions for the sake of Heaven (which would be a deeper point). There is a more basic and fundamental point here: For a person to train himself to be more aware of his intentions, in what he does.

The average person does not eat before *davening* because it is simply part of his daily routine, and he does not pay attention to what he does or doesn’t do. This is not an issue of having intentions for the sake of Heaven or not. It is simply a lack of awareness to what he’s doing. He might be a very organized person, who first *davens* before eating anything, and later he learned the *halachah* that it is forbidden to eat before *davening*. But he did not do so out of any awareness to what he was doing.

A person gets up in the morning and goes to *daven*. Does he ever think, “Maybe I shouldn’t go?” He may think that any other option is unthinkable, and say, “*Chas v’shalom*. There is an obligation to go *daven* in the morning. Chazal enacted three obligatory *tefillos* a day!” Of course he is correct. But a more truthful perspective would be: “I got up in the morning, tired, and with no strength to go *daven*. So why did I go to *daven*? It was because I know that the Torah obligates me to go *daven*. I need to align with my actions and my feelings to the Torah, and to desire to go *daven*.” One needs to examine his motivations and think about what he is doing, and why.

There are countless examples of this idea, and it takes a lifetime to work upon. In any of the examples, the main point must be understood: in order for a person to reach the *neshamah* within him, he must think more.

## [Training Ourselves To Think]

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There’s a line in a *sefer* which says, “All of the abbreviated *halachah sefarim* of our times, abbreviate the life and years of a person.” In the past, in order for a person to know a certain *halachah*, he didn’t have a choice but to open up the *Shulchan Aruch*, learn the *Magen Avraham* and the *Taz*, then the *Pri Megadim*, until he concluded what the *halachah* was. Today, *Baruch Hashem*,

on every topic in *halachah* you can find abbreviated *halachah sefarim*, with an index in the back of the *sefer*, and then you can immediately find what you want. Clearly, there is an advantage to this, which we are not coming to negate. But the very approach [of these *sefarim*] has caused many people not to think.

In recent years, new editions of *Gemaras* have been produced, with easy-to-read commentaries. For many years, there were *Gedolei Yisrael* who were opposed to it, for the reason that it prevents a person from truly thinking while learning the words of the Gemara. It used to be that a person had no choice but to think, when he learned the Gemara. But if a Gemara has periods and commas in it which make it easier to read, and with easy-to-read commentaries on the side that simply the Gemara learning process, a person does not think at all. However, since we live in times where Torah study needs to be especially increased, the Gedolim permitted the use of such Gemara's.

Even so, there is a clear reason why there was opposition to these Gemara's. It is because a person was born to reveal the *neshamah* within him, and in order to reveal it, a person has to reach a point where his intellect is constantly active. If everything is 'spoon-fed' to us, we cannot get anywhere.

We need to train ourselves to get used to thinking. After training ourselves, we must then do the same with our children, and educate them to think. Many times a child will ask, "Why?" Before answering the child, tell him, "Think about it, and then I'll tell you why." After that, you can answer him. But before you give him the answer, give him a minute to think. Ask the child: "What do you think about this?" You don't have to 'spoon-feed' every answer to the child. This is applicable not only with children, but also with ourselves.

When you come across a question, pause and think about it. If you see two answers to a question, begin to think why the first answer didn't want to say the second answer, and why the second answer didn't want to say the first answer. As long as it is a point which can be thought about, one should train himself not to quickly see the answer, but to stop for a moment and think about the question. We are not losing anything from this. To the contrary, we will be gaining. We will be gaining our *neshamah* from it, along the way.

The *neshamah* is the power of thinking which is found within us. It is the root of the revelation of G-dliness that is found within man. If we wish to get anywhere, we must know that a person who doesn't think has no hope!

Our life is successful is only if we have "the mind controls the heart." We first need an actively working mind! If one does not develop his mind, he certainly will have no control over his heart. And if he doesn't have control over his heart, he will simply follow his heart's natural emotions, which do not enable a person to reach his *neshamah*.

In our times, a person can find quick indexes which give brief definitions of the deepest possible matters. There are certainly advantages to this, but at the same time it trains us not to think. In the past, when a person would begin to learn a tractate of Gemara, he would jump into it and arrange and clarify the matters by himself, and that is how he would enter further into the tractate. Today,



the new Gemara's have two introductory pages at the beginning which give a general summary of the topics to be discussed, and immediately a person receives a clarity on what he will be learning about. On one hand, this gives him something, but at the same time, it makes him lose so much – because it trains him not to think.

The Chazon Ish would learn the Gemara first without looking at *Rashi's* explanation. First he would try to understand it on his own, and only after that would he check to see what *Rashi* said. This is not conceitedness, but an inner perspective, of training oneself to think. The Chazon Ish was known in the generation for his brilliance, and the reason for this is clear – it is because he trained himself to think about each thing.

There is a story told about Reb Chaim Soloveitchik, that once a person came into his room and saw that Reb Chaim's clock was several minutes later than the real time. The person there asked Reb Chaim: "Why doesn't the Rav set the clock to the exact time?" Reb Chaim answered, "I want to train myself that whenever I look at the clock, I am also thinking, besides for just seeing what the time is. When the clock isn't accurate, I have to figure it myself." That is an example of a person whose mind was strongly active, to the point that he was also able to place his head against the wall and think entirely about his Torah learning and forgetting about everything else in the reality around him.

These were men whose minds were active, who trained themselves to think about each thing. That was how they reached the inner point within them. This is not to say that it is the very innermost point, because there is more [in the soul] to reach than this. But in order to proceed further, we must build the power of thinking that is deep inside us.

May Hashem merit all of us to reach the ability of holy intellect, and from there, to attach ourselves with the Creator.

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## *12 / Thoughts of Chayah – Vitality Source & Self-Nullification*

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### 1. Wisdom – The Unification of the Universe

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The *Chayah* level of the soul is, in essence, the power of wisdom (*chochmah*), as Shlomo HaMelech said, “*Wisdom sustains its owner.*”<sup>81</sup> There is a verse, “*All of them, You made with wisdom.*”<sup>82</sup> It is clear and simple that this does not simply mean that each part of Creation was made with wisdom. Rather, the verse is coming to teach us that the common uniting factor between all of the creations is that they were all made with wisdom. Thus, it is teaching us that the root of the unification (*achdus*) of all of existence is *chochmah*, wisdom.

There is *achdus*/unification in the “negative” sense, and there is *achdus*/unification in the “positive” sense. *Chochmah*/wisdom is the “positive” use of *achdus*/unification, as in “*All of them You made with wisdom*”, which refers to action, and hence a constructive use of the *chochmah*. The positive use of *chochmah*/wisdom is, essentially, the unifying power in Creation.

### 2. The Connection Between Chayah/Chochmah and Ohr (Spiritual Light)

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*Chochmah* (wisdom) is a kind of *ohr* (spiritual light), as it is written, “*The wisdom of man illuminates his face.*”<sup>83</sup> The *Mishnah* in *Avos* teaches that the world was created with ten expressions.<sup>84</sup> The Gemara asks that the Torah only writes “*And Hashem said*” nine times – where is the tenth place? The Gemara answers that the word “*Beraishis*” counts as one of the expressions, for it is written, “*By the word of Hashem, the heavens were made.*”<sup>85</sup> Thus, the first expression of Hashem to create the world was “*Beraishis*” (“In the beginning”), and the second expression was “*And Hashem said, Let there be light*”.

The first expression, *Beraishis*, corresponds to the *Yechidah* level of the soul, which is also known as the spiritual sphere of “*Keser*” (lit. “Crown” - the highest spiritual point). The second expression, *Yehi ohr* (“Let there be light”), corresponds to the *Chayah* level of the soul, which is also known as the spiritual sphere of *Chochmah*, wisdom. From the above, it is clear and simple that the “*Chayah*” part of the soul corresponds to the power that is known as *ohr* – spiritual light – which is described in the words “*Yehi ohr*”, “Let there be light.”

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<sup>81</sup> *Koheles* 7:12

<sup>82</sup> *Tehillim* 104:24

<sup>83</sup> *Koheles* 8:1

<sup>84</sup> *Avos* 5:1

<sup>85</sup> *Rosh HaShanah* 32a

### 3. The All-Inclusive Light Which Sees From One End of the World To The Other

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Of this light, Chazal state that Adam was able to use it to see from one of the world to the other. How was Adam able to see through this light from one end of the world to the other? The simple answer to this is because the light must have been very powerful, enabling him to see that far. From a materialistic perspective, this seems to be a powerful form of physical vision, and it meant that Adam could stand at the northern end of the world and see what was happening in the southern end of the world, or to see the west from the south. This is only a superficial understanding, and although it may be true, this is not the inner point of the light.

Clearly, when the Sages revealed that there was a light which Adam could see from one end of the world to other with, they were not speaking of a superior kind of binoculars that could see a distance of a thousand kilometers away. Rather, they were defining what the concept of this spiritual light. It was the light of *chochmah*/wisdom, which is the “*Chayah*” part of the soul. Since the concept of this light is defined as *chochmah* - which unifies Creation - that is why it was a view that could see everything, from one end of the world to the other.

### 4. An Inner View From The Soul

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The “*Chayah*” part of the soul, which corresponds to *chochmah*/wisdom, is the root of the power of thought (*machshavah*). When the Sages revealed to us that there was a light which could see from one end of the world to the other, this was teaching each of us a way in *avodas Hashem*, that there is a power to see from one of the end to the other – through an inner understanding of our soul, and a perspective which one must work to acquire.

### 5. What Is The Thing That Unifies Everything Together?

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Let’s explain more. From a superficial perspective, we can say that man sees many details in the world: many creations, many actions, many colors, etc. Here is a question: What is the thing that unifies it all together?

Our teacher, the *Ramchal* (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato)<sup>86</sup> established that all of Creation serves to reveal the oneness (*yichud*) of Hashem, that there is nothing in Creation which rules besides for Him. This means that **every single action of every detail in Creation exists in order to reveal His oneness**. This is a brief description of the core of his Torah teachings.

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<sup>86</sup> Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, famed 16th century kabbalist and author of *Mesillas Yescharim (Path of the Just)*, *Derech Hashem (Way of G-d)*, *Daas Tevunos*, *Kelach Pischei Chochmah*, *Maamar HaChochmah*, and many other classic works of Jewish thought.

This fundamental teaching of the *Ramchal* reveals to us an important understanding about all of Creation: that **the entire Creation is unified**. Without this rule, we would view the entire Creation as a bunch of disparate parts and details, with nothing unifying together.

## [Examples of 'Partial' Unity]

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**[1. The Arizal's Teachings About Soul Incarnations.]** [The above understanding of the *Ramchal* does not appear in the writings of the *Arizal*, and therefore one will not gain the *Ramchal*'s perspective just by learning the *Arizal*'s words alone]. When one learns the writings of the *Arizal*, he sees that the *Arizal* discusses the concept of *gilgul* (soul reincarnation), and he would learn that a certain person was born with a defect in his heart because of a sin in a previous lifetime, and another person did certain deeds in his previous lifetime and rectified them in the next lifetime. This kind of understanding is only a "partial" kind of unifying, because it would only be unifying together the different lifetimes of a person.

In another example, the *Arizal* (in *Shaar HaGilgulim*) explains how a certain person's *Neshamah* can be a combination of other *neshamos* (and therefore he may feel more of a love for those who contain sparks from his *Neshamah*). This is also "partial" "unifying", because it unifies together two parts of a *Neshamah*, a *Neshamah* of a lesser root with a *Neshamah* of a more inclusive root.

Why are the above two examples only a "partial" kind of unifying? The kind of unity which the *Arizal* is discussing is not a kind of unity which unifies together the entire Creation. If one soul loves another soul because the other is a spark of his own soul, this person's soul has become more unified with another, but it does not unify the entire Creation together. Therefore, the *Arizal*'s teachings are describing a "partial" kind of unifying [as opposed to the more all-inclusive kind of unifying which the *Ramchal* described].

**[2. The Unifying Power of In-Depth Torah Study.]** When one studies Torah in-depth, he can see how the Torah is entirely a unifying power.

As the Sages state, from the time of Creation, Hashem has been arranging marriages. The depth behind this is that every day, Hashem is renewing the power to unify. When one has this perspective about the power of Torah learning, and that the Torah renews the world by unifying Creation, he reveals the *achdus*/unifying that is contained in the Torah.

When one exerts himself in the study of Torah, he learns how to take apart and combine, reminiscent of what happened with Adam and Chavah, who were at first separated from each other and later joined together.

This concept, to divide matters from each other and then unify them, is the inner perspective in Torah learning. Just as a person can have many destined spouses, so is a person learning the holy Torah able to reveal many different 'spouses' to each other [by combining together different pieces of knowledge in the Torah]. One can reveal a unifying power through learning Torah.

Yet, this is also a ‘partial’ level of unifying, for it does not reveal a oneness which unifies together the entire Creation. Even when unifies much pieces of information together when he is studying Torah, this still does not reveal that all of the knowledge is one single unit.

### **[3. Unity of Souls.]**

The root of all of us began with the soul of Adam HaRishon. Every soul was contained in his soul. This seems to be the point where everything is unified. However, even this unity was partial. It was not the unified state of the entire Creation. The souls of all human beings were contained in Adam’s soul, but what about the rest of the Creation, such as the animals, plants and rocks? Adam’s soul contained every social being which came into existence, which includes only human beings, but not the other creations which aren’t capable of speech. While it was certainly a more unified state than our current one, it was not the complete unity of Creation.

And so, we remain with our question: Where do we find in the Creation a power that can unify together all kinds of creations – the non-living, the plants, the animals, and people?

## 6. The Power of the “Chayah” To Unify

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Truthfully, there are many different means by which the entire Creation becomes unified. Before we explain these ways of unifying, let us understand that the very understanding of unifying together all of Creation comes from the perspective that is in the “*Chayah*” level of the soul. And the “*Chayah*” can be revealed in several ways.

On the first day of Creation, when Hashem created the light that could be used to see from one end of the world to the other, the depth behind this matter is that it was a means by which the entire Creation could be unified together. Thus, the power to “see” from one of the world to the other is referring to the power that unifies together all of the Creation, which is really the power of the *Chayah*. The *Chayah* part of the soul takes on the form of various means, by which a unification of Creation can result from.

The following is an example where the *Chayah* is cloaked in. Hashem said, “*All is called in My Name, and for My honor I created it and fashioned it, and also made it.*”<sup>87</sup> This verse teaches us that we can reveal the glory of Hashem in each thing. Thus, by revealing the honor of Hashem in each thing, the entire Creation is unified.

Compare it to the following parable. A person has several children in his house, and he asks from all of them that they help him set the table for dinner. The children are trained to be obedient and they all help him set the table. Each of the children is doing an action that reveals the honor of their father. They are all setting the table in order to honor their father’s request. In a sense, they are all unified together, in this act. However, it is only a partial level of unity. Why? While they are all doing an act that honors their father, the unity is only revealed on a level of actions. It doesn’t yet show that they are unified, in their very essence.

An additional example of a unifying power is *chochmah*, wisdom. Hashem created the entire world with *chochmah*, with His wisdom, and therefore His wisdom is contained in each thing. One can learn how to see the wisdom of Hashem in each thing, and thereby unify together all the parts of Creation, because he sees that they are all examples of Hashem's wisdom.

The essential unifying power, however, is contained in the perspective viewed through the *Chayah* level of the soul. It is written “*And He blew into his nostrils a breath of life, and man became a living soul.*”<sup>88</sup> The Sages state that “The One who blew, blew from His own.” We should reflect into this statement. What were the Sages telling us here? What does difference does it make from where Hashem blew from, from His own or from somewhere else?

There are many levels of understanding to this matter, but for our purposes, the meaning is that just as Hashem is One, Individual, and Unique, so is the breathe of life which he breathed into man, “from His own” – which means that Hashem ‘breathed’ into man, so to speak, a power to unify. If the breathe of life in man wouldn't have been from “His own”, we would relate to the breath of life in man simply as another new power added to the list of man's abilities. If it simply another power added onto man, then it is a human power, and this would mean that all of Creations are essentially separated from each other. But since Hashem breathed into man this power from “His own”, Hashem has breathed into man a power to unify.

Earlier, we explained that the *Chayah* perspective of our soul can unify together the entire Creation, through the various means which it is cloaked in. This is through uncovering the *chochmah*, the G-dly wisdom, which is in each thing. That is one way to reveal the unity of Creation: the *chochmah* in each thing is really a garment of the *Chayah*, and through it, there is a unity of Creation that can be revealed on many different levels. But there is also a more inner way of revealing unity: by revealing the very root of the *Chayah's* power.

## 7. Revealing The Chayah: The Ramchal's Principle of “Revealing The Oneness of Hashem” and The Baal Shem Tov's Principle of The “G-dly Spark”

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The concept of revealing the *Chayah* part of the soul is where we encounter the same core principle that runs throughout the teachings of the *Ramchal* as well as the *Baal Shem Tov*.

The *Ramchal* establishes a principle that everything in Creation is for the purpose of revealing the oneness (*yichud*) of Hashem. The *Baal Shem Tov*, however, has a different understanding of how the entire Creation is unified: each thing contains a “G-dly spark” which empowers it.

From a simple perspective, when a person doesn't that deeply into this, it seems that these two principles are completely different from each other. But if we look deeper, we can see that both the *Ramchal's* core principle and the *Baal Shem Tov's* core principle are essentially two approaches which reveal the *Chayah's* perspective.

We will explain this. Firstly, we should understand that the complete power to unity is not found in the *Chayah* level of the soul, but only in the *Yechidah* level, from the word *Yachid* (Individual). Of the *Chayah* level of the soul, which corresponds to *chochmah*/wisdom, it is said, “*And wisdom, from where is it found?*”<sup>89</sup> The verse is saying that the source of wisdom is rooted in “*from where?*” which in Hebrew is called *ayin*, nothingness. This means that all wisdom is nursed forth from *ayin*, and that is how the wisdom can unify.

So while the absolute level of unifying is only found in the *Yechidah*, it is *chochmah* (*Chayah*) which reveals that point of unity. How does the *Chayah* reveal the point of unity? It is either revealed in the sense of *po’el* (active current use) or through *nifal* (eventual purpose of the use). [That is the outline, and now it will be explained.]

The Baal Shem Tov, who spoke about the “G-dly spark” in each thing, was relating more to the *po’el* aspect, whereas the *Ramchal*, who spoke about revealing the oneness of Hashem, was relating more to the *nifal* aspect. In depth, these two viewpoints really complement and complete each other. Thus, the *Ramchal*’s principle and the *Baal Shem Tov*’s principle are not two completely unrelated teachings. It is the same principle, but the *Ramchal* is describing it in terms of *nifal* (eventual purpose of the use), while the *Baal Shem Tov* is describing it in terms of *po’el* (active current use).

We will now explain these words.

**Po’el / Currently Active Sense** – The *Baal Shem Tov*’s definition is that there is a “G-dly spark” in each thing which keeps it sustained. Firstly, let us understand clearly that this “G-dly spark” has no divisions to it, for G-dliness cannot be divided. G-dliness is a total state of unification, which does not divide into any parts. Therefore, the concept that there is a G-dly spark in each thing cannot mean that there are millions of these sparks and that each creation has one of these sparks which sustains it. Rather, it is one spark, which illuminates each creation and which sustains each of them.

It can be compared to the following parable. The sun lights up the world. The sun is one unit, but its light spreads to the entire world. The sun itself is not being divided. The same sun which shines in Israel is the same sun which shines in the western parts of the world, as well as the distant eastern parts of the world. Thus, the G-dly spark which is in each person, also called “bone of the *Shechinah*”, is all the same spark which is found in all people, as opposed to understanding it as being many different sparks, *chas v’shalom*.

Just as *Eliyahu HaNavi* can attend ten *bris* events at the same time, and we do not say that there are ten *Eliyahu HaNavis*, but we understand it as a spiritual power that can be revealed in many places at once, so can we understand that the G-dly spark in each person is all an expression of the same spark. Thus, the G-dly spark is a “unifying” power.

Let us now understand it in depth. On a simple level, this G-dly spark which sustains each of us, and all creations, is one power which is found in all of the creations, thus it is a power which unifies together all of Creation. However, what we need to understand is: Why does this vitality have to be revealed in the creations, when Hashem can keep all His creations sustained from a different source?

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<sup>89</sup> *Iyov* 28:12

To illustrate, it is known today that there are microscopic cells which are sustained from the energy of the sun.

It must be that the G-dly spark which sustains each creation is that there is a revealed oneness in all creations. From that perspective, all of the creations are unified. This means that from my private perspective, I am separated from all other creations. What unifies me with all other creations? It is the G-dly spark found in me. It is found in everything, and it is one single spark which sustains everything all at once – and which is the unifying point of everything.

In contrast to the above, the view of *Nif'al* (eventual purpose of the use) says that the “G-dly spark” which sustains each person is, unconsciously controlling him and leading him. The direct result of this principle is that all actions which I do are a revelation of how Hashem sustains me. This is the secret behind the teachings of the *Ramchal*, who explained that everything in Creation exists in order to reveal the oneness of Hashem. This is a view the perspective of *ni'fal*, of the eventual purpose of the use, for it is how the G-dly spark is activated within me and revealing His oneness.

Thus, the *Baal Shem Tov* is speaking from in the sense of *po'el* (active current sense), for the G-dly spark that sustains each thing is the unifying power which is found within me. The result of this is [the *Ramchal's* perspective] that since there is a G-dly spark that is actively working within me, all of the actions I do are serving to reveal the oneness of Hashem [this is the *nif'al*, eventual purpose of the role of the G-dly spark].

Therefore, from a deeper understanding, the teachings of the *Ramchal* and the teachings of the *Baal Shem Tov* are really one and the same. The *Ramchal* was speaking of the external dimension to the unity, from the *po'el* (the current active use) of the G-dly spark, which is about how the unity is actively revealed, through the actions of each creation. The *Baal Shem Tov* was speaking about the more inner dimension of the unity, its very perspective, which is that there is a unifying power [called the “G-dly spark”] found within us.

## 8. The Root of The Unity Is In G-dliness

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Thus, the *Chayah* part of the soul is the revelation of the unified state of Creation, revealed in each of the creations. As explained, the *Chayah's* perspective is not the complete level of unity that can be found in the soul.

We defined this unity through the understanding that each of us contains a G-dly spark that sustains all creations. There are two layers to this unity: an external layer, which is found in the person, and an inner layer, which is the G-dly spark that sustains us.

This unity does not come from the view of our self. From the view of our private self, there is no unity with the rest of the creations. Only from the view of the G-dly spark that sustains me, is there a perspective of a unified Creation.

We will explain. A person is comprised of a soul and a body. The *Baal Shem Tov* defined three levels of existence – the first which is called *Olamot* (lit. “Worlds), which corresponds to the physical



body, and an intermediate level which is called *Neshamos* (lit. Souls), corresponding to the soul [the true self, which is beyond the physical layer of our existence], and the highest level being *Elokus*, “G-dliness”.

From the perspective of our physical body, there is no unified state with Creation, and even more so, it is a state of separation from all other creations.

From the perspective of the soul, there is a partial level of unity with us and with all other Creations, but it is not the absolute level of unity. This is because although all souls in the Jewish people are one unit, there are 70 nations of the world which are not unified with the Jewish people, so the unity is not complete. Even if we were to unify all the nations together, it would still not unify the rest of the creations, which include animals, plants, and the non-living.

The absolute level of unity with Creation is only from the perspective of the point of “G-dliness” that is found in all creations. That is essentially the *Chayah* which is within us. With the help of Hashem, when we learn about the *Yechidah* level of the soul, we will learn about an even deeper level of unity. That is why we said that from the *Chayah*'s perspective, the unity of Creation is revealed through the “G-dly spark” that resides within all of the creations.

## 9. Revealing The “Chayah” In The Mind & Heart By Knowing & Feeling Your Source of Vitality

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Until now, we explained the role of the *Chayah*. Now we shall try to explain how to reveal this within us, meaning, how we can reach a revelation of the *Chayah* that is in each of us.

As with anything else, there are always two levels to reach: an intellectual connection to the matter, and a heart connection to the matter. This is based on the verse, “*And you shall know today, and you shall settle it upon your heart.*” We first need to bring a matter into our intellect, and then bring it into our heart. The “intellectual” level of revealing the *Chayah* is achieved when we learn all that there is about this topic, and the “heart” level is when we have sharpened our understanding of this matter to the point that we clearly feel it in the heart.

Let us explain each of these stages in more detail: how we can reveal the *Chayah* through recognition of the intellect, as well as through the recognition of the heart.

**Intellect:** The “intellect” level of revealing the *Chayah* is when **one knows what his source of vitality is**. This is not referring to a mere intellectual level of knowledge, but through a “*daas*” of this matter, as the *Tanya* explains *daas*, that it is when one connects his mind to the matter. In our own terms, we refer to this as “awareness” (in Hebrew, *mu-da-ut*).

In the morning prayers, we say that Hashem “renews, in His goodness, every day constantly, the act of Creation.” Why? The depth of it is because the world gets its vitality each moment from the total unification of Creation. We need to identify this concept first on an intellectual level, and it will not suffice just by reciting the above morning prayer. Rather, we need to recognize it well

through thinking about it. One should arrive at a clear intellectual recognition that “What is it that sustains my life every moment? It is the G-dly unity which is found within me.”

**Heart:** The *avodah* on the “heart” level is to try to sense the inner source of our energy (which is the Creator).

Every person can feel that he is alive, but when he never pauses to think about he is pursuing various worldly interests, he doesn't feel his existence. If he pauses a bit from what he is doing, he can feel that he is alive. Yet, even when a person reminds himself that he is alive, he may not consider the source of his life and how he is being kept alive. He is only in touch with the result of his being alive – and not with the root of his being alive.

Compare this to a person who turns on the sink and he has running water. He doesn't stop to consider where the water is coming from, if it's coming from the Kineret, or from a spring in the Golan, or from Ein Gedi. At best, when he drinks the water, he can tell if it came from a clean source or from a dirty source. But as the water's flowing out of the sink, he is not thinking about where the water is actually coming from. He is only examining the quality of the water – its results – but not the actual source of the water.

When we are speaking here of the need to connect to the *Chayah* in the soul, it is not enough just to feel the results of our *Chayah*, which is the mere sense of being alive. Rather, we need to connect to the inner source of our *Chayah* – to feel where the Source of our energy is coming from.

## 10. Feeling The Source of Our Breathing – By First Finding Our Personal Source of Vitality

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Today, there are many practices which really stem from our early *sefarim* which involve focused breathing, and on how to inhale and exhale properly, etc. These matters are explained in the writings of Rav Abulefia and by others. Without getting into the details, let us first understand what the source of this *avodah* is.

It is written, “*The breath of our nostrils, Hashem's anointed... under whose protection, we had said, we would live among the nations.*”<sup>90</sup> The verse attributes *ruach*, the air, to the nose. The main source of our life-giving vitality comes from the air that we mainly breathe through our nose. While we are also able to breathe from our mouth, but our main energy comes from breathing through our nose. This is true both on a physical level as well as on an inner level. Thus, the main vitality which comes to us through our breathing, is coming to us by way of the nose.

The idea of learning how to breathe properly, on the inhale and exhale, is, on an inner level, a way to become connected to the source of our energy.

We need to understand that when people work on their inhale and exhale, this is not simply a superficial act which we are familiar with from the various breathing exercises that exist today, in which a person discerns how rapid his breathing is, from which place in the body it is coming from,

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<sup>90</sup> *Eichah* 4:20

etc. That perspective is just a language of the body, which originated from the gentiles, and it is not the language that speaks to a Jew.

A Jew has to feel that the source of the vitality in the breathing comes from his *Neshamah*, from his soul. When inhaling, a Jew must return the source of the vitality to his inner root, which is the *Chayah* part of the soul that is within him. And on the exhale, he should feel that he has released this source of his vitality. When one works with his breath, this is really an *avodah* for one to reach one's inner source of vitality. When inhaling, one needs to feel that he is taking in the source of his vitality from outside, and when exhaling, one needs to be aware that his releasing this source of vitality outward. But in order to reach this understanding, one first needs to feel that the source of his vitality that is within him.

If the breathing exercises are done without feeling the inner source of one's vitality, they are simply external physical breathing exercises which calm the body, and perhaps it can calm the heartbeat as well and moderate it better, as well as calm the thoughts. But this alone will not lead a person inward to the source of the vitality coming in, because the person is missing the root of connecting to his inner energy source.

Therefore, in order for one to turn breathing into an inner *avodah*, one needs to reveal the *Chayah* point in the soul. How can one do this? Every person has a certain **path** that can connect him to the source of his vitality – meaning, every person has a path from which he can use to nurse forth his inner source of vitality.

## II. Discovering The Main Source of Chiyus (Vitality) In Our Actions, Emotions, and Thoughts

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The *Chayah* point in the soul is also known as *ohr makif*, “enveloping light”, for the *Chayah* surrounds and envelopes the *Nefesh*, *Ruach* and *Neshamah*. In clearer terms, the *Chayah* is the source of *chiyus* (vitality or energy) found in our “*Nefesh*” level, which is our area of action; it is also the source of energy found in our “*Ruach*”, which corresponds to the character traits and emotions; and it is also the source of energy found in our “*Neshamah*” level of the soul, which corresponds to thought.

**Action (*Nefesh*):** Let us first identify the source of *chiyus* when it comes to our area of “action” [which corresponds to the *Nefesh* level of the soul]. If a person works as a farmer, he is involved with planting, digging, reaping, etc. Another kind of person may be a blacksmith, and another person is involved with construction. People who do physical work are deriving some level of *chiyus* from their actions. Each person derives a life-giving vitality from various forms of physical work, and one should identify it.

Just as there is a kind of physical activity which we each derive vitality from – all of us on some level, more or less – so is there a primary emotion (corresponding to the *Ruach* level of the soul) which we derive vitality from, meaning that our main source of emotional vitality comes from a certain emotion, which we should identify. Going deeper, there is also a primary kind of thinking (corresponding to the *Neshamah* level of the soul) which we gain vitality from.

If a person wishes to reveal the *Chayah* level of the soul needs, he must reveal what the source of his *chiyus* (vitality) is. In order to do this, one needs to deeply examine his activities, emotions, and thoughts, and to see in each of these areas where he is deriving life-giving energy from.

This inner work, of clarifying where you get *chiyus* from, is a very personal kind of *avodah*, which each person needs to do with his own soul. Understandably, most people in the world have not even touched upon knowing where they get their *chiyus* from. They never think about what mainly energizes them; they never clarify to themselves what makes them feel more alive.

If we take a person and we ask him at the end of the day, “From where do you get vitality from?”, we will get all kinds of answers that are superficial, such as a kind of physical pleasure which the person enjoys the most and which he lives from. We will not even speak about this here. Let us instead speak about the more inner aspects of where people get *chiyus* from.

If we ask a blacksmith, “Where do you get *chiyus* from?”, he may answer, “Today I built an *Aron*. After I was finished, I looked at it for 10 minutes and I felt a certain feeling of vitality from what I did.” People also like to take pictures of their work after they are finished, so that they can remember it. Their work makes them feel more alive. There are people who have constructed buildings, and if they are passing by, they will want to stop in and see their building. They live from the satisfaction that comes from their finished product.

Clearly, we are not discussing anything here a spiritual source of *chiyus*, which is a deeper kind of *chiyus*. This is rather a first, basic step of knowing where one gets *chiyus* from: by seeing which kind of physical work he does which he finds a sense of vitality in.

**Emotion (*Ruach*):** After considering which kind of physical activity you get vitality from, the next step is to identify the primary emotion which you receive vitality from.

There are those whose souls are more rooted in “*kav yemin*”, the “right line” [which represents *chessed* (kindness)]. These kinds of people mainly derive their emotional energy from *ahavah*, love. Others are more rooted in *kav smo'el*, “left line” [which represents *gevurah*/strength], and they mainly derive their emotional energy from *yirah*, from seriousness.

These two main roots of the emotions, *ahavah* and *yirah*, are very general terms. *Ahavah*/love divides into many different kinds and levels of love, and the same goes for *yirah*. There are many emotions, but *ahavah* and *yirah* are the roots. One needs to figure out which of the emotions he mainly receives vitality from.

For example, some people need to feel loved by others, and this is their basis of vitality. Others do not care if people love them or not. Another kind of person does not need to feel loved by others, but if he does get love from others, he receives vitality from it. Yet it isn't his main source of vitality, because he doesn't need it that much. He receives vitality from a different emotion, perhaps from acts of giving or the like.

Each person has a certain emotion which he derives vitality from, and one must identify it. It may be a positive emotion, or a negative emotion.

**Thought (*Neshamah*):** Next, a person rises to the level of thought. One needs to identify which kinds of thoughts give him vitality.

We can have a person who goes to seven *shiurim* during the week from seven different people, and you ask him, “From which *shiur* did you get *chiyus* from?”, and he answers, “From all of them!” But this just shows that he is confused. Of course, it is possible that all of the seven *shiurim* which he heard are all “*The words of the living G-d*” and therefore they are all true. But each person has an individual soul, which has its particular source of vitality. Does a person have the soul of *Mashiach*, which is an all-inclusive soul that can receive vitality from everything equally? No! Each person has a kind of thought where he derives his main vitality from.

To give examples, some people mainly derive vitality (in the thoughts) from an interesting insight of the Torah, practical *halachah*, while others mainly enjoy in-depth learning of Gemara. In-depth learning itself divides into several different styles of learning. Others mainly enjoy the depth of *pnimiyus haTorah*, the inner dimension of Torah.

Often, when a person is starting off his path of spiritual growth, he learns a *sefer* and feels enjoyment from it, so he immediately decides that it is his source of vitality. However, we already explained earlier (in the chapter of “*Thoughts of Ruach – Emotional Intelligence*”) that a person is not able to have clarity right away. It is a drawn-out process. It takes time for one to recognize himself, throughout different periods of life. It also takes time for one to amass the necessary information of the words of our Sages, in all their many different ‘colors’. Only after this learning process can a person identify where his source of his vitality [in his area of thought] is.

## 12. Knowing Your Personal Source of Vitality – In Action, Emotion, and Thought

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The *Chayah* part of the soul is essentially the point where we are getting *chiyus*/vitality from. If a person wishes to reach its innermost point, which is the root of life, the point where there is G-dliness – as the *Baal Shem Tov* said, that each person has a point of G-dliness within that sustains him – one cannot jump straight to this inner point. Rather, a person must first identify his more external sources of *chiyus* – the vitality he gets from certain actions, from certain emotions, and from certain thoughts.

When one traverses this path, firstly, he receives a “clear world” within him. As explained earlier, a person can never have 100% clarity, but one can certainly receive a clearer understanding, to the extent that he has become clear about what he wants.

When a person feels a sense of dissatisfaction from life, and he doesn’t know how to identify what gives him vitality, he won’t know how to fill the void. In contrast to this, when a person knows what gives him vitality, he at least has an ‘address’ of where to go. Compare this to a person who runs out of milk in the house, but he knows of a store nearby where he can get milk from. When a person feels a void in himself, as long as he knows where he can go to get *chiyus* from, he will be able to help himself, because he is clear about where the source of his *chiyus* is.

We can possibly say that almost all people are not clear about where they feel vitality from. Instead, they are just taking life as it comes. But one needs inner clarity about which actions give me vitality, which emotions or *middos* give me vitality, and what kinds of thoughts give me vitality.

When one becomes clear about himself like this, he gains immensely. Firstly, he will be able to get back to a source of vitality when he is going through a stressful period or dissatisfaction in his life. Even more so, when he is involved with the activity/emotion/thought that gives him vitality, he will receive even more vitality from it than before, now that he has become clearer that it gives him vitality.

Why is it that way? Until he becomes clear about where he gets vitality from, we can compare his life to the sun on a cloudy day, which isn't able to shine. When he clarifies what his source of vitality is, it's as if he is removing the 'clouds' of confusion that are covering his soul, where the 'sun' in his soul can now shine strongly. In the words of the Gemara, there is a terminology found "If the matter is clear to you as the sun."<sup>91</sup> How does a person reach a level of clarity that is as clear as the sun? By removing the obstacles and placing them to the side, we have created an opening and now the matter can shine clearly in the soul.

When a person clarifies where he gets vitality from in the areas of action, emotion, and thought, this clarity gives him an additional burst of vitality to those areas where he was already getting vitality from, because he has now become clearer about his vitality from these areas.

Although we are discussing this matter in relation to revealing the *Chayah* part of the soul, we can all understand that this is the implication of the words of one of the Sages, "You see a clear world."<sup>92</sup> From where do you get vitality from? What energizes you? When you live with clarity! A person must recognize where he gets vitality from. The inward result from this will be that a person will reveal an inner flow of vitality within him. In contrast, when a person does not identify what gives him vitality, he cannot identify any inner source of vitality in him.

Every person goes through many different things which he receives vitality from, but he doesn't always identify it. If he doesn't identify it, he doesn't connect to it, because he is not aware that it can provide him with vitality. Compare this to a person who comes across water and he drinks from it, and he is unaware that the water is really coming from an underground spring. His experience of this water is not nearly what it could have been, because he thinks he is drinking from some gathered rainwater, rather than from a spring.

It is the same with a person. As long as a person has not yet done any inner clarification with himself, even if he does touch upon an inner source of energy for himself, he will not sense it, so he will not derive any revitalizing energy from it. In contrast, when a person becomes clear about where he gets vitality from, he will sense that he is touching upon a personal source of energy for himself when he encounters it, and then he will become revitalized from it.

### 13. Feeling Alive

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Each of us has a certain path, which can be used as a means to connect to the root of our personal energy source. When a person connects to the source of vitality in his areas of action, emotion, and

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<sup>91</sup> *Sanhedrin 72b*

<sup>92</sup> *Pesachim 50b*

thought, he will suddenly feel that he has become **alive**. He is clearer about where he draws his vitality from, and therefore he can focus on this source of vitality and feel that this is where his vitality from. It is not simply that it results in feeling more alive – it is rather a feeling of an inner revelation, which is called *mekor haneviah* (inner source of energy).

It is difficult to express this any further in words. We should understand that the meaning of an “alive person” is a rare phenomenon in the world today. Many people do receive vitality, but they are not receiving it from the *mekor haneviah*, from an inner source of vitality. If we take a look at where most people are receiving vitality from, it is either from various desires of this world, such as food, etc. or from receiving a little honor. But these forms of pleasure are not an inner source of vitality.

A person might be involved with Torah study for his whole life, yet he hasn’t even touched upon an inner source of *chiyus* in himself! Why? He learns Torah either because he knows that there is a *mitzvah* to learn Torah, or because out of an obligation to know *Shas*, or because he needs to know *halachos*. Although that is all true, where he is “he” found amidst all of this? We ask, “*And give us a portion in Your Torah*” – where is this person’s personal portion in the Torah? One’s personal portion in Torah serves as his vitality in learning Torah.

The Sages state that there are 600,000 letters in the Torah, parallel to the 600,000 souls of the Jewish people. Thus, each person has a personal source of vitality in the Torah, and he must reveal it. If one never reveals his personal source of vitality in the Torah, he will never study his personal portion in the Torah. It is not only people in the street who are lacking real vitality in their lives. Even a person who is sitting in the tents of Torah and immersed in deep study of Torah, will be lacking true vitality in his life if he has never done any inward clarification with himself.

Although the Torah is called “Torah of life”, and we say of the Torah “For they (the words of Torah) are our life”, this does not necessarily mean that a person’s Torah learning is emanating from his inner source of vitality. When a person is not getting vitality from the inner source, he is missing the root of his *chiyus*, because he is not touching upon the inner root of his *chiyus*, and as a result, the *chiyus* that he does receive from his Torah learning will only be minimal.

## 14. In Summary of Revealing the Chayah By Way of the Soul’s Garments

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Studying the *Chayah* level of the soul begins with getting in touch with the “garments” of the *Chayah*, which are action, emotion, thought. After that, a person can then reach the understanding of the *Chayah*, which is his inner source of vitality. From there onward, one can go on to reveal the very Source of life that sustains him from within.

If a person skips over the stage of revealing his own inner vitality source, he will not be able to reveal the very Source within him that sustains his energy. First one needs to reach the root of his energy, and after touching upon it, one needs to go after the Root of his vitality source, the light of the Infinite, which sustains the very source of his energy. The light of the Infinite is cloaked in each person, in the “unifying point of Creation” which is present in each person, as explained in the beginning of this chapter.

We should understand that it is impossible for one to skip over this step. Only after a person reveals the source of his own personal energy, can he reveal the very root of his energy source, the Infinite, the “G-dly spark” that sustains one’s *Neshamah*.

Earlier, we discussed focused breathing. We should understand that if a person has not identified where he gets vitality from in his actions, emotions, and thoughts, his breathing exercises will be acting from a very superficial place. When he inhales and exhales, he won’t touch upon his the source of his breathing, because he does not recognize the source where he draws his vitality from.

Only after a person recognizes his source of *chiyus/vitality/energy*, can his acts of inhaling and exhaling bring him to the source, for he can feel within him what his source of vitality is, thus he will be inhaling and exhaling from an inner place.

## 15. An Alternative Way To Reveal The Chayah - By Removing The Soul's Garments

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Until now we learned about the inner way [of revealing the *Chayah* part of the soul] in which a person reveals his inner source of energy/vitality, and we learned of one way how a person can reveal it. There is also an alternative way to reveal the inner source of energy/vitality within us, which is a totally opposite approach than the one we explained until now.

We have so far explained how the *Nefesh*, *Ruach* and *Neshamah* levels of the soul are below the *Chayah* level of the soul and serve as “garments” for the *Chayah*. Until now we have taken the approach that we can reach the *Chayah* by way of the “garments”, meaning, through identifying where we draw vitality from in the areas of action, emotion, and thought, we can reach the very source of the vitality. This approach reveals the source of one’s vitality through the three garments which it is cloaked in. However, there is also an opposite *avodah* than this: to divest these garments, whereby one learns how to separate from his actions, emotions, and thereby reveal the “*Chayah*”.

In order to identify something, there are two ways. Either we can identify it by way of the garments which it is cloaked in, or by directly revealing it. To illustrate, let’s say we meet a person in the street whom we only met once before, and we no longer remember what he looks like. How can we recognize him? We may ask him what he was wearing the last time we met him, such as what color his jacket was, etc. A more inner recognition of him would be if we can remember his facial features.

So we can recognize the person based on external features such as his build, voice, way of walking or style of dress, or we may recognize him through the face. Recognizing him through the face is the more inner way of identifying him, because the wisdom of a person is on his face: “*The wisdom of man illuminates his face.*” Wisdom (*chochmah*) corresponds to the *Chayah* level of the soul.

The point we want to take out of this is that when we want to reveal the *Chayah*, we can reveal it in either one of two ways. (1) We may reveal it **by way of its garments**, which are the actions, emotions, and thoughts, as we explained; through [uncovering our vitality] in those areas, we can thereby reach the very source of the vitality of the actions, emotions and thoughts, which resides



above them. (2) Taking an opposite approach, we can alternatively reveal the *Chayah* by **divesting the actions, emotions, and thoughts**, which in turn reveals their source - the *Chayah*.

## 16. "Ohr Makif" – The View From Outside of The Self

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In essence, the *Chayah* part of the soul is in the category of “enveloping force” (*makif*). The *Nefesh* resides in the liver, the *Ruach* is found in the heart, and the *Neshamah* dwells in the brain. The *Chayah* envelops the person from the outside, and does not have a space within the body. In order for a person to reveal the *Chayah*, either he may reach it by way of the garments of the *Chayah*, or he may reach it by revealing the *Chayah* directly.

As we explained, the *Chayah* corresponds to “*makif*”, a view from around the person which can see a broader, more inclusive perspective. It is a way to view a matter from the outside of the matter. **One can learn how to see himself from “outside” of himself.** In this way, he learns how to identify with his *Chayah*’s view.

If one wishes to get used to the view from his *Chayah* and to receive a broader, “outsider” perspective on things, he can get an idea of this by taking a picture of himself and looking at it. (Without getting into the issue here of taking pictures, which many *halachic* authorities did not approve of, we are speaking here in a case where the person already has a picture of himself.) Usually when a person looks at himself, he is looking at himself from “inside” himself, but by looking at a picture of himself, it is like seeing himself from “outside” of himself. He can suddenly see himself in a new way.

This is especially the case in today’s times, where a person can view a video of himself, watching not only how he looks, but how he moves, how he acts, and how he talks. Through this means, a person can essentially learn how to view himself from an outsider’s point of view. If a person takes five minutes to watch a video of himself, he will realize that there are two different ways to view oneself – from the inside, and from the outside – and he will learn how to view himself from a completely different point.

There is a perspective that comes from within, and a perspective that comes from one’s outside. One may view a matter from inside of himself, or he may view a matter by stepping outside of himself. The Ramban advises that when a person is in doubt about anything and it is hard for him to decide what to do, because he feels drawn towards both options, he should get involved with Torah study, until the light of the Torah influences him to feel that he can now think of the options more objectively. Then he can decide properly between the options, carefully weighing out his choices, without feeling particularly drawn towards any one of them. This was also said by the Baal Shem Tov.

The depth behind this advice is that when a person is viewing a matter from his inside, he may be stuck inside his own view, so he cannot always see things clearly and objectively. If he steps outside of his view and instead he views the matter as if he is an outsider, he can see the matter more clearly, as if he is viewing it from above.

It can be compared to a person standing in middle of a city, who cannot see all the city's streets at once. But if he stands on top of the tallest building in the city, he can see the entire city laid out in front of him, and then he can see everything clearly.

To illustrate, there is a story told that one of the *chassidim* came to the Kotzker Rebbe and asked, "How is it that people come to discuss with the Rebbe about financial matters, when the Rebbe has never dealt with money before?" The Kotzker Rebbe was very secluded for many years from the rest of the world which makes the question even stronger. How did he understand about money, if it wasn't his field? The Kotzker answered, "That is precisely why. You are found within the business world, so you cannot see those matters clearly. I am outside of it, so I can see it more clearly."

Viewing a matter from the "outside" enables a person to see it more clearly. Our problem is that we usually view a matter from inside of ourselves, and then when we are in doubts about how to decide something, we are particularly drawn towards choosing a certain option, which clouds our mind from seeing the situation more objectively. This happens because we are stuck inside our own view, so we don't see the matter with clarity. That is why the Ramban advised that becoming involved in Torah study, after doubts enter us, can remove whatever personal motivations we may have, which enables us to step outside of our own view, seeing the matter from an outsider's point of view. When you view the matter as if you are an outsider, you can see it more clearly and then you can decide properly between different options.

In our circles, the custom is that whenever a person wants to resolve a doubt that he has, he goes to a Rav for his questions and to seek advice. This is precisely the idea of seeing the matter from the outside. A person may also be able to arrive at an answer to his doubts just by sitting alone with himself and then trying to see the matter "from outside of himself", by stepping outside of his own view. This is also considered like asking another person. Why? He has left the matter from his own viewpoint, and as soon as he leaves his view of the matter, he is viewing it from a different place in the soul – he is no longer found in his own perspective, and instead he is viewing the matter from being on the outside of it.

We can give an example of this. A person is in doubt if he should buy a certain item or not. How can he decide? The first basic piece of advice we can give for this is that he can imagine his brother or a friend asking him the very same question: "Should you buy it, or not?" And then he should think what his brother or friend would answer him.

How does this work? It is because as long as you identify it as being your issue, you are found within it, so you are stuck in it and you can't see it objectively. But when you leave "your" issue and instead you view it as if it's not your own issue, just something that you are being asked about by someone else, you are viewing the matter from the outside, where there is a clearer view.

Many examples can be brought which illustrate this idea, but the point should be clear: One can acquire the ability to leave his own view of a matter, and to instead view it from the outside of the matter. One can leave his view from the inside, and instead view a matter from the outside.

## 17. Revealing The “Chayah” Directly: Leaving The “I”

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If you think deeply about this approach, you’ll discover that this is essentially the way to reveal the *Chayah* not by way of its “garments” (action, emotion, and thought), but through leaving the “garments”. One can find himself through feeling that a matter has no connection to him, and if he isn’t connected to it, he can see it from the outside. This inner shift of perspective is called *hafshatah*, “divesting” [alt. “removal” or “detachment”].

In this approach, I am not revealing the *Chayah* by way of the garments, but through the perspective that any matter, action, emotion, or thought is not relevant to me, and to that extent, I will be able to see the source of the vitality of the matter. When I see the source of the vitality of the matter, I can then see how it has extended.

This is the depth of the words of Chazal, “I have seen *b’nei aliyah* (those who ascend spiritually), and they are few.”<sup>93</sup> On one hand, there is an *avodah* of a person to be a *ben aliyah*, one who resides above in the spiritual, on a more permanent basis. As the Baal Shem Tov said, one must mainly live above in the spiritual, and at times he needs to descend to the materialistic parts of life, for practical purposes, as one who lives in an attic and only sometimes coming down onto the ground level of the house. On the other hand, a person must also be able to deal with the materialistic parts of life, when the need arises.

This corresponds to the two ways in how we reveal the *Chayah* part of the soul – we can get to the *Chayah* either by way of its garments, or by divesting its garments. When we use the first approach – accessing the garments – it is a descent into our “I”, where we are in touch with the personal actions, emotions, and thoughts that give us *chiyus*/vitality. Along with this, one also has a corresponding *avodah* to learn how to see a matter from outside of him. Herein is the root of the inner *avodah* of a person to come out of himself – to be able to exit his “I”.

## 18. Removing The “I”

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We are speaking here of the *avodah*, the inner task, for a person, to remove his *ani*, his “I”. There is a verse in the Torah, “*I stand between Hashem and between you*”, which is explained by the *sefarim hakedoshim* to mean that the “I” of a person is a barrier between himself and the Creator. The *avodah* of a person is to remove this “I”, and the *avodah* which we mentioned until now is the way to take in order to remove the “I”.

One needs to regress back and forth between the state of his “I”, with the state of removing the “I”. On one hand, one needs to identify which kinds of actions, emotions, and thoughts give him vitality. This is the state of his “I”, for it intensifies the “I” by placing one’s focus on his personal sources of vitality. Along with knowing one’s personal sources of vitality, one must be able to see himself from outside of the self. In that state, the “I” does not draw vitality from anywhere, because it is outside of the “I”.

Therefore, one needs to train himself to these two different ways of viewing – he should get used to seeing a matter both from within himself, as well as from outside of himself. And in order for a person to reveal his actual “I”, he needs to see himself from outside of the self. We have added on a deep point here. Until now we explained that in order for a person to reveal the *Chayah*, he can do this either by revealing the “garments”, or by removing the “garments” (*hafshatah*). Now we have explained that when one uses the second path, *hafshatah*, he should learn to see his “garments” in a different way, by seeing his “I” from a different view [a view from outside of the self, a state where there is no sense of the I].<sup>94</sup>

## 19. Constant D'veykus With The Creator

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Why is it that almost no one lives with higher awareness? Even in the few who do have awareness, it is only on a partial level and it is quickly lost. Only the *tzaddikim* live with constant *d'veykus* with the Creator at every moment. Why is it that almost all people are not found in a state of constant *d'veykus*, only on rare occasions?

The answer to this is because generally, people will only have a view that comes from their inside, and therefore their view is limited. How can a person see a more inclusive view? Only if he climbs to the top of the tallest building in the city, where he can view the entire city. Adam HaRishon was able to see from one end of the world to the other end, and the light which Hashem created on the first day shined throughout the whole world. It was a view from outside of the self, as opposed to a view from the inside. When one's view comes from inside the self, his view is only partial, but when he is viewing from outside of the self, he can see everything.

Our personal *avodah*, to reveal the *Chayah* part of the soul, requires two different viewpoints. On one hand, we need to access the *Chayah* by way of the garments of the *Chayah*: by discovering which actions, emotions, and thoughts give us vitality. Simultaneously, we also have an *avodah* to learn how to acquire an “outsider view”, by means of *hafshatah*, divesting the self from involvement in a matter, to view a matter as if it has nothing to do with our self. When you view the matter as irrelevant to you personally, you can see the source of the matter, which allows you to see the inclusive view of the matter – because the source includes everything.

A person who merits to divest the soul's garments from himself will reveal the very source of his vitality, and such a person will be able to live constantly with the Creator. The very source that empowers each thing is the Creator. Why isn't a person always aware that the Creator is the source? It is because he doesn't feel how he much needs this source to keep him going. When it comes to our physical body, we all feel the need to breathe, if our nose and mouth suddenly become blocked. We automatically sense that if we don't breathe, we would die. So why doesn't a person feel this way about our bond with the Creator, if we cannot survive without Him? It is because we usually are not aware of where we get vitality from in the first place, and therefore we are not aware of the Source which provides vitality to our very “I”.

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<sup>94</sup> Editor's Note: This point is explained further in Chapter 17 (*Bonding With The Creator Through Scent-Movement*)

So first, a person must identify his personal source of vitality [in the areas of action, emotion and thought], and after that, he should identify that the Source of all vitality to his very existence is the Creator. After he exposes this awareness, he will feel his need to bond with the Creator no less than his need to breathe. He will fight every second to sustain this bond, just as he would fight to breathe if his mouth and nostrils would become stuffed and he is gasping for air. It wouldn't be perceived of as an "*avodah*" – rather, it would be a struggle to sustain his very life, for he realizes that the lack of connection to His source feels like death.

Why don't most people feel this true *chiyus* from the Creator? It is because they don't know what gives them vitality in the first place, so they certainly aren't thinking about the source of vitality. If they don't feel any vitality in their life, they don't feel that there is a Source that provides the vitality for everything.

This point corresponds to the second stage of *hisbodedus*, of bonding with the Creator, in which we have explained here that a person must learn to feel what gives vitality to his soul, both by way of the soul's garments [action, emotion and thought] and by way of being divested from the garments [disconnecting from the self and adopting a view as if you are an outsider to yourself, thereby seeing outside of the soul, which gives one the ability to have an all-inclusive view, enabling him to see that he is sustained by the Creator].

## 20. The Chayah – The Root of Our First Thoughts.

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The *Chayah* level of the soul corresponds to *chochmah*, wisdom.

*Chochmah* enters the brain as a small dot of wisdom, which later becomes expanded by the *Neshamah* (a Jew's Divine soul) through the ability of *binah*, contemplation.

This process is oft-mentioned in the teachings of *Chabad Chassidus*: An initial "first thought" is revealed to the mind, which one cannot understand clearly. One will feel that there is something here, but he doesn't grasp it clearly. At times, when he analyzes the thought, the thought begins to multiply into several words and thoughts, forming a structured and developed thought. At other times, the initial thought remains as a mere dot of wisdom which he can't figure out. He can sense that something has entered his mind, but he doesn't know how to develop this thought and what to do with it.

Sometimes it may happen that a person is learning the weekly *parshah*, and he notices a tiny thought about it, and he doesn't know how to expand it further. This happens many times when a person is learning a *sugya* of Gemara. He feels that there is some point contained in the *sugya*, he identifies it, but his understanding of it is weak, so he isn't able to expand upon it and develop anything from it, nor can he draw forth any answers from it.

Let's try to understand this phenomenon. There is a well-known principle that the lower vessel receives illumination from the level above it, but it cannot receive the entire illumination, only a partial level of it. Applying this to the current subject, the *Neshamah* is at a lower level in the soul than the *Chayah*. The *Chayah* is the root of a thought, whereas the *Neshamah* develops the thought

further. That is why the *Neshamah* is associated with *binah*, contemplation – the ability to reflect into a matter and analyze it and understand it.

Therefore, the thoughts of the *Chayah* do not always extend into the *Neshamah* below it. That is why not every thought can be developed. There are some thoughts which we can keep analyzing and we come to understand them better, but other thoughts simply cannot be developed any further.

## 22. How To Relate To Our First Thoughts

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Most people, when encountering a small kernel of a thought or an idea entering their minds, tend to feel stuck with these “first thoughts”, as if there is nothing to do with them. This may be because they have other contradicting thoughts, which they have difficulty answering, or because they don’t see a continuation of the thought. Usually, a person will dismiss a “first thought”, either concluding that the thought is incorrect or simply non-existent.

However, from analyzing a certain event in our holy Torah, we can see that there is a different way to approach this matter. When Yosef was having dreams about his father and mother and brothers all prostrating themselves before him, the Torah says that “his father guarded the matter.” Although Yaakov knew that Yosef’s dreams contained a contradiction, for he could not rule over his mother Rachel who had already passed on, Yaakov did not dismiss Yosef’s dreams. Instead, he “guarded the matter”, and as Rashi explains, he sat and waited for the fulfillment of the dreams.

When a thought first falls into the mind, a person may not be able to take the thought further and make anything with it. He may not know how to act upon the thought, or even develop the thought further. But this does not mean that a person should dismiss the thought. Rather, he should protect the thought in his inner storehouse, in his mind and heart, and at a later time, he will be able to make use of the thought.

In the physical world, we can all understand the need for a storage place to keep various items in, so that when the time comes to use those things, we can remove them from storage. The same is true about the spiritual. We need a kind of ‘storehouse’ to keep all of our first thoughts in, meaning that we don’t try to verbalize the thoughts until a later time. There are two gains of this, as we will now explain.

## 23. Allowing a Thought to Develop Over Time

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We understand that when we are in the midst of cooking a food, we cannot eat the food right away, until it is fully cooked. In the current time we live in, we have to wait until we can see results from something. The Sages state that “In the future, a woman will give birth every day”,<sup>95</sup> without having to wait throughout nine months of pregnancy. In the time we live in, there is a period of

pregnancy before the birth of a child, which lasts for nine months, and sometimes the process happens quicker and a baby is born after seven months. Moshe *Rabbeinu* was born after six months.

Just as there is physical pregnancy, where there is a slow process until birth, so is there a concept of ‘pregnancy’ in the thoughts – it can take time until the spiritual illumination which provided the thought can fully reach the mind.

For this reason, the *Arizal* said that whenever a person discovers an inner thought or understanding about something, he should not reveal it to another person for at least three months. Just as in the physical world we cannot recognize that a woman is pregnant before three months, so is it with the spiritual, that nothing spiritual can be developed before three months. If it is released before that time, it would be like a miscarriage. It is even worse if a person were to reveal his thought before 40 days have gone by, because just as it takes 40 days for a fetus to form, it takes 40 days for his thought to completely form.

The above is all illustrating the concept that a spiritual or inner kind of understanding about something cannot be developed immediately. It is a process that takes time. Usually when a person reflects about a certain point and he can’t understand it, he stops thinking about it, and he loses the root thought. But one should understand that it may take nine months until he can even absorb the thought.

Chazal<sup>96</sup> state that a person doesn’t understand his *rebbe* (Torah teacher) for forty years, meaning that it takes forty years until one can absorb the thoughts of his *rebbe*, even if he has known about these thoughts for the last forty years. If a person doesn’t ‘protect’ these thoughts, though, he will not understand his *rebbe*’s thoughts even after forty years, because since he didn’t safeguard it in his memory, he will have already lost it, so it cannot be accessed again. But if he made sure to remember the thought – not just on an intellectual level, but to keep an inner connection to the thought – he has guarded it. When the time comes for his mind to become further illuminated, he will be able to connect new thoughts with the first thought, to form a structured, developed thought.

When a person learns how to live more inwardly, with his soul, he needs to train himself to understand that there are many thoughts which he cannot fully develop, and even so, he should guard them and store them in his memory. They should remain in his internal world, and over time, the thoughts may combine with other thoughts, but at other times, the thoughts will remain in their raw state. It is still important to hold onto such thoughts, because even if he cannot use these thoughts immediately, eventually he may be able to develop them, where they can last for generations.

There are thoughts which a person can sense, but he doesn’t know how to interpret them properly. We explained earlier in the chapter about “*Thoughts of Ruach*” that a person should make a list of positive qualities about himself which he recognizes, but which he hasn’t yet actualized. He can also write about certain interests he has. He may feel that he is drawn towards something, or that he feels a connection to something, or that he has a distaste for something – and he doesn’t know why. He should hold onto these thoughts and he shouldn’t disregard them. With the more than he

becomes familiar with his own inner world, he will suddenly become aware of why he feels a connection towards certain things and why he dislikes certain things.

As is known, the Hebrew word for “wisdom”, *chochmah*, is the combined letters of the words *koach mah*, which means “[Our] power, what is it [worth]?” With the help of Hashem, later in this chapter we will explain more about the implication of *koach mah*. However, first, before anything, we should know what the term *koach* is.

*Chochmah* itself is called *koach*, which also means “potential”, because *chochmah* is the kernel of wisdom in its potential form. When the *chochmah* is absorbed, it graduates into *binah*, which takes place in the *Neshamah* area of the soul. At that point, the *chochmah* becomes actualized from its potential state. The original state of the *chochmah*, itself, is a potential state, where the kernel of wisdom is still in its raw form. If one cannot guard the *chochmah* when it is still undeveloped and in its potential form, he also will not be able to actualize it, because he has lost the raw state of the *chochmah*. But if one has guarded the *chochmah* in its potential form, it will not immediately be actualized, and instead, it will emerge at a later time, after it has been allowed to “cook” and develop.

When it comes to the physical world, we can relate very well to this idea. If a person has some spending money and he doesn't know where to put his money towards, he doesn't have to spend his money right away. He can wait for the right opportunity to use his money, and perhaps invest it when the time is right, so that he can reap the most benefits from his money. If he is so impulsive to immediately spend his money that he just made, he may not be able to gain that much from the investments that are currently available. The money is in its potential form, and a person can hold onto it for a later time, when it will be appropriate to invest. Then he will be able to actualize the real benefits of the amount of money he had.

The same goes for the soul. We need to understand that not every potential force that enters our inner world can be actualized right away. We can guard it in an inner place in the soul. Sometimes it will be actualized on its own, and sometimes only for later, for a different purpose. What we need is the patience to hold onto our potential insights that come to us, and keep them safe in our soul, without trying to actualize them right away. It is really a two-fold job. We should try not to force any actualization of the dormant insights within us, but also need to make sure to guard them well, so that we don't lose them.

## 24. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Our “First Thought”

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Until now we explained one angle of understanding, with regards to how a person needs to hold onto a dormant, undeveloped insight that enters his mind, guarding it in its potential form, even if it is only a tiny point of wisdom that cannot be expanded upon right now. Now we will turn to explain an additional inner angle of understanding.

Whenever a small dot of wisdom enters the mind – which is either called the “first thought” or an “illumination” (each person calls it something else), a person receives certain *chiyus*/vitality from it. There is both an advantage, as well as a disadvantage, to this.



**The disadvantage** to it that when a person receives vitality from his first thought, this may have the negative outcome of him getting used to doing nothing with his thoughts. Instead, he will jump from idea to idea, from one flash of understanding to another, and none of his thoughts will lead to any practical action.

There are some people who live from their first thoughts. Every day they get a lightening flash of understanding, some new idea, and they feel energized from it. Often, these ideas never materialize, even when it is seven or nine months later. These kinds of people may write sefarim or books filled with their ideas, but which cannot be practiced. Sometimes they become advisors or social workers to others, which they can be good at, but they would not be able to do anything that involves practical action. If you try to direct them to take their work a step further which would actualize their ideas, you can't get anywhere with them, because they thrive on ideas themselves, not the actualization of their ideas. He would rather give advice to others than try to actualize the ideas.

If this would only be a problem that affects his dealings with others, it would be bad enough. But when this problem has negative bearings on one's own soul, the issue becomes much worse. There are some people who have ideas constantly flowing through their minds, at a rapid pace. Some of the ideas are total fantasies, some of them are a mix of fantasy and reality, and some are clear ideas which can be actualized. But if you ask them, "So, what practical steps will you take to implement this idea?", he will answer, "Yes, yes, one of these days, I'll work on it." You meet him some time later you ask him, "Whatever happened in the end?" and he doesn't even remember the idea anymore, because many other ideas have entered him since then.

One cannot be successful when he lives this way. Nothing ever comes of his ideas. Such a person lives solely from his first thoughts. It is living in a fantasy. In life, we need to be able to act upon at least some of our flash ideas and first thoughts.

**The advantage** of our first thoughts, however, is that they enable a person to explore the realm of thought itself, without focusing of how to act upon the thoughts.

It is not for nothing that Hashem created a person in a way that some of his first thoughts can be actualized, and others cannot be. The thoughts which he can act upon are limited, and those are the thoughts which we are able to actualize in the practical aspects of our life. But our soul is much vaster than what we are able to actualize of it in the practical realm.

Compare it to a funnel, with the hole of the funnel on the bottom, and the wider part of the funnel on top. On the bottom, where the funnel is small, lies our realm of practical action. The top part of the funnel represents our world of thought itself, which takes up much more space than the practical realm below. That is why many thoughts remain in potential form, and only a small percentage of thoughts can be drawn down to the bottom of the 'funnel', where they can be actualized in the practical realm.

There is a deep saying of Rebbi Nachman of Breslev, that "Some people have [an allotted share of] Torah which is narrow above, and wide below." He meant that some people have only a few words of Torah to say, but they can speak a lot and produce volumes of *sefarim*, from these few points they know; whereas others have volumes and volumes of Torah thoughts at their root above, but since the bottom part of their 'funnel' is narrow, they can't draw down all of their Torah knowledge from their root above, and therefore they don't have much Torah to say.

When a person is always trying to actualize his “first thought”, and he will only acknowledge it if he can make something practical out of it, and otherwise he ignores it, he would be constricting his soul. Even more so, he will stifle any first thought which he can’t act upon right now, and in doing so, he would be limiting them, thereby constricting them.

Thus, returning to the original point that we mentioned many times, a person needs a balance: On one hand, he must be able to live with the clearly limited reality on this world, but on the other hand, he also needs to be able to live deeply with a space in himself that is unlimited by anything.

Perhaps we can use the following example from the laws of Shabbos to illustrate the idea. In the laws of Shabbos, a private domain is a space of four by four cubits. In this aspect, the private domain is a limited space. However, going upwards, it extends endlessly into the air above. If we are considering the ground space of the domain, it is limited. If we are considering its space in the air above it, it is unlimited.

The lesson from this is clear. On our ‘ground’ – the physical world we stand on – we must live with clearly defined boundaries and limitations. But when we rise above to the spiritual, we need to expand our horizons, and keep expanding. Although there are also clear definitions of the spiritual realm, it is ultimately a widening of our horizons, and we can keep expanding in that space.

When a person can only relate to first thoughts that can be actualized, he is limiting the vitality of his soul, because he would only relate to something that he can actualize on this world, constricting his soul in the process. The amount of our soul which we can actualize on this world is very limited, so he would be stuck in a limited realm, using very little of his potential. But if he knows how to live with his first thoughts even when they can’t be actualized, he is expanding his limitations, allowing himself to receive a vast amount of vitality from his soul, even though he cannot actualize the potential right now.

We should emphasize, however, that this is a very subtle point about our soul. For if a person will only live from his first thoughts, he will become disconnected from reality, yet on the other hand, if he only confines himself to the limited reality of this world, he would be losing the expansiveness of the soul. He would also be cutting himself off from the flow of the soul’s inspiration. The first thoughts always come from the inner flow of inspiration in the soul, and if one loses it, he would be living without a source of true, spiritual vitality in his life.

Therefore, a person needs to guard his first thoughts, by sometimes trying to actualize them, and at other times, to simply just feel vitality from them, without trying to actualize them. One needs to be aware that his first thought is just a first thought, which cannot always be actualized, but which he can definitely derive inspiration from.

Here is an example. A person gets an idea to build or develop something, and he thinks about he can develop his idea, but when he thinks about how to actualize the plan, he discovers that only 50% of his dream can make it to reality. The other 50% will remain merely as a good idea, which he currently does not have the tools to actualize. From where should he draw his vitality from here? He needs to feel inspired from both parts – from the part of the idea which can bear results, and also from the part of the idea which he can’t actualize. One needs to be able to draw vitality from the mere aspiration and will to broaden his horizons. It is just that he needs to keep one condition – he has to know that there is 50% of his idea which he cannot actualize, at least not right now.

The problem with most people is that as soon as they get a certain inspiration to do something, and they don't have the tools right now to actualize the idea, they forge ahead with the idea anyway. They make the mistake that the idea will come to fruition very soon, and they act as if they are already seeing the results. We are all aware of the following expressions: "There is no problem. Trust me. In a little bit of time, I will begin, or get it done."

For example, a person sees an advertisement for a home that is worth half a million dollars, being sold for \$350,000. He jumps at the opportunity, thinking, "This is a real find! I must grab it!" But he should really stop for a moment and ask himself: "Wait a second. Do you even have the \$350,000 right now? You don't even have \$100,000! The fact that you came across a really good deal doesn't mean that you can do anything right now to get it."

The closer that an idea is to reality, the less it will disconnect a person from reality, and the further it is from being actualized, its main use is for a person to acquire expansiveness from it. But as mentioned, a person must have a balance between how much he can actualize right now and how much he cannot, otherwise he will become delusional.

When one can live from his aspirations, this is a true source of vitality, but only on the condition that the person clearly recognizes it as an aspiration, not reality. A person must be careful not to mix aspiration with reality. One must be balanced between his aspirations and reality, by knowing which parts of his aspirations he can actualize, and which parts he cannot.

Thus, a person is able to use his fantasies which Hashem has implanted in him, as a source of vitality. This is on the condition that he identifies it merely as a source of vitality to him, and he is aware that it is merely an aspiration, which cannot be actualized right now.

We have so far explained two different ways to receive vitality from our "first thoughts".

## 25. Identifying and Connecting To The Source of the First Thought

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Finally, there is a deeper point about we will explain about how we should relate to our power of "first thought": When a person identifies the **source** of the first thought.

We can give an example of it. As mentioned above, there are some people who will only advise others what to do, but they cannot actualize their own advice. What can they do to take their ideas further? They need to seek ideas from others in how to execute their plans.

How is it that the advisor himself cannot develop his thoughts further, whereas the second person is able to? What is the difference between them, if they are both working with a first thought? It is because the second person is able to draw inspiration from an inner source in him, whereas the first person, the advisor himself who couldn't actualize his own ideas, doesn't have a connection to this inner source.

Thus, whenever a person gets a first thought, he needs to have the **inner awareness** to connect to the source of the first thought. The term that the Sages use for this is, "*And wisdom, from where is it found?*" [The verse is saying that wisdom comes from a source, which is called 'where is it', which in Hebrew is called *ayin*, lit. "nothingness"].

Earlier we explained about the *avodah* to connect to the source of our vitality, and now we are explaining an *avodah* to connect to the source of our thoughts. These two ways of *avodah* correspond to each other. We can either receive vitality by drawing it forth from the vitality itself, or it can come to us by way of thought, which is a “garment” for the vitality.

Applying this to our current discussion, where we are learning about the *Chayah* part of the soul, we need to know that the *Chayah* draws forth vitality from a deeper source in the soul. The *Chayah* part of our soul nurses its energy from either one of two ways: Either by way of the feelings, contained in the heart, or by way of the thoughts.

The matter known as *ruach hakodesh* [lit. “spirit of holiness”, a higher inspiration] can be revealed to a person in one of two ways: It may be revealed to him through an intense feeling of the heart, or through an intense increase of thought. These are the two existing forms of *ruach hakodesh*. With regards to where the *Chayah* nurses its vitality from, a person needs to identify the source of the vitality to his feelings, as well as the very source of his thoughts.

All of us have “first thoughts” that fall into our mind, more or less. Some people have a more revealed “*Chayah*” point in their souls, so they experience more of these first thoughts. In others, the *Chayah* point of their souls is not as revealed, so they experience less of these first thoughts. But in any case, every person has first thoughts that fall into him. The only issue is if a person is identifying the source of the inspiration that led to these first thoughts.

A person will may not be aware of the first thoughts even when they fall into him. He may suddenly realize that some thought has entered his brain, and he identifies the thought, but it is already after it happened, so he doesn’t identify the flow which it came through.

Compare this to opening a sink and filling a cup of water with it. One person looks into the sink and he sees a cup of water, but he didn’t see the water pouring into the cup from the sink. He is simply aware that if there is a sink here, so he knows that is how the water got into the cup. Another person, though, was there when the sink flowed into the cup, so not only does he know that the water entered the cup by way of the sink, but he was actually aware of the flow of the water in the sink as it entered the cup.

In order for a person to connect to the source of his thoughts, it is not enough to be aware of a thought after it has already entered his brain, when he tries to wonder where it came from. Rather, he will need to connect to the source of the thought while the thought is actually flowing into him, when he can sense it.

The less inner awareness that a person has to this, he will only be able to identify with a thought after it has entered his mind, when it will suddenly dawn on him that there is a new thought here. It will be like opening a drawer and suddenly finding an object there. In contrast to this, when a person has more inner awareness, he can identify how there are new thoughts flowing into his consciousness. The keener that one’s awareness is towards the flow of thought when it comes, the stronger level of *ruach hakodesh* it will be.

Until now we have briefly explained about the concept of our “*Chayah*” level of the soul. Now we turn, with the help of Hashem, to touch upon the innermost level within the *Chayah*.

The *Chayah* is known as “*koach mah*”, “what is [our] energy?” As is well-known in *sefarim hakedoshim*, the term “*koach mah*” is associated with the concept of “*bittul*”, self-nullification. Moshe Rabbeinu said, “*V'nachnu mah*” – And we, what are we?”<sup>97</sup> The word “*mah*” (what) is the point of *bittul*. The *gematria* of the word “*Adam*” in Hebrew is 45, equal to the value of the word *mah*, which is also 45 – a hint that the *avodah* of a person is, essentially, the *avodah* known as “*bittul*”.

Firstly, we shall emphasize that there are two levels of *bittul*. There is *bittul* at the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, and there is *bittul* at the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul. Here we will be discussing the *bittul* of the *Chayah* level, not the *bittul* on the *Yechidah* level (which we will later discuss, with Hashem’s help).

The *Chayah* level of *bittul*, itself, consists of two steps, which are parallel to the first two stages of *hisbodedus* that we outlined in the beginning of this *sefer*: Recognizing the self, and bonding with the Creator. The concept of *bittul* obviously cannot apply to the third stage of *hisbodedus*, which is the Infinite, for we cannot nullify the Infinite, *chas v’shalom*. We can only have *bittul* with regards to nullifying our own self, and with regards to nullifying ourselves to the Creator.

We are currently discussing the first stage of *hisbodedus*, revealing the self, by way of the power of thought, and in the *Chayah* level of the soul. Therefore, the *bittul* which we will discuss here is a *bittul* in relation to the self, and not a *bittul* in relation to bonding with the Creator (which we will explain, with Hashem’s help, in a later chapter).

## 27. The Meaning of Bittul (Self-Nullification)

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The basic level of *bittul* is when a person nullifies his understanding of attributing success to his own powers and strengths, which result from conceitedness and from fantasies.

It is the tendency of most people to attribute their success to their own abilities, when the truth is far from this. A considerable amount of people will naturally take a lot of work upon themselves, which is really much more stressful than what they can handle. Even if they don’t actually do it, they are still readily prepared to take upon so much work, because they think that they have a lot of their own superpower.

This attitude really comes from an erroneous perspective. The person is failing to acknowledge the reality of our human limitations. We explained earlier about recognizing basic reality, when we explained the “*Nefesh*” level of thought. The basic level of thinking, which is at the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul, is for one to recognize his capabilities and limitations. This is also known as *chochmah tataah*, “lower wisdom”, the lower, basic use of the power of *chochmah*/wisdom).

Currently, where we are discussing the *Chayah* level of the soul, we are discussing the higher use of *chochmah*, which is *chochmah ilaah*, “higher wisdom”. We are speaking here of a real, existing

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<sup>97</sup> *Shemos* 16:7

power in the soul, not of something imaginary. When considering this power that exists within my soul, there are two different perspectives: (1) One way to look at it is that it is my own power. (2) From the “*Chayah*” point in the soul, I realize that all of my *chochmah*/wisdom is *koach mah* – lit. “what is [our] energy?” – where I nullify the perspective that I have “my own” energy.

## 28. “Koach Mah” – I Cannot Complete Anything On My Own

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Since we are discussing the kind of *bittul* where a person nullifies his sense of his own power and strength, which is not a *bittul* in regards to bonding with the Creator [but simply a *bittul* for the purpose of becoming more humble], we must understand what the concept behind this *bittul* is.

The Sages describe this kind of *bittul* in a teaching in *Avos*: “The task is not upon you to complete, nor are you so free that you are exempt from it.”<sup>98</sup> When the Sages state “The task is not upon you to complete”, they are implying that a person cannot complete anything on his own.

The *Ramchal* bases the sefer *Mesillas Yesharim* on ten steps of growth, laid out by the sage Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair. The highest stage in this ladder of growth is *kedushah*, sanctity, and the *Ramchal* says that it only comes to a person as a gift, which one must work hard for in the beginning, and which is only acquired in the end as a gift. What we see from this is that a person, by himself, really cannot finish anything – whether in the spiritual, or in the physical. Only the Creator can finish any work. On our part, we cannot complete a thing. On a larger scale, we cannot complete our task in this period of exile, because the exile will only be completed by *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who will send *Mashiach*. In the same vein, we as human beings are not able to finish anything on this world, on our own.

One needs to be awake and aware to this concept. Our focus here, at this point, is not about who will be the one that finishes everything. Rather, here we are focusing on the fact that “I, as a human being, cannot complete anything.” (We need to subtly differentiate between these two aspects.)

With this, we shall explain the meaning of “The task is not upon you to complete”. Since the task is ultimately not “upon you”, you don’t have the energies to do it. If it would be your task, you would have received the energies to do it. Since you do not have the energies for it, it is not upon you to do. So you are not able to complete any task or work. Furthermore, Chazal state that the seal of Hashem is truth.<sup>99</sup> Only Hashem can give the final ‘signature’ on something. A person cannot complete anything on his own. When one understands this, that “I cannot complete anything on my own”, that is how he will reach the perspective of *koach mah*, recognizing that he has no power of his own. He understands that his own strength is worthless.

Consider the following. A person wants to go to a wedding in Tel Aviv, and he lives in Jerusalem. If he would know that he only can travel to Tel Aviv but he won’t be able to get to the wedding hall, would he leave his house to go to Tel Aviv? Of course, he wouldn’t. He would only leave his house if he knows he can get to the wedding hall. If he can’t, there’s no point in traveling there. What we

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<sup>98</sup> *Avos* 2:16

<sup>99</sup> *Shabbos* 55a

want to take out of this illustration is, that if a person thinks he can get somewhere, he will try to reach it, but if he realizes that he cannot get to that place, he knows that it is worthless to try to get there, and he won't bother himself at all, because there is no point.

There is a deep place in the soul which recognizes the perspective of *koach mah*, that we have no power of our own. To the extent that I recognize that I cannot complete anything, my power is worthless.

There are some who raise the argument that although one person cannot do anything on his own, it is still possible to have two people who can complete an act together. We shall deal with this argument. There is a discussion in the Gemara is two partners buy an item, and one of them pays 99 coins for it and the other partner pays one coin.

The Gemara concludes that the partner who paid 99 coins gets to keep 99% of any profit from the item, while the partner who paid 1 coin gets to keep 1%. However, before the Gemara concludes this, the Gemara assumes that each of the partners should get to keep 50% profit from the item, because the item was worth 100 and therefore it could only have been bought by both of them together, so they are equal partners in it. According to that argument in the Gemara, owning 99% of the item is not worth anything, because it doesn't get them anywhere.

Meaning, if it would be possible to acquire 99% of the item, then owning 99% of the item would be something. But since the item can only be bought with 100 coins, the Gemara held that even if one of them paid 99 and the other paid 1, adding up for a total of 100, none of them own it, not even the one who paid 99. Why? Because the 99 is not enough to acquire the item. Therefore, his payment of 99 for the item is worthless. It's not that he owns 99% of the item – rather, he owns nothing of it.

Applying this to our own souls, one needs to reach the point where he concludes that he does not have any strength of his own, and that his own strength is worthless. The Sages state “And when I am for myself, what am I?”<sup>100</sup>, meaning that “my” own strength is nothing. When one reaches this understanding, he recognizes his nothingness. Why is he nothing? Because his own power cannot do anything.

In the second stage of *hisbodedus*, a person connects outward, whether towards others or towards the Creator. Currently, we are dealing with the first stage of *hisbodedus*, which is to negate the “I”. It is for one to understand, “When I am for myself, what am I?” It is essentially the realization that I am nothing, and that I do not have any power of my own – *koach mah*, “what is my energy worth”?

The soul's deep point of *koach mah*, of recognizing the futility and worthlessness of our own power, is essentially the realization that our actions do not make anything happen.

We have explained here that every thought begins with a first thought that falls into the mind. The question is: How does it fall into the mind in the first place? The mind takes the first thought and develops it further, but how does a first thought come to me at all? Many of the wealthy people in the world all began with ideas which no one else thought of. From where did their original ideas

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100 Avos 1:4

come? How did they get the first thought to acquire a certain business? There was definitely some factor that spurred on the first thought to begin with. Where did it come from?

A person cannot create his first thought. Everything a person does begins with a first thought, and he is not able to create the first thought on his own. When a person contemplates this, he realizes that his “I” cannot produce anything on his own. This realization enables a person to nullify all of his actions, for he realizes that his actions do not cause anything to happen. As it was explained, an action which cannot be completed is worthless.

When a person needs to get somewhere and he can only get half of the way there, it not worth anything to him if he only gets halfway there.

The implication of “And when I am for myself, what am I?” is a negation of my “I”, a realization of the futility of my power and actions. “*There is nothing besides Him*”, according to *Chassidus*, is explained to mean that the sense of one’s own nothingness is what enables a person to realize that there is nothing else besides for the Creator. A person, on his own, is not able to do a thing.

## 29. In Conclusion

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When a person reaches this perspective in the soul, he reaches the inner source of his vitality. As long as a person identifies himself as a being that has independent power of his own, the inner source of energy is blocked. Only when he nullifies the self can he reach the inner energy source of both his feelings and thoughts, as explained earlier. The factor which blocks a person from reaching his inner source of energy is, “*I stand between Hashem and between you*” – in other words, it is the “I”, the sensing of one’s own independent existence, which creates a divide between the person and the Creator.

When one nullifies that “I”, by feeling his nothingness, he essentially removes the divide between him and Hashem, and then he touches upon his inner source of energy.

As explained earlier, this concept of *bittul* (self-nullification) is with regards to one’s actions, meaning that one realizes that he cannot complete any of his actions, which leads him to a feeling of being nullified to the Creator, when he realizes that he cannot complete anything on his own. As explained, the appropriate kind of action to work on this kind of *bittul* is when a person does something which ends up being in vain, and especially in a case where it was not only a pointless action but one that harms him in some way.

When such a thing happens, it is the proper time to work on the concept of *bittul*, for can he realize the fruitlessness and nothingness of his actions.

It was emphasized that this level of *bittul* is only regarding the actions of a person. There is also a deeper level of *bittul* than this, which is through the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul, which is the subject of the next chapter.<sup>101</sup>

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*101 Editor’s Note: Due to the lengthy material of this chapter, we will provide a summary which outlines the general points of this topic - revealing the “Chayah” level of the soul via the power of thought.*



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## *13 / Thoughts of "Yechidah"*

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### I. The "Yechidah" Is Conceptually Different Than All Other Parts of the Soul

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We have so far merited, with Hashem's help, to learn about the *Chayah* dimension of our soul. Now we will proceed to the next step: the *Yechidah*.

We will only explain it in brief terms, due to the complex nature of this matter. If Hashem merits us, we will hopefully devote an entire sefer that explains the *Yechidah*.<sup>102</sup>

The *Yechidah* point in our soul is a whole different kind of viewpoint in our soul than any of the other four viewpoints of the soul. Although each of the five points of the soul are all different from each other, it can still be said of them that they all fall under one category.

To illustrate, in the animal world, you have many different animals, but there are still families and groupings of animals [i.e. the cat family, which includes cats, tigers, lions, jaguars, leopards, cheetahs, etc.]. So too, it can be said of the first four dimensions of the soul that they are all under one "family". The *Yechidah* of the soul is in a 'family' of its own, in contrast to the other four dimensions of the soul. Although the *Yechidah* is deeply connected with the other four layers of the soul, it is still a class of its own entirely.

The *Yechidah*, which is the deep point of the soul, sees a different view on the same reality we look at.

To illustrate what we are describing, the *Neshamah* is described as being partially in man and partially in Heaven. The part of the *Neshamah* which resides in man lives together with the physical body, and the part of the *Neshamah* that resides in Heaven lives totally in the spiritual dimension. It's the same *Neshamah*, of course, but there are two viewpoints within it that are seeing two totally different dimensions. The part of the *Neshamah* which is in man can relate to physicality, whereas the part of the *Neshamah* that resides in Heaven sees only a spiritual viewpoint.

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(1) Identifying, both on an intellectual and emotional level, what the Source of my energy is (which is the Creator). This can be worked upon when breathing: upon inhaling, feel the source of your breathing (the Creator), and upon exhaling, feel how you are returning your energy source to the Creator.

(2) Identify the main kind of physical work which you enjoy doing; identify also the main positive emotion which you receive vitality from (i.e. love, etc.), as well as the main area of Torah thought which you receive vitality from (i.e. Halacha, in-depth Gemara study, chassidus, etc.)

(3) Learn how to view yourself from "outside" of yourself.

(4) Identify your "first thought" that enters your mind before it develops into a detailed thought. Feel vitality from your aspirations and positive fantasies.

(5) Work on the concept of *bittul* (self-nullification): Whenever you do something which turns out to be pointless or damaging, realize that you cannot complete anything on your own, and that only the Creator can complete everything.

102 Refer to the Rav's sefer "Da Es Havayasecha", adapted into English as "Reaching Your Essence".

The other four dimensions of our soul see reality in a certain way that is limited. But our *Yechidah* views the same reality with a much higher perception than the lower four dimensions of the soul.

To give a parable that describes the *Yechidah*, the Sages say that “the difference between *Gan Eden* (Paradise) and *Gehinnom* (Hell) is the size of a hairsbreadth”. This doesn’t mean simply that there’s a small space that separates *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom*. Rather, *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* are both found in the same place; to one person, the place will be *Gan Eden*, and to another person who comes there, the place can be *Gehinnom*.

To illustrate this on a more practical level, we can take a person and stick him in the *beis midrash* with a Gemara, and it feels like *Gehinnom* to him. Another person will feel like it is *Gan Eden* - he has merited to taste the enjoyment of learning Torah, so to him, learning Gemara in *Gan Eden* is endless bliss. The opposite experience is felt by one who never tasted enjoyment in his learning - for him, that very same *beis midrash* is a *Gehinnom* to him.

All five dimensions of the soul exist on the same plane, but each of them sees a different view. The lower four dimensions of the soul all have the same kind of vision, but the *Yechidah* has a whole different level of vision. All five views, however, are looking at the same exact reality.

We will clarify here that the *Yechidah* is not found in a different place than the other points of the soul. They are all found in the same place. The understanding is not that the *Nefesh* is in Eretz Yisrael, the *Ruach* is in Europe, and that the *Neshamah* is in America. They are all existing in the same place. It is just that each of the dimensions in the soul sees reality from a different viewpoint.

## 2. The Yechidah Sees The “Light of the Infinite” In Each Thing

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The *Yechidah* can see the *ohr EinSof* (light of the Infinite) in each thing, as opposed to our normal perception of the soul, which only sees the limits of something. The other four dimensions of the soul generally see a limit of something; each of them sees a limited view, as we explained earlier. But the *Yechidah* sees how the light of the Infinite is cloaked in something.

Right now we are not discussing how a person connects himself to the Infinite. This will be at the second stage of *hisbodedus*, which we will later explain when we get there, with the help of Hashem. At this point, we are only discussing it in terms of discovering and recognizing it. It is essentially to recognize the spark of G-d that is in each and every one of us. This is the meaning of recognizing the *Yechidah*.

The *Yechidah* in you can recognize the light of the Infinite that is found within you. In other words: there is a spark of G-d found within you. When you think of this in terms of how it sustains you, that is not the *Yechidah*; it is the *Chayah*. But when you grasp this in terms of seeing the endless light of Hashem, that is the *Yechidah*’s view. In deeper words: the *Yechidah* sees how the Infinite manifests in all limited things.

So the other four parts of the soul see limited kinds of vision, while the *Yechidah* sees the unlimited. The *Yechidah* sees an all-inclusive kind of view.

Of the future it is said, “*Hashem will be One, and His name will be One*”.<sup>103</sup> The fact that His Name will be one is essentially the view from our *Yechidah* - it is one, therefore it sees oneness.

To illustrate, the concepts of hatred and disparity only exist in our limited views, whereas hatred and disparity have no place in the viewpoint of the *Yechidah*. Our limited kinds of perception see deficiencies. The *Yechidah* does not see deficiencies. Our limited perceptions see movement, while our *Yechidah* does not relate to movement. Our willpower is limited, while our *Yechidah* is an unchanging will.

We can give tens of examples of the concept, but the point is the same: the other four points of our soul all see limited views, while our *Yechidah* does not see a limited view.

We have only scratched the surface here. This cannot be fully understood unless we go more into detail, but here is not the place to do that. It really requires a whole sefer to explain it.

### 3. Reaching The “Yechidah”, Stage One: Nullifying The Will

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Whenever we work with our soul in any *avodah*, there are always two stages – “remove yourself from evil”, and “do good.” First there is a stage in which we must negate something, and then we move on to acquiring a level. In order to reach the *Yechidah* as well, we also must go through this two-step process; first we must negate something that is evil, and after that we can proceed to acquire the matter.

The first stage in reaching the *Yechidah*, in which we must remove something from us that is evil, is also the matter of “*hishtavus*”, “equilibrium”, a quality which the *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* describes as “the purpose of all *avodah*”. The concept of *hishtavus* is a secret. The question of all questions is if a person merits in his *avodah* to reach *hishtavus*. It draws the line between the sphere of the limited with the realm of the endless. In the limited realm, there are ‘divisions’, thus there are many ‘differences’ within this world. But in the realm of the unlimited – the *ohr EinSof* – all is one, so there are no divisions there.

*Hishtavus* means to equate things together, to unify. The more we see two things as differentiated, the further it is from *hishtavus*. The more we see how two points can unite and be brought to harmony, the more we unify them. This is the concept of *hishtavus*.

Through *hishtavus*, we can attain the “remove yourself from evil” part of the *avodah* in reaching the *Yechidah*. However, we are not trying to simply negate something for the sake of negating it. We will be negating something so that we can achieve a unity through it. We are referring to the concept

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<sup>103</sup> Zecharyah 14:9

of *bittul haratzon* – to “nullify the will”. When one learns how to nullify his *ratzon*/will, he is negating his will, and for a greater purpose: so that he can achieve unity in his very will, in contrast to having many other desires. The way we work on this is by learning how to detach from a desire towards something.

It is our *ratzon* (will) which is responsible for all the ‘divisions’ we are always making. When we have many desires, this creates disparity in the soul. *Ratzon* is also called “*Keser*” (lit. “Crown”); to be more specific, *ratzon* is the outer layer of “*Keser*”. After “*Keser*”, the *ratzon* extends to the realm of thought, and then to the emotions. Thus, in order for us to erase the notion of disparity and divisions in our soil, we need to erase the root of it, which is our *ratzon*.

To understand this, think about the following. A person wants to reach the light of the *EinSof*. However, he wouldn’t have to desire it, if it’s already revealed in his soul. If so, why does a person desire the light of *EinSof*? It must be that he wants something. If he would not want anything, that means he already has the *EinSof* revealed in him, so he wouldn’t want anything else. A person does not have a desire for something he already possesses; he doesn’t have to want it, because it’s already a part of his existence.

In order to reach the *Yechidah*, there must be *mesirus nefesh*, a giving up of the will. The term *nefesh* (soul) is often identified with the term *ratzon* (will), being that the will is how we experience ourselves. The concept of *mesirus nefesh* is really about *mesirus haratzon*, to give up your will. This is because when you give up what you want, it feels like you are giving up yourself, for something greater. However, there are levels of giving up the will – a partial level, in which we give up certain desires, and the more complete level, which is when we give up the will entirely.

For example, if a person has a desire for a certain food and he restrains himself from eating it, he has given up his will, but it is only partial, because he still has a will. There is a higher level: giving up the will entirely. The truth is that nobody can reach this level perfectly, but any person on his own level can reach it to a certain degree.

So the first stage in reaching the *Yechidah* is to nullify the will. It should begin with giving up the desires for things that are forbidden, and then one should then work to give up even permissible desires as well; as we know, the holiness of a Jew is reached when he does not indulge in even permissible desires<sup>104</sup>, because even permissible desires taint the soul. After that, there is a higher stage, in which one should nullify even holy desires. On that level, one reaches the secret of *hishtavus*.

In our current state, we are not able to totally nullify our desires – not even desires for the forbidden, and surely not with holy desires. We cannot nullify our desire for forbidden things because we live after the sin of Adam, in which the evil effects of the Serpent are still upon our soul, preventing us from totally nullifying our desires for evil. The Sages state that there were four *tzaddikim* who never sinned, and the only reason why they died was due to the effect of the

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104 See Ramban to Parshas Kedoshim, 19:1

Serpent.<sup>105</sup> This implies that all of us are affected by the Serpent after the sin. So we are not able to disconnect completely from evil desires, and we surely cannot disconnect completely from permitted desires.

As for holy desires, it would be detrimental if we would disconnect from them, because we need holy desires in order to survive spiritually. If one would give up his holy desires, he will not want to keep the *mitzvos* (*chas v'shalom*). Since we live in a world in which there is evil, which can only be rectified when we do *mitzvos* in it, it would be forbidden for us to completely nullify our holy desires.

(However, there is still a concept of nullifying holy desires which we can do, as in the following scenario: If one wanted to do a *mitzvah* and then something happened that was not his fault which prevented him from doing the *mitzvah*, he must accept this as a decree of Heaven and not be upset. In this way, he 'nullifies' even a holy desire.)

In summary, the first level is that we need to get used to nullifying our desires, at least on a partial level, by refraining from forbidden acts, as well as from indulgence in permissible desires; and sometimes, even from holy desires, as we have explained above. This is the first stage in reaching the *Yechidah*: nullifying the desires.

## 4. Working Our Way Through The Soul - Upwards and Downwards

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There are two approaches in how we work with our soul: either to work our way upwards (beginning from the lowest point) or to work our way downwards (beginning from the highest point).

When we use the first approach, working upwards, we begin with *Nefesh*, then *Ruach*, then *Neshamah*, then *Chayah* and then *Yechidah*.

If we use the opposite approach, we start by nullifying our desires, which causes the *Yechidah* in our soul to shine with each time we do this. Through nullifying a desire, we are in touch with *hishtavus*, and this activates the light of our *Yechidah*. From there, we can continue with *Chayah*, then *Neshamah*, then *Ruach*, ending up at *Nefesh* – as a continuous process.

In this *sefer*, we are using the first approach, working our way upwards. However, the other approach is valid as well. We will explain why each of them is valid.

The approach of this *sefer*, which involves working our way upwards, is based on the concept of the "ladder of growth" listed by the Sage Rabbi Pinchos Ben Yair, which starts from *zehirus* (watchfulness), *zerizus* (zeal), *nekiyus* (cleanliness), etc.<sup>106</sup> The other approach, working downwards,

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<sup>105</sup> Bava Basra 17a

<sup>106</sup> Avodah Zarah 20b

is reflected in the story of Rabbi Eliezer Ben Dordaya, who cried so much until he gave up his soul<sup>107</sup>, reaching the pinnacle of spirituality in just one moment. He nullified his desires – he reached his *Yechidah*.

Nullifying the desires must be worked upon only slowly and progressively. With each desire that a person lets go of, he reveals more and more *hishtavus*. This slowly but surely begins to reveal the light of the *EinSof*, for the light of the *EinSof* is contained in *hishtavus*; that is how the *Yechidah* in the soul is revealed.

This is the general description of the first stage in reaching the *Yechidah*. The details of this are many, for there are countless desires that each person has, which have many branching desires within them as well.

## [The Yechidah Is Not The Ratzon]

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The following point must be made clear.

There were many who believed that the *Yechidah* of the soul is the *ratzon* (will). As a result, they thought that the complete bond with Hashem is reached only through accessing their power of *ratzon*. After all, Chazal state, “It is our will to do Your will”, which implies that one must transform his *ratzon* into the *ratzon* of Hashem.

However, what those people did not realize was that this perspective is only valid from the viewpoint of this current 6,000 year era, which is a limited realm. The point of *ratzon* is the deepest point within this limited realm - but not in the realm of the unlimited. A hint to this is that the word *ratzon* is from the words *ratz* (run) and *tzar* (narrow), implying that the will narrows a person’s perception. The *Yechidah* is the point above *ratzon*. On a deeper note, the *ratzon* is what prevents the *Yechidah* – if one cannot go beyond his *ratzon*, he is unable to reveal the *Yechidah*.<sup>108</sup>

## 5. Reaching The Yechidah, Stage Two: Reaching Oneness

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Until now we explained the first part of reaching the *Yechidah*, which was “remove yourself from evil” (negate your desires). Now we will explain the second part, which is to “do good.”

As we explained earlier, the difference between the *Yechidah* and the other layers of the soul is that the *Yechidah* sees oneness, whereas the rest of the soul sees divisions. So in order to reach the perspective of the *Yechidah*, we need to reveal an all-inclusive kind of view (“*koach hakolel*”).

There are levels within “*koach hakolel*”. The *Chayah* in the soul also contains “*koach hakolel*”, but it is not as inclusive when we compare it with the view of the *Yechidah*. The *Chayah* surrounds the

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<sup>107</sup> *Avodah Zarah* 17a

<sup>108</sup> For further understanding, see *Reaching Your Essence\_07\_Nullifying Your Will*

*Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah*, so it can be present in all of them. However, it can only surround one soul layer at a time. If the *Chayah* is surrounding the *Nefesh*, for example, it cannot simultaneously surround the *Ruach*. This is explained in the writings of the Arizal. While the *Chayah* is more inclusive than the lower soul layers, it is not as inclusive as the *Yechidah*.

Thus, there are levels in inclusiveness – a partial level, and a complete level. To illustrate the concept, there are positive commandments and negative commandments. These are the rules of the Torah, and they include many details. That is one kind of inclusiveness. But there is something higher that includes all of the *mitzvos* within it: the *EinSof* (Infinite) of Hashem. The *EinSof* of Hashem includes everything. Not only does it include all the details; it is much more inclusive than that. It is the all-inclusiveness itself.

When we say the word ‘everything’, what does that mean? Does ‘everything’ mean all the details, or does it mean even more than that? It means more than having all the details; it means that there is everything. If ‘everything’ is everything because it includes all details, this is a partial level of inclusiveness, because it is ‘everything’ with regards to details. That is the ‘everything’ which the *Chayah* is capable of. But if ‘everything’ is ‘everything’ because it is seen as ‘everything’, then it is a much broader kind of inclusiveness. It is ‘everything’ itself. That is the ‘everything’ contained in the *Yechidah*.

Thus, when we explain here that the *Yechidah* in the soul includes all the details, this is addressing a partial level of the *Yechidah*, not the complete level. To say that the *Yechidah* includes all ‘details’ is a definition of *Yechidah* when compared to the *Chayah*, but it is not describing the actual view of the *Yechidah*.

The *Chayah* level of the soul is called *chochmah* (wisdom), and the source of *chochmah* is in “*ayin*” (nothingness), as it is said in the verse, “*Wisdom, from where is it found?*”, and *ayin* is identified as *Yechidah*. But “*ayin*” is only a definition of *Yechidah* from the viewpoint of the *Chayah*, meaning, when compared to the view of the *Chayah*. So *ayin* is not describing the total level of the *Yechidah*. The *Yechidah* itself is not defined by how it relates to the *Chayah*. The *Yechidah* is just the *Yechidah* itself. The *Yechidah*, itself, is not defined as something that includes all ‘details’.

This is an additional error that people made about the *Yechidah*, relating to the *Yechidah* as being the root of all details, when this is not the defining aspect of the *Yechidah*. The *Yechidah* is the *Yechidah*, itself, and there is an external resulting aspect from it, which is that it can be clothed in all details and illuminate them. The *Chayah* level of the soul is indeed nourished from that external result of the *Yechidah*. But the *Yechidah*, itself, is an all-encompassing reality besides for its inclusiveness of details. It is everything, in and of itself [and this is a fact regardless of how it relates to the details included in it].

Now let us explain how this applies to us on a personal level. If we want to reveal the *Yechidah* in relation to details, we will not be touching upon the *Yechidah*. We would only be ascending towards it. But if we want to touch upon the revelation of the *Yechidah*, as it is, we need to reach a perspective that is “everything”.

How do reach such a perspective? “Everything” does not have to mean “everything” with regards to including all the details. Rather, it has more intrinsic meaning.

We will explain this more. The following is an example of “everything” with regards to including all details.

The Sages said that “Chavakuk came and established them all on one – *“The righteous person shall live by his faith.”*”<sup>109</sup> The “one” thing which Chavakuk establishes our entire task is on is in the category of the *Yechidah*. What is that one thing? *“The righteous person shall live by his faith”* – the fact that a person can look at everything in terms of *emunah*, the fact that Hashem oversees everything. This is the *Yechidah*, but here it is clothed in the lower level. The *Yechidah* is being manifest here is an instructor to teach us that all details are run by the Creator.

However, this is not yet the higher perspective called “everything.” It is rather a perspective in which all-inclusiveness is being shined within details; it is a way to get to the inner point, but it is not yet the actual inner point. The *Yechidah* itself, as it is, its inner point, is not defined as *emunah*, which is about how all details are run by the Creator.

Here is another example. The *Yechidah* can be defined as “*emunah*” in relation to the fact that the Jewish people are called “one nation in the earth”, but this is not the general, collective level of *Yechidah*. It is rather a *Yechidah* on a more relational level, in the sense that all of the Jewish people are one.

Basically, the rule is that the *Yechidah* is not defined as something that expresses any combination of details or as being a root of details. It is rather an expression of oneness itself. When we grasp what oneness is, in and of itself, that is the view of the *Yechidah*.

Understandably, there are levels within the *Yechidah*. The highest level of *Yechidah* is the general *Yechidah*, which is the *ohr EinSof*, the Infinite Light, which is all-inclusive. The lower level of *Yechidah* is the individual, private level of *Yechidah* [in oneself].

Here is another example. When we think of Kohanim, we will think of all Kohanim as being one group of Jews that are known as Kohanim. This is a degree of the view of the *Yechidah*, for it is a view of “oneness” with regards to how we view Kohanim. If we expand the view further, all of the Jewish people are one, for it is written, *“One nation in the earth.”* This is a more inclusive view of *Yechidah*, for it is including the entire Jewish people. If we expand this view even further, there is a way to view the entire Creation with this oneness, and in such a view, the *Yechidah* is even more inclusive.

Thus, the view of *Yechidah* is not defined as the combination of all details. It is rather to view all separate parts as being one unit. Again, we will repeat that the *Yechidah*’s view does not see separate parts as unified. That would be the view of the *Chayah*, which is a view that unifies together details.



The *Yechidah*'s view of oneness is like the original oneness between husband and wife, before the sin, of “*And they shall become one flesh.*”<sup>110</sup> In Adam's original state, he was not two separate parts that became one. Rather, man and woman were originally one. When a man and woman marry, the deeper perspective on this is not that they are two parts coming together (that would be the view of the *Chayah*) – rather, it is like the view of the *Yechidah*, in which they are both one unit.

It is the same with everything else we view. Whenever we look at different details, if we view them all as one, this is the root of the *Yechidah*'s view.

So, to reveal the *Yechidah*, one needs to learn how to see a unified perspective on things. The basic concept of it is to get used to seeing two separate parts as really being one, as opposed to merely seeing how two different parts are meant to become unified.

We already gave one example of this above, regarding marriage, in which the perspective should be “*And they shall become one flesh*” – that the husband and wife are one unit, not two separate parts coming together. One can extend this view to include all of the Jewish people, by viewing them all as one, and one can take it even further and view all of Creation as being one.

To see all of Creation as one is like what is written in the verse, “*And it will be that Hashem will be King over all the earth, and on that day it will be that Hashem is One and His Name is One.*” The words “*Hashem is One*” refers to *achdus peshutah* – the undivided unification of everything – and the words “*His Name is One*” refers to all of the creations, who were created entirely from the Names of Hashem. The words “*His Name is One*” are telling us that all of the creations are really one unit. When we have this view, we are revealing the view of the *Yechidah*.

In deeper words that make this concept clearer, a person must try as much as he can to see each thing in Creation on two levels: as a part that is separate from other parts in creation, and as something that needs to become unified with the greater whole of Creation, and, finally, as something that is part of the oneness of the entire Creation. First, one needs to see it as separate (*nifrad*), then he must connect it (*me'uchad*), and then he must see it as having always been one with the rest of creation (*echad*). One should keep viewing the same thing with these three different perspectives.

However, there are some things in which it is forbidden to see them as being unified with the rest of Creation, and the same is true vice versa – there are things in which it is forbidden to see them as disparate parts. For example, when we shake the Four Species on Succos, we may not individuate them. If one takes any of the four species without the other three, he does not fulfill the *mitzvah*. The *mitzvah* is to take all the four species together in one bundle. This is a *mitzvah* in which we are required to see all the parts as unified, where we may not individuate any of the parts.

We also find instances in which it is forbidden to connect together two different parts. An example of this is forbidden relationships, such as the Torah's prohibition of marrying relatives. When it comes to these relationships, the *avodah* of a person is to recognize the individuation of

parts. But in areas where it is not forbidden to so, there is a deep *avodah* of our soul to acquire a perspective of oneness towards Creation.

In the reality of our world we live in [when it comes to areas of keeping *halachah*], there are times where we need to adapt the “separated” mode, in which we recognize the individuation of the parts of Creation, and there are times in which we need to unify together details. But the deepest perspective, *echad*, where everything is seen as one, is not a perspective which we can practically live with and act upon. In other words, the perspective of *echad*/oneness cannot be applied to any of the *mitzvos* and *halachos* which we keep in our times.

The reason for this is clear and simple. The perspective of *echad* is the light of the future, but currently we are in exile. In the current state, where we are obligated in *mitzvos*, we do the *mitzvos* either in “separated” mode or in “unified” mode, but we cannot do the *mitzvos* with the perspective of *echad*/oneness, for *echad* is a light of the future, whereas the *mitzvos* are currently wrapped in a different “garment” that is not of the light of the future.

Thus, if we want to define how a person reveals the *Yechidah* level of the soul, it is by acquiring a perspective of oneness, to view everything in Creation as being all one unit. As we explained, this means that we should first get used to seeing each thing in front of us with three different perspectives: to see it as individuated (*nifrad*), then to see it as a part that is unified with all other parts in Creation (*me'uchad*), and then we can try to see it part of the oneness of Creation (*echad*).

The following example can help us relate more tangibly to the concept, so that we may be able to better implement this idea into our life. A person is blessed with a wife and children, *Baruch Hashem*. He has three children. How do we view this? If we go with the lower perspective, in which we see individuated parts, we see a father, mother, and three children. According to this perspective, which sees the individual parts, how many souls are present here? Five. If we take the higher view, in which we unify together details, we will view the husband and wife as one, for they are two parts that have merged into one, so we will see four souls in front of us (the husband/wife, and the three children).

If we take the highest view, which is oneness, we will see the entire family as one, for since they are all related to each other, they are really five souls bound together through oneness, and therefore, they are really five souls that are one. Within this higher view as well, we can take the oneness even further, for we can see all of the souls of the children as being included in their father's soul, so altogether, there is one soul in front of us!

The idea behind this is to take anything we can see and uncover three different perspectives towards it: to see the reality of separate parts, to see the reality in which there is a unification of parts, and to see the reality in which there is oneness. Through getting used to this perspective, the soul slowly receives the ability to view things in terms of oneness, which is the very revelation of the *Yechidah* level of the soul.

In deep terms, the entire secret of *hisbodedus* is this secret of oneness (*echad*). The very idea of *hisbodedus* implies that you should isolate yourself from everything and reveal the oneness that is in you. So the secret of *hisbodedus* is the secret of oneness. However, in the very beginning stages of *hisbodedus*, which is the external level of *hisbodedus*, you need to separate from everyone and everything around you, and in that elementary level, you are only “alone” in the sense of being separated from all others (*nifrad*). But this is all a tool that is meant to be used to reveal the more inner perspective within you, which is called “*echad*” – oneness.

## 6. Revealing “Echad” - Oneness

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In the beginning of this *sefer* we explained that there are three stages of *hisbodedus* [Jewish meditation], also called *hisbonenus* (reflection): finding one’s self, finding one’s bond with the Creator, and finding the Creator. These are all parts to *hisbodedus*. In deeper words: they are all stages that are needed for one to find the state of *echad*, “oneness”.

The preliminary stage of finding “*echad*” is when one is alone with himself, for the sake of simply discovering himself. After that, the *avodah* is for one to be in a state where he is “*echad*” (one) with the Creator, which is also a way of feeling oneness. Finally, there is an *avodah* for one to feel “*echad*” on its most absolute level, which is when one just finds the Creator alone [with no sense of self].

These three stages, however, are all ways to find one’s *Yechidah*, which is called “*echad*” (the state of “oneness”). They are all essentially three stages of how to get to “*echad*”.

On the simpler level of *hisbodedus*, a person finds the state of “*echad*” by reflecting on how all of Creation is one unit. This is the first stage, in which one finds “himself” as being part of the collective whole. It is still the external layer of “*echad*” and not yet the inner stage. However, although it is external, it is still necessary, because it is the tool one needs in order to bring himself into the absolute stage of “*echad*”.

There is also a danger contained here in this stage. When one is alone in a forest or in any secluded place that is away from people, he will come to feel only himself alone, and then he might become too focused on his ego. Now that he is away from people, he will only feel *himself* as existing - which is the ego.

There are indeed many people who have become total egoists because of practicing *hisbodedus*! Such a person has one hour of the day to think only about himself, so he uses that time to become solely immersed in his own existence. This is disgracing the level of the *Yechidah*, for the person is taking the most Heavenly light possible, which is “*echad*”, and using it to become immersed solely in himself.

The person will become immersed in himself: “What happened to me today? What do I need to do? How can I *daven* for what I need...?” We have a word for this, and it is called: self-absorption! (Of course, in order to for a person to avoid feeling totally egoistical about himself, he might throw

in a *tefillah* for *Klal Yisrael* at the end of the *hisbodedus*, this way he feels like he has done his obligation towards the greater whole of *Klal Yisrael*. But the fact of the matter is that he's still wrapped up in himself most of the time.)

A person must learn how to leave his own private existence, secluding himself from others in order to find the state of "*echad*" (oneness) in order to reveal how "Hashem's Name is one" – that all creations are really one unit. This is the true, inner kind of *hisbodedus*.

Thus, grasping reality through the *Yechidah* is for one to reveal the state of the true "alone", of "*echad*", oneness. The external part to being alone, physical seclusion, is just a means to get to the greater end, which is for a person to reach his own state of "*echad*", oneness. From there, a person can go further, and realize that all of Creation is really "*echad*".

May Hashem give all of us the ability to reveal the inner point within us, and to connect it to the Creator – and to discover the reality of His Endlessness, completely.

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## *14 / Bonding With The Creator Through Thought*

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### Introduction: Bonding With The Creator Through Thought – In All Five Layers of the Soul

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We have so far discussed the first step in *hisbodedus*: revealing the five parts of the soul [via our faculty of thought]. Now we shall continue, with the help of Hashem, to the second step in *hisbodedus*, via the faculty of thought: bonding with the Creator.

As in the previous chapters, we explained the stages throughout the five parts of our soul - our *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*. These five levels are present throughout all stages of our *avodah* (spiritual task). Let us now explain what our inner work is in these five levels of the soul, in relation to our power of thought, when it comes to the stage in *hisbodedus* of bonding with the Creator.

### I. Bonding With The Creator Through Thought - In The “Nefesh” Level of the Soul

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We have explained that the “*Nefesh*” level is our actual grasp of reality. With regards to our bond with the Creator, this will mean that we simply become aware of the reality of our bond with the Creator. As the Rambam states in the beginning of *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, we are all found within the truth of His existence.

The bond between man and the Creator is based upon an actual grasp of reality: the very fact that we are found within the truth of His existence; the fact that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* everything. Our bond with the Creator stems from the fact that our very reality is part of the Creator's. Thus, the “*Nefesh*” level of bonding with the Creator [in our power of thought] is when one thinks of the bond between him and the Creator. Our very bond with the Creator is defined by this fact that we are found within His reality.

Maybe a person will ask: “Perhaps that was only true when man was first created by Hashem, but now, a man is found within his own independent reality.” But we know from the words of our Sages, as is explained in *sefarim hakedoshim*, that “He renews in His goodness every day constantly the act of Creation.” The reality of the entire Creation in general, as well as the reality of man specifically, is being renewed every moment. When Hashem constantly “fashions light and creates darkness”, He is renewing man with this – every moment.

Therefore, our bond with the Creator is based on the fact that our existence is powered by the Creator; the fact that we are found within the truth of His reality is our constant bond with the

Creator, every moment. When one recognizes this, he bonds with the Creator [in his thoughts] through the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul.

## 2. Bonding With The Creator Through Thought – In The “Ruach” Level of the Soul

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The “*Ruach*” level of the soul, when it comes to bonding with the Creator [through the power of thought], divides into two categories.

### **2a) “Ruach” - Belief In Divine Providence**

We defined the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul as the grasp of reality that is based on our faith that we are the creations of Hashem. The “*Ruach*” level of the soul is when we believe that the Creator is also conducting all of the Creations. It is to believe in Divine Providence – the fact that Hashem runs the world both in the collective sense, as well as in the individual sense. The *sefarim hakedoshim* have gone to great lengths in explaining this concept, that we have the *emunah* that Hashem oversees all of the Creation, as well as each individual person, without exception.

When one thinks of this – the fact that all of Creation as a whole, as well as each person individually, is being watched by Hashem – this is also a kind of bond with Him.

### **2b) “Ruach” - The World of Emotion**

A considerable amount of our classical *sefarim*, especially the *sefarim* of *Chassidus* (specifically, the *Chassidic* teachings in Poland), deal with the role of emotions in the bond between man and the Creator.

There are two general roots of the emotions: The line of *ahavah*, love, and the line of *yirah*, awe. When we go further into the roots, there are seven primary emotions: *ahavah* (love), *yirah* (fear), *hispaarus* (pride), *nitzuach* (victory), *hodayah* (gratitude), *hiskashrus* (connection), and *shiflus* (lowliness). The emotions play a part in man’s bond with the Creator: man’s love for the Creator, man’s fear of the Creator, etc.

Understandably, there are levels within love and fear. Within love, there can be conditional love and unconditional love. Within fear, there is fear of punishment, awe of G-d, fear of sin, and self-nullification. This *sefer* is not the place to discuss all of the details of all the branching emotions that stem from either *ahavah* and *yirah*. But what we need to know regarding the current stage we are discussing, which refers to the *middos* and the emotions which are expressed in man’s bond with the Creator, it refers to bonding to the Creator through love, or through fear, or through any of the other emotions of the soul.

Thus, the “*Ruach*” level in bonding with the Creator is when one connects to Him from these natural emotions of the soul.

### 3. Bonding With The Creator Through Thought – In The “*Neshamah*” Level of the Soul

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The bond between man and the Creator, in the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul, also divides into two categories.

#### **3a) “*Neshamah*” - My Existence Is A Revelation of The Glory of Hashem**

Hashem created the world and He is leading it, which reveals His glory (*kavod*) in the Creation. When one reflects and he sees how his existence reveals the glory of Hashem and how he is a part of this glory, this is a bond with the Creator through the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul.

This does not simply mean to recognize simply what “glory of Hashem” is – that is a separate reflection to make. It is rather the recognition that my very existence has a part in the glory of Hashem that is revealed on this world. This is how man bonds with the Creator through the [power of thought in his] *Neshamah* level of the soul.

#### **3b) “*Neshamah*” - Resembling Hashem’s Thoughts In Our Own Thoughts**

An additional path of connecting oneself to the Creator through the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul is when one has the understanding that his own thoughts are part of the [Creator’s] world of thought. In the teachings of *Chassidus*, this is explained in terms of how man must be aware that his own thoughts really have their source in a higher world of thought. Meaning, part of this “higher world of thought” is accessed by his own mind.

Let us explain this. Naturally, whenever a person thinks a thought, it appears to him that his thoughts are his own. When he is thinking of going someplace, he thinks, “I am thinking of how to go someplace”, and when he thinks of setting out on a journey, he is thinking, “I am thinking of setting out on a journey”, and so forth. He identifies his thinking as a part of his “I”. But the truth is that all of our inner abilities are part of a greater whole. There are individuals within Creation, which includes all of us individually, and there is also our collective whole – the Jewish nation. After that, the collective whole expands to include all of the creations as well.

Our bond with the Creator [through our power of thought which corresponds to the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul] is contained in the concept of “*B’tzalmeinu, K’demuseinu*” – “In our image, and in our likeness.”<sup>111</sup> Every one of us has a *tzelem* (image) and a *demus* (likeness) – each person on his own level (depending on how much one has protected himself from losing his “*tzelem elokim*” (his trait of “resemblance to G-d”, so to speak) which leaves a person through sin). The *tzelem* (Heavenly

“image”) and the *demus* (Heavenly “likeness”) that is present in each person is a resemblance to the *tzelem* and *demus* above. Thus, each person is like a “shadow” of this *tzelem* and *demus* above.

The purpose of Creation is that the very design of this Creation should become a tool that connects man to the higher root of his existence. If man’s *demus*/“likeness” of Heaven would not be similar to the *demus*/“likeness” that is above, his bond with the Creator would be deficient. Since the will of the Creator is that the creations on this lower realm should become connected with the Heavenly – all the way up until the point of the Infinite (which has no *demus*/likeness, but which can be reached through the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, and *Chayah* levels of the soul) – the Creator has therefore designed a human being with a resemblance of Above. Since the lower worlds (and the lower levels of the soul) bear some resemblance to Above, man has a way to connecting his lower dimension to his higher dimension.

The Sages taught us that the work of man is to become attached to the Creator, to be “*domeh lo*” – to become “similar to Him.” Through becoming “similar” to Hashem, you can come to have *d’veykus* (attachment) with Him. This inner point, of “becoming similar to Above”, is a view from our lower dimension which can extend all the way until the highest point of the upper dimension. Meaning, from our own lower perception, from our own design which is a resemblance of the heavenly dimension – for we are created *b’tzelem elokim*, in G-d’s image – we can bond with the Creator.

Going further, we can also apply this to our character traits and understand that we need to get our character traits to resemble the traits of Hashem, so to speak. “Just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate. Just as He is graceful, so should You be graceful.”

Our speech as well is a resemblance of the speech of Above, for in the language of *Chassidus*, our speech emanates from the “world of speech” Above. Therefore, our speech is not our own, and that is why we must guard our tongue from forbidden speech. (This is the depth behind the prohibition not to speak *lashon hora*.) Hashem created the world with ten expressions, and for each day of Creation, Hashem said, “It was good”, so if a person wants to connect himself with the ten expressions, he must make sure that his speech is proper, so that he can connect to this “good”.

When it comes to our area of thought as well, we also have the inner task of getting our thoughts to resemble the thoughts of Hashem, so to speak. This is the subject of the current stage we are explaining.

### **“Resembling Hashem” Through the “Nefesh”, “Ruach”, and “Neshamah” levels of the soul:**

We have so far defined that our bond with the Creator through the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul is to recognize the simple reality that we, His creations, are a part of His reality, and our bond with the Creator through the “*Ruach*” level of the soul is through the feelings of love and fear of the Creator. In the current stage we are discussing – man’s bond with the Creator through the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul – the definition is, that one must get his thoughts to resemble the thoughts of his Creator, so to speak.



Firstly we should understand that the *avodah* to “resemble Hashem” adds an additional depth to the *Nefesh* and *Ruach* levels of bonding with the Creator. Meaning, not only is there a Creator and we are His creations, and not only must we love and fear the Creator, but there is also a task to “be similar to Him”, and there is way to do this through each of the layers in the soul, as will be explained.

***Nefesh*** - Our *avodah* to resemble Hashem in our “*Nefesh*” level of the soul is that since we are His creations, He created us “in His image.” Therefore, our very makeup is already a resemblance of Him.

***Ruach*** - In the “*Ruach*” level of the soul, which corresponds to the feelings of the soul that include *ahavah*, *yirah*, *hispaarus*, etc. – this is not simply to be defined as a bond to the Creator because “I love the Creator” or “I fear the Creator”, but the definition is rather that I am a resemblance of Above, through these character traits.

Just as He loves me, so can I love Him, and just as He “fears” for His children (as is explained in the *sefarim* of *Chassidus*, that Hashem “fears” for his children that they should not sin, so that they will not become distanced from Him. He has given free will to man, which enables man to act against His will, and Hashem fears that the person will choose evil), so can I fear Him. And just as Hashem is “proud” of His children (“*Yisrael, in you I am glorified*”<sup>112</sup>), so do we take “pride” in Hashem.

Thus, our bond with the Creator is not only in the external sense of recognizing that we are His creations and recognizing our spiritual feelings towards Him, but more so, to recognize that our inner makeup is a resemblance of Him. When I love and fear the Creator, my bond with the Creator is not the actual bond. Rather, our traits a reflection of the Creator’s – as in the verse, “*Just as water reflects a face to a face, so does the heart of man to man*”<sup>113</sup>. Our own fear and love of the Creator is a “reflection”, so to speak, of the Creator’s love and fear for us, and it is the same with all the other character traits.

***Neshamah*** - Bonding with the Creator through the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul is, firstly, as we explained earlier, to recognize that our existence is a part in revealing Hashem’s glory onto the world. But there is a deeper aspect as well: bonding with Hashem through our thoughts. Man has the *avodah* to align his thoughts with the thoughts of his Creator. This is, in essence, the entire secret depth that is behind **studying the holy Torah**.

### ***[Sevara Yeshara (Upright Thinking) – Developing A Torah-Thinking Mind]***

There is a well-known letter which Rav Chaim of Volozhin wrote to his grandson: “The *Rishonim* (the Talmudic scholars of the 10<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) are praised entirely due to their ***sevara yeshara***, upright thinking.” (Understandably, they also possessed great depth to their hearts, but here we will focus on their mental precision, which is what we are currently discussing.)

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<sup>112</sup> *Yeshayahu* 49:3

<sup>113</sup> *Mishlei* 27:19

Certainly, the simple meaning of this is true, that upright thinking is a good thing and crooked thinking is not good. But there is a far deeper point contained here, which we shall explain. There is a term we often quote, which is called “*Daas Torah*” (the view of Torah). It is said of Hashem, “He and His wisdom are one”, as the Rambam and many others have said. The task of man, in studying Torah, is essentially to align his own mind with the “G-dly way of thinking”.

Shlomo HaMelech said, “*G-d made man upright, and they seek many calculations.*”<sup>114</sup> What is wrong when people seek these “many calculations” (*cheshbonos rabim*)? There is much to say about this matter, but for the purposes of our discussion, it means when a person becomes distanced from *yashrus* (uprightness) and instead he involves himself with the *cheshbonos rabim* (“many calculations”) and his thoughts do not resemble the thoughts of the Creator, so to speak.

The thoughts of Hashem are *yoshev*, they are upright, and that is why the Jewish people are called *Yisrael*, from the words *Yashar Kel* (an upright G-d), for that is how the Creator has made them to be: “G-d made man upright”. But when their thoughts deviate from this original upright way of thinking that man is created with, and instead they seek “many calculations”, their thoughts do not resemble the thoughts of the Creator, and then their bond with Him is lacking. For the entire bond of man with his Creator is based on resembling Him – to resemble Him in how we act, in our character, and in our thinking.

Man can work to improve himself and cause his actions, character, and thoughts to resemble that of the Creator. The more a person nullifies his own thinking to *daas Torah* – to the Torah’s thinking – the more the light of the holy Torah becomes revealed to him. The Sages praise those who are “naked in their knowledge, and placing themselves like animals”<sup>115</sup> in order to submit their minds to the thinking of the Torah. The more one submits his thinking to the Creator’s thinking, the more he joins with the Creator, for “He and His wisdom are one.” The thoughts of a person then become *sevara yesharah*, upright thinking, and then the thoughts of a person resemble the Creator’s thoughts, so to speak.

As long as a person does not straighten out his thinking to become more aligned with the Torah’s thinking, it is said of him that “The thinking of laymen is the antithesis to the thinking of Torah”<sup>116</sup>, for the person’s mind is distant from the G-dly way of thinking.

## Acquiring The Ability of Upright Thinking

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Based upon the above, we can now understand the depth of our *mitzvah* to study the holy Torah. There is certainly more depth to this matter than what we are explaining here, but we will deal here with how it applies on our own level, and for the purposes of this particular discussion.

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<sup>114</sup> *Kohel* 7:21

<sup>115</sup> *Chullin* 5b

<sup>116</sup> *Sma: Choshen Mishpat* 3:13

In essence, the task of man is to acquire an ability of upright thinking (*sevara yeshara*), which means to learn how to see things from the perspective of the Creator, so to speak.

How do we acquire such thinking? Understandably, there are many steps involved. The simplest and most basic step in order to acquire this ability is through sitting and learning Torah. The more a person learns Torah, his mind slowly becomes aligned with the Creator's thoughts. This, however, is only the basic step.

The more inner level is that a person must learn how to avoid "mental bribery", to be wary of anything in his thinking that is causing him to think a certain way. Just as the Torah forbids a judge from taking a monetary bribe, because the bribe will sway his mind and corrupt his thinking, so must a person avoid "bribery" in his mind, which will sway his ability of upright thinking. The mental bribery which sways the mind is whenever a person has various personal motivations that are influencing his mind to think in a certain way and form certain conclusions, to his own benefit. One must learn how to erase these self-serving motivations.

Let's explain what we mean. You can have a person who is a Rav or a *posek*, and he receives a *halachic* query, and before he has even begun to think, he may already be affected by various self-serving motivations (called *negios*) which he may not even be consciously aware of. He will reach a certain conclusion, because he really *wanted* to conclude that way, even before he had begun to think about it.

In the Torah, there are 49 ways to declare something pure, and 49 ways to declare it impure. Only when a person begins his thinking from a pure place can he reach a truthful conclusion; if one feels an affinity towards a certain option which makes it pure, he will find 49 ways to declare it as pure, or vice versa - if he feels an affinity to somehow make it impure, he will find 49 ways to declare it impure.

The same question can be sent to many different rabbis, worded in the same exact way, and if they disagree on the matter, each of them can find proofs to their words, beginning from the words of the Sages of the *Mishnah* down to the *Gemara*, the *Geonim*, the *Rishonim*, and the *Acharonim*, each with a lengthy response explaining their opinion. What, indeed, is the true understanding of a matter, if there are proofs that each opinion is correct? The *Gemara* says that Rabbi Meir had 150 reasons to declare a *sheretz* as ritually pure.<sup>117</sup> This means that he had all the proof to declare it pure, and if he would have had any personal motivations to declare it pure, he could have found all of these reasons to do so, even if the *halachah* was contradictory to his opinion.

Therefore, in order for a person to arrive at an inner, upright way of thinking, one must be prepared to accept the truth, even if it contradicts his way of thinking. Deep in a person's soul, a person has certain opinions, beliefs and ways of thinking, when it comes to something he learns about in the Torah or when it comes to how he lives life. He must be prepared to submit his thinking, however, to the truth.

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<sup>117</sup> *Eruvin 13b*

Each person needs to make this internal examination: “Am I ready to turn around my whole life, in one day, if I must?” A person is living in a certain community, amongst a certain sect of Jewry, and he thinks that his way of living is the truthful one. But every person must ask himself: “Would I be prepared to change over my entire way of living, in one moment, if I found out that the truth was elsewhere....?”

Of course, it is very possible that his way of living is indeed truthful, and that he does not have to switch his path for another one. The issue is if he finds out that there is a different way of living which is more truthful than the one he is currently living. What would he do? Is he prepared to leave it all behind, and live in the place which is more truthful? Practically speaking, it may take some time until he can sell his house and move everything to the new place. But the issue is: Is he ready to make a decision in his soul, to be prepared to leave behind everything and move to a new place that’s more truthful?

If the answer is “No”, that means that he does not either submit to a more truthful way of thinking in his Torah learning. When he has certain ways of thinking which he will never budge from, he cannot arrive at the truth.

But if a person is prepared at any moment to accept that his thinking may be wrong, and he is ready to go along with the truth, and whatever that entails – for example, if he has already gone through four massive changes in his life which brought a total overhaul in his way of living, and he is now prepared for a fifth massive change to his life, if it is the truth – such a person’s Torah learning stems from truth, for he is searching for the uprightness (*yashrus*) that is in the Torah.

Today there are much *chiddushei Torah*. Anyone with a discerning eye can tell if the person writing the *chiddushim* is really trying to get to the truth, or if he is just trying to come up with any answer. One kind of person writes *chiddushei Torah* because he is searching for truth, whereas another kind of person will write *chiddushei Torah* simply because he wants to be an author of *chiddushim*. There is a vast difference between these two kinds of *chiddushim*.

The ability in man of *seichel hayashar*, an upright intellect, is essentially an ability to see the true *yashrus* (uprightness) in each thing – the *yashrus* that is in the Torah, a view of *yashrus* towards the Jewish people, towards the rest of the nations, and towards the entirety of Creation. The more a person’s thoughts become *yashar*/upright, to that level, he is more attached with the Creator, for the Creator is, so to speak, *yashar*. The more we turn away from *cheshbonos rabim* and instead get our thinking to resemble the *yashrus* of the Creator, we are able to attach ourselves more with the Creator.

There was a story with Reb Chaim of Brisk, that one of his students was sitting with him and writing down his teacher’s Torah *chiddushim*. Reb Chaim would dictate to him what to write, and the student would write down each exact word. They sat for hours together, forming piles of written notes. At a certain point (this is how the story is told, though it is not clear if this is exactly what happened), the Rav requested to his student that he tear up the papers. (I do not know if, from a

*halachic perspective*, this was permitted to do or not, even if the Torah *chiddushim* weren't truthful. Leaving aside the questions about the details of this story, though, let's consider the lesson here.)

The student, who had sat with Reb Chaim for such a long time writing down the *chiddushim*, begged the Rav to reconsider, for he had spent so much time and hard work on it. Reb Chaim's response was: "When words of Torah are not truthful, they are not needed."

Let us consider for a moment something about this story. Reb Chaim had exerted his mind greatly in developing these Torah *chiddushim*, and the student had worked so hard to write them down. Certainly, when Reb Chaim was dictating his words of Torah, they seemed to be truthful to him. After several hours had passed, suddenly Reb Chaim realized that there was a mistake about something, or a certain point that contradicted his words, or a certain logical reasoning that undermined everything. In one moment, he erased it all! The student, though, who had spent so much time writing them down, found it difficult to part with them. He found it too difficult to part with his hard work, rather than submit to the truth.

There is a saying that "In Brisk, they learn how to erase." In other words, it is a style of learning in which one aims to root out any points that aren't totally truthful, even if they are already written down. It should not only be this way when it comes to Torah learning. Rather, it should also be applied to our own beliefs and ways of thinking.

The reality is that if a person was raised and educated with certain beliefs, he generally remains with those ways of thinking until he dies (unless he went through anything extreme in life that caused him to majorly overturn his thinking). In contrast to this, a truthful kind of person inspects his own beliefs and opinions every day, filtering and refining and clarifying them, seeing if there is anything untrue within his beliefs which should be removed, and the parts are true that can remain.

This is really a task which spans all of our lifetime: to learn how to become *yoshev* (upright). Learning how to become *yoshev* is to learn how to look at each matter through a lens of *yashrus*.

This does not mean to become judging of others, and to view a person who profanes the Shabbos as a wicked individual. This is not *yashrus* - and in fact, it is a superficial perspective.

(*Yashrus* stems from a deep point in the soul which is capable of seeing even the most wayward Jew as a complete *tzaddik* (for there is a very deep place in every Jew's soul which is completely righteous and pure of sin), and on a more external level, to see the wayward Jew as a "captured child" [*tinok shenishbah*, who is not to be blamed for his sins, due to his careless upbringing]. Even if it is a Jew who sins with the intention of angering Hashem, it is only his external layer which is evil. In his inner layer, he is a *tzaddik*. This is an example of viewing another person from a perspective of *yashrus*.)

The view of *yashrus* is a view which takes everything into account. It sees a matter in its entirety, with no leanings towards any particular detail and with no personal motivations to arrive at a certain conclusion.

For example, when seeing a person who commits negative deeds, instead of imagining him to be a “bad person”, a person can view him from a perspective of *yashrus* and see that the person is very complex, with good parts and bad parts to him. He can see the totality of the person, and he does not become transfixed on one particular aspect of the person which would either make him completely good or completely bad. Rather, he sees the external layers of the person, the parts that are on the surface, as well as the more inner parts of the person, all the way to the innermost point.

This is one of the tasks which spans all of our life: to acquire for ourselves more *yashrus*, more *yashrus*, and more *yashrus*, both when it comes to our Torah learning and when it comes to how we live all of our life. A person may be capable of learning Torah, but when he goes outside and he takes a look at the world around him, his view may be totally mistaken. Why? Because he still hasn't yet acquired the inner *yashrus* of thinking that is in the Torah. While it is true that he's learning Torah, that does not mean he has acquired the upright perspective which can be gained from it. If he would acquire it, he would view others from a perspective of *yashrus* as well, no less than how he approaches a subject in his Torah learning with *yashrus*.

Generally, there aren't many who think that much. The “thinkers” of today are usually people who form new opinions, who challenge the traditionally accepted ways of thinking. There are few people in this generation who are constantly refining their thinking process in a way that is *yashrus*. This is usually more common when people are young and idealistic, because the older that one becomes, the more he finds it harder to let go of his old opinions that he is so used to, and it becomes impossible to change his thinking patterns.

You can meet a 40-year old or 50-year old and try to explain something to him, and he is basically telling you, “Don't even try. I've already made up my mind about this.” Clearly, this means that the person is not truthful, because a truthful person doesn't stop clarifying his thinking until the day he dies. For Creation is so deep, layer within layer, and there is always more truth that can be uncovered.

One must search for truth and for *yashrus*/uprightness not because he should seek Torah *chiddushim*, and not because he should seek additional depth, but because he should always seek to straighten out his own thinking, to keep sharpening it, more and more. As explained earlier, the more a person's mind becomes *yoshev*, the more he becomes attached to the Creator, Who is (so to speak) *yoshev*.

We have been lengthy here in explaining this matter, because this is really a perspective about life: to keep developing more and more inner *yashrus*/uprightness in our thoughts [to match our thinking with the Torah's thinking].

## [Yashrus Brings Ruach HaKodesh]

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This *yashrus* that is being described is an ability that brings a person to *ruach hakodesh* (lit. the “holy spirit” – an enlightened level of thought), as explained in the *sefarim hakedoshim*. Whenever a person receives an enlightening thought from the Creator, this is a degree of *ruach hakodesh* in one’s thoughts, which we touched upon earlier.

The reason why *yashrus* brings about *ruach hakodesh* in the thoughts is, that when the thoughts of a person are beginning to resemble the thoughts of the Creator, they become aligned with the Creator’s thoughts and therefore they can receive spiritual illumination from them, which is *ruach hakodesh*. In contrast, when the thoughts of a person are dissimilar to the Creator’s, the spiritual illumination is greatly minimized, so the thoughts of a person do not become enlightened. Thus, the more a person attains *yashrus* in his thoughts, the more he is able to merit *ruach hakodesh*.

(Unless he attributes the *yashrus* to himself. If a person does not attribute the *yashrus* to its source, he cannot truly attain *yashrus* in his thoughts, because his thinking would already be crooked from the start.)

In summation, the more a person aligns his thinking with the thinking of the Torah, and the more he attributes this *yashrus* to its Source and not to his own thinking, to that degree, he opens a spiritual pipeline to the Source, so that his thoughts can become enlightened from their Source.

## 4. Bonding With The Creator Through The “Chayah” Level of the Soul

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The next step is to bond with Hashem through the “*Chayah*” level of the soul.

To give an introduction to this stage, we need to know that there are many ways to serve Hashem. Generally, there are four schools of thought when it comes to how a person should go about *avodas Hashem*, serving the Creator:

- 1) The first way is ***mussar* (self-discipline)**. *Mussar* focuses on recognizing one’s strengths and weaknesses as a way to know oneself and be able to serve Hashem by working on oneself.
- 2) A second way is the ***Chassidus of Poland***. *Chassidus* focuses on one’s relationship with Hashem through the feelings, such as through love and fear of Hashem.
- 3) The third way is the thinking of ***Chabad Chassidus***. The *sefarim* of *Chabad* deal with the concept of *bittul* – nullifying oneself completely to the Creator.
- 4) The fourth way is ***temimus* (simplicity)**.<sup>118</sup>

When we discussed the power of thought in the *Nefesh* and *Ruach* levels of the soul, we explained that this refers to simple awareness of reality (*Nefesh*) and of one’s character traits and emotions (*Ruach*). This is, in essence, referring to the school of thought of *mussar*. And when we discussed the

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<sup>118</sup> Editor’s Note: The way of “*temimus*” is not discussed in this chapter. For more on *temimus*, see *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh Vol. IV, Chapters 09-011 and Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh Vol. IX*.

stage of bonding with the Creator through the emotions, this is in line with the teachings of Poland *Chassidus* – to develop a bond with the Creator through one’s natural emotions.

The current stage we are discussing, which is about developing the power of thought - for the purpose of developing our power of thought, and not in relation to developing the emotions – corresponds to the school of thought of *Chabad Chassidus*. We will try to explain this way of thinking, in these brief words.

The word “*Chabad*” is an acronym for *Chochmah* (wisdom), *Binah* (contemplation), and *Daas* [lit. “knowledge” or “understanding”, but more accurately known as “awareness”]. It is a school of thought that is based on using the power to mentally reflect (*hisbonenus*).

All other ways of thinking include mental reflection as well, but they are not based particularly on this power. The other ways of *avodah* certainly involve mental reflection, but only for the purpose of simply knowing what to do, for if there is no reflection, a person will not know what to do. By contrast, the teachings of *Chabad Chassidus* are based on the power of mental reflection: to use the abilities of *chochmah* (“wisdom” - the initial, simpler level of thinking) and *binah* (“contemplation” – in-depth thinking) and then *daas*, to fixate one’s thoughts on something.

What should a person fixate his thoughts on? Generally, there are two parts to this matter, which we will now explain.

#### 4a) Self-Nullification In The Sense That I Am Sustained Entirely By Hashem

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The first part of it is for a person to reflect on the fact that Hashem is the Source of all life, and that all of Creation in general, as well as each Creation individually (including my own vitality), is empowered from Hashem. Therefore, my entire existence depends on the higher Source of my energy, every moment. It is to know that **my entire vitality is enabled by Hashem, in His will. If He would not will it, I cannot continue to exist.**

This is the bond to the Creator through the “*Chayah*” level of the soul: in the sense of knowing the source of my *chiyus* (vitality). We will explain what this means.

In the stage lower than this, a person understands that there is a Creator and there are the creations, and the Creator watches over each individual in His Divine Providence. In this level, I acknowledge my “I” as an existing factor – I exist from Hashem sustaining me, I am watched by Him, etc. But in the current stage we are discussing, one reveals greater depth to this matter. Not only must a person recognize that the source of his vitality comes from Hashem, but he must understand that **if there is even one moment where Hashem does not give me my *chiyus*, I will become nullified, because I will stop existing. Therefore, my very existence right now is nullified to the Creator.**



It was explained previously that the “*Chayah*” level of the soul is parallel to *chochmah* (wisdom), which is an acronym for the words “*koach mah*”: “What is our energy [worth]?” This is the secret known as *bittul*, self-nullification, which is described in the verse, “*V’nachnu mah*” (“And we, what are we?”)

It means that not only are our movements nullified to the Creator (as we explained earlier), but that my very existence is nullified to the Creator - because if He were to stop sustaining me *chas v’shalom*, I would cease to exist. If the Creator would remove my *chiyus* from me, not only would I stop moving (and be like the dead, who do not move) – I would cease to exist. (Even a dead person is existing, and it is just that he is not moving. Even the dead have some minimal spark of vitality that remains in them, and if not for this bare level of vitality, they would stop existing entirely).

Thus, the *avodah* of a person, when bonding to the Creator [through the power of the thought] in the *Chayah* level of the soul, is to recognize that “My existence is enabled by Hashem, and I am dependent on Him – therefore, I do not exist on my own.” Not only are my movements enabled by Hashem, but my very existence depends on the vitality that He continues to send to me every moment.

With this understanding, one’s bond with the Creator becomes much deeper. For if I believe that I can exist on my own without Him, and it is just that I cannot move without Him enabling me to do so, then my bond with Him would not be coming from my very existence. I would have the belief that deep down, I exist on my own somehow, so I am not necessarily nullified in my whole being to Him. With this perspective, my “I” will divide me from the Creator – as in the verse, “*I stand between Hashem and between you.*”

But if I have the understanding that my very vitality in life is dependent on the Creator, and that if the Creator would stop sustaining me, I cannot exist – then my very “I” is not here. In that way, I nullify my sense of existence. This is the implication of “*V’nachnu Mah*” (“And we, what are we?”) and “*koach mah*” (What is [our] energy [worth]?), the personification of *bittul* (the nullification of one’s sense of self), which in turn enables one’s existence to become more unified with the Creator’s.

This is one way of bonding with the Creator in “*Chayah*” level of the soul – by way of the “*chochmah*” that corresponds to the “*Chayah*” level of the soul.

#### 4b) Self-Nullification – In The Sense That Hashem Is So Vast And I Am So Small

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A second way of bonding with the Creator, which is greatly mentioned in the *sefarim* of *Chabad*, and which is also using the “*Chayah*” level in the soul, is for a person to reflect into the greatness of the Creator, in contrast to the smallness of my “I”.

It can be compared to the *halachah* of *bittul b’rov*, “nullified by the majority”, or the other kinds of *bittul*, which include “nullified by a sixtieth”, “nullified by a hundredth”, or “nullified by a two-

hundredth”, where a miniscule amount is considered nullified by the majority amount that is in the mixture. This can be applied in the inner sense, when it comes to our relationship with the Creator. The Creator is infinite, and the creations are limited – therefore, all of the creations are nullified to Him, for He is the majority, while His creations are the minority, who are “nullified to the majority.”

(Understandably, a created being is nullified to the Creator in a much greater sense of nullification than how a minor amount is “nullified by the majority” - much more than being nullified by a sixtieth, a hundredth, or two-hundredth. The Creator’s vastness cannot be measured, and there is no comparison between a limited being with the infinite.)

This kind of reflection includes two parts. On one hand, a person should reflect on the fact that **the Creator is, essentially, everything.** He “*Rav v’Shalit al kula*”, “Leads and Rules over all.” It is when one understands that Hashem rules over everything, through His way of conducting the universe, His attributes, His wisdom, and all other qualities attributed to the Creator, Who Is Infinite. Along with this reflection, a person should also think how small he is, in comparison to the vastness of the Creator. He can then feel, as described in terms of *Chabad Chassidus*, the feeling of “I do not exist”.

Earlier, we spoke of a different perspective, in which one realizes that his vitality is dependent on what he receives from Hashem, thus he comes to feel that he has no sense of an existing self. This is one kind of self-nullification. Here we are explaining a second kind of self-nullification, where the emphasis is not on the Source of my vitality, but on the smallness of a human being when compared to the Infinite, which is another way of losing the sense of an existing self.

When one reflects on how “I am so small, compared to the vastness of the Creator”, he can come to feel as if he does not exist, like a grain of sand in comparison to the rest of the universe. When one measures his own existence in comparison with the existence of the Infinite, he can feel that his existence melts away into the vastness of the Infinite - the truthfulness of the Presence of the Creator. This kind of reflection produces in a person the feeling of “*koach mah*”, of the uselessness of our own power, which is the self-nullification achieved through the perception of the “*Chayah*” level in the soul.

This is a deeper level of *bittul* than before, because in this perspective, a person doesn’t feel a sense of self at all, even while being aware that he is receiving his vitality from the Creator. In the first level of *bittul* described, where a person is aware that his vitality depends on Hashem, he acknowledges his own existence, but he is aware that he depends on the Creator for survival. But in this perspective of *bittul* we are describing here, where a person reflects on his own smallness, in contrast with the vastness of the Creator, **he does not even feel his own existence. He has no sense of self at all.** It is not simply to be understood that if his vitality would be cut off from its Source, he would cease existing. Rather, **even as he exists right now, he can reach an understanding where he does not feel any sense of self at all.**

(There is also a different angle of understanding, in which acknowledging that my vitality is dependent on the Creator is actually a greater level of *bittul*, than acknowledging my smallness in contrast with the Creator's vastness. But here we have explained the more general approach).

Thus, the *avodah* of a person in the “*Chayah*” level of the soul is essentially to bring oneself to the point where his bond with the Creator is based upon self-nullification.

Earlier, we explained the levels of *Nefesh*, *Ruach* and *Neshamah* in bonding with the Creator. In these levels of the soul, a person acknowledges his own existence. But in the *Chayah* level of the soul, a person bonds with the Creator precisely when there is no sense of an existing self.

It is the understanding that I am nullified to the Creator, and therefore, I have no existence of my own. This is either because I understand that Hashem can take away my vitality at any given moment, or because I see how miniscule I am in comparison to the vastness of the Infinite. Either way, though, the basis of this perspective is that my bond with the Creator is through negating my sense of existence. When I am not sensing my existing self, I am nullified to the Creator; I am integrated with Him - and that is the bond.

## Self-Nullification Leads To Feelings of the Soul For The Creator.

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The “*Chayah*” level of bonding with the Creator produces two factors – a more external layer, as well as a more inner layer, of change.

The external change it produces is that it leads a person towards love and fear of the Creator. But these are the not the same feelings of love and fear as in the “*Ruach*” level of the soul we discussed earlier, which are the actual root feelings of love and fear. Rather, in the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, the feelings of love and fear are a result of self-nullification.

The more inner layer of change which it produces, which is deeper, is where a person reaches a state of self-nullification that is higher than the feelings of the love and the fear towards the Creator.

We will explain. In the feelings in the “*Ruach*” level of the soul, a person learns what love and fear of the Creator is when he experiences these feelings. With the more he experiences these feelings, the more he learns about them. But there is also a way to get to love and fear of the Creator: through “*koach mah*”, or self-nullification. One can become so nullified to the Creator that, as a result, he also loves and fears the Creator. Feeling nullified to the Creator brings a person to unify with the Creator; as is well-known, *ahavah* (love) is equal in numerical value (in Hebrew) to the word *echad* (one).

Thus, there is a way to get to feelings of love and fear of the Creator through the “I” [this is in the “*Ruach*” level of the soul], and there is also a way to get to these feelings of love and fear through nullifying the “I” [this is the “*Chayah*” level of the soul].

Taking this to a deeper level, as it has been explained earlier, *bittul* (self-nullification) is not only for the purpose of producing feelings of love and fear of the Creator. Rather, it is for the sake of nullifying the self. From being nullified, a person can attach himself to the Creator. When a person bonds with the Creator by way of love and fear of Him, He is connected to Him through these feelings, but if he bonds with Him through totally nullifying his existence to Him, he becomes nullified and integrated with the Creator. He is then able to be “one” with the Creator, so to speak.

#### 4c) Bonding With The Creator Through The “G-dly Spark” That Sustains Each Thing.

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Until now, we explained two alternate paths within the stage of bonding with the Creator [in our power of thought] through “*Chayah*” level in the soul, which were both related to the concept of *bittul* (self-nullification). Now we shall turn to a third approach.

As is well-known, one of the clearest principles taught by the Baal Shem Tov is that each and every thing in the Creation contains a “G-dly spark” which empowers it. This is a fundamental which is deep and subtle. Much of the written opposition against the teachings of Chassidus, which was fought between the students of the Baal Shem Tov and the students of the Vilna Gaon, revolved around this matter: What is this “G-dly spark”? If it is understood simply and literally, *chas v’shalom*, it sounds like trying to give physical form to the Creator, which is against the Torah. There are many other issues as well, surrounding this concept. This was the main argument fought in those times against *Chassidus*.

Here we will not get involved with that controversy. What we want to know here is: What our inner work in our soul is, when it comes to this matter. The principle taught by the Baal Shem Tov, that each thing contains a G-dly vitality which empowers it, means that the G-dly vitality in something is what enables it to become a tool in connecting it with G-dliness.

Let’s explain this matter further. Hashem can keep a person alive even without the G-dly spark of vitality, and Hashem could have created man in a way that he won’t need this G-dly spark in order to live, for Hashem is capable of anything. If so, why then did Hashem make man in a way that his vitality must come from this “G-dly spark”?

The answer to this is because the goal of Creation is for man to be brought to the state of *d’veykus* (attachment) to G-dliness. When man receives vitality from this G-dliness, this is exactly what brings him towards the connection with the Infinite. If man were to receive vitality from a source other than this, it would not bring him to a connection with the Infinite. Since man’s purpose is to connect himself to the Infinite, the thing that revitalizes him is the “G-dly spark” within him.

The Baal Shem Tov’s principle, that each thing contains a G-dly spark which empowers it, is essentially the perception of the “*Chayah*” level of the soul that connects man with the Infinite. It is not simply a way of defining the source that keeps a person alive. Rather, it is a definition of how a created being can become connected with the Infinite, through the inner work of his soul.

We have already explained in the previous chapter that the inner work in our “*Chayah*” level of the soul is, firstly, to reveal the understanding that there is an inner energy source in man, which keeps him alive. From there, a person can reach the ultimate Source behind all of his energy - Who is *Hashem Yisborach*. Then a person can feel the “G-dly spark” within him.

The purpose is not simply to simply say these words. “In each person, there is a G-dly spark.” That, anyone can say. They are simply words, and most people can understand this concept intellectually, to a certain degree. But a person has not reached the purpose just by saying these words or defining it, and even if he understands it. Rather, it is a definition that must be lived, which provides a person with actual energy. The “G-dly spark” must be an active source of energy to a person.

When one bonds with the Creator through the levels of *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah* in the soul (as explained earlier), and then traversing the first two paths in the “*Chayah*” level of the soul which we explained, he has reached the level of *bittul* (self-nullification) to the Creator. From being nullified to the Creator, he can then feel that his inner energy source comes from the Creator. This reflects the verse, “*For with You is the Source of life, in Your light appears light.*”<sup>119</sup> When one is nullified to the Creator, he can feel how the source of all his life comes from the Creator. After a person is found at this point, and he has solidly acquired it, **he will then be in a state where his mind never stops being cognizant of the Creator.**

Let us explain. At the beginning of one’s *avodah*, a person seeks to remember that there is a Creator. At this stage, he should seek various external reminders that can aid him in this: To hang up signs that state “*Shivisi Hashem L’negdi Tamid*” (“I place Hashem opposite me, always”), and other ideas which exist. But these are all tools which bring him closer to the more inner point.

The inner point itself, once it is reached, can be compared to a person with a stuffed nose, who is trying to breathe. He realizes that he must breathe in order to stay alive, because if he doesn’t breathe, he will die. It is the same once a person recognizes that his source of life is the Creator. This is not another fact of knowledge to him, but a perception in his soul, in which he feels that he receives his very vitality from the Creator. Just as a person knows how to keep his body alive, by making sure to always eat and drink when he needs, so can a person come to feel that the source of his life is the Creator, and that if he stops thinking about the Creator, he loses his energy source. (In deeper terms, this is really an inner awareness in his soul, of the Creator.) He will feel that if he loses awareness of the Creator as his Source of energy, it is a death for the soul.

Of course, he knows that he can remain alive even when he loses this awareness – but only on a physical level. His body can continue to live even if he forgets the Source of his energy. But deep down, in his soul, he feels like a person thrown from a bus onto the street outside. When he feels helpless, he can try to grab onto the ‘rope’ that attaches him to his Source which is Above – to his bond with the Infinite.

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<sup>119</sup> *Tehillim 34:10*

As long as a person has not yet reached the point where he feels that his source of vitality is coming from the Creator, it is impossible for him not to lose awareness of the Creator. After all, we are not made of material which is unceasingly cognizant of the Creator. But once a person reaches the point where he feels that the source of his vitality is the Creator, he won't be able to forget it. It is like a person who is suddenly prevented from breathing normally, who will naturally and quickly remove the impediment to his breathing. Such action is natural, and it does not require any deep thinking, for even a little child would do the same thing.

Once a person reaches this inner understanding, that the source of his vitality is from the Creator – and when this is not just knowledge to him, but something he actually feels (and even more so, when he perceives it in his soul), which he feels no less than his own need for breathing – from that point onward, a person will not be able to lose his mind's cognizance of the Creator.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* state that before a person reaches this level - of never losing cognizance in his mind of the Creator – a person must first attempt to “capture” the presence of Hashem, so to speak. At that initial stage, a person cannot possibly be on the level where he never forgets about Hashem. Only when a person feels that his vitality comes from the Creator, does he reach a point where his mind never forgets about Hashem.

## 5. Bonding With Hashem through the “Yechidah”

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Finally, with the help of Hashem, let us complete the picture here by explaining how we bond with Hashem through the “*Yechidah*” part of the soul that is in us.

**We bond with our Creator through our “*Yechidah*” level of the soul when we firmly believe that “Hashem, Yisrael and the Torah are *chad* (one).”** These three are all interconnected.

When we discussed how we bond with the Creator through the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, it was explained that this is when a person nullifies his existence to the Creator; alternatively, it is when one realizes that the Creator sustains him. At this level, a person still has the understanding that there are “two” planes to exist on – the plane of the self, and the state of being nullified with the Creator – and it is just that he nullifies his self to the Infinite. But in the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul, there is a state of total *emunah* (faith) in Hashem. It is the soul's inner perception that the Hashem and Yisrael are one: **where a person feels *chad* (one) with his Creator.**

Many have grappled with this concept. How can a created being, a human, become “one” with the Creator? Understandably, the attempt to understand how this can make sense logically is already out of the question. Why? Human logic comes from *chochmah* (wisdom), which exists in the *Chayah* level of the soul. The *Yechidah* point in the soul, though, is above the *Chayah* level of the soul. Therefore, it is beyond all intellectual wisdom, and its perception cannot be contained or absorbed through any intellectual means.

The *Yechidah* belongs in the category of “The hidden intellect that is above all idea.”<sup>120</sup> It is above all logical reasoning and understanding. In the *Yechidah* level of the soul, there is no intellect. It simply does not pass through the understanding of the human mind. Just as the air cannot be tangibly grasped, so is the perception of the *Yechidah* out of the range of the intellect. It is said, “*All of them, You made with wisdom*”, and this is a perception which speaks to the *Chayah* level of the soul and below. It does not apply to the *Yechidah* level of the soul.

In the *Yechidah* level of the soul, there is only *emunah*. The definition of *emunah*, in clear terms, is that it is a power of the soul which does not pass through the intellect. Just as there is an existing force called weight, an existing force called movement, and an existing force called wisdom, so is there an existing force called *emunah*. It is essentially a path in the soul that does not pass through the radar of the intellect. It is a power of the soul just like any of your other senses, and it is fundamental.

Bonding with Hashem through the *Yechidah* level in the soul is when one has the *emunah* that a person and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* are one. Anyone can **say** these words, but when it comes to **understanding** this concept, that is much more difficult. A higher level is to **feel** it, and anyone who has traversed all the steps of this *sefer* will have a sharpened their sense for *emunah*, to the point that they can feel it palpably. (Without feeling it, it just remains on a level of knowledge to a person.) But when one strengthens his bond with his Creator to the point that he has become totally nullified to the Creator – which is the “*Chayah*” level of the soul – he can then reach a level of **firmly believing that he and the Creator are, so to speak, one**. That is how he perceives reality.

As soon as people hear about this concept, they are usually filled with questions: “If I can be “one” with the Creator, does that mean I don’t have to serve Him (*chas v’shalom*)? If I am “one” with the Creator, does that mean that I am the Creator?” We all know of such questions that people like to ask. But the answer to all of these kinds of questions is always one answer alone. A person who is truly on the level of oneness with the Creator does not have such questions, and if a person is asking questions on this concept, he is obviously not *there*.

When one is “there”, his brain is rewired and it is not busy with such intellectual questions. He has entered a whole new mode of life. A person might wonder, “If you can’t answer my questions about this, it must not make any sense.” But again, all of the questions about this topic are coming from a superficial kind of understanding, the understanding that our human intellect has to offer. The inner dimension of reality doesn’t follow all the rules of logic.

So although there are no answers to the questions we may have on this matter, that doesn’t tell us anything, because you cannot try to understand a plane above the intellect through your intellect. One who is there at the inner dimension has different thinking patterns. One who is not there can only perceive things with his logic, so he won’t be able to understand the inner dimension.

When a person has *emunah* that he and Hashem are one, that *emunah* itself is what defines the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul.

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<sup>120</sup> From “*Keil Mistater*”, one of the *Zemiros of Shabbos Shalosh Seudos*

## The Danger of Trying to Enter this Level

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Here we will state the following crucial point. Just because one is advancing in this *avodah* does not mean that he can allow himself to slacken off from doing any *mitzvos*. If one is becoming weaker in his *mitzvah* observance due to the ‘spiritual high’ feeling he is getting out of this (and therefore he thinks he doesn’t have to do the *mitzvos*), he should know that he is deluding himself, and he is not at the inner dimension yet.

Of this, Chazal say, “If your heart runs, return to your place.”<sup>121</sup> Such a person is using the area above the intellect in order to nullify all human intellect, and in doing so he will uproot the entire Torah. One who is truly at the inner dimension does not damage his intellect in the process; if he does, he is obviously not at the inner dimension. One who is not there, and he tries to enter there, will only damage his intellect in the process; and he will come to destroy all the holy rules of the Torah with it [*chas v’shalom*]. Once a person breaks the rules of the Torah, he breaks everything.

This was the terrible mistake that many people made throughout all of the generations: people who tried to enter into the higher dimensions when they weren’t careful to keep the rules of the Torah, and they only damaged themselves in the process.

Therefore, we are warning here that **this *avodah* is only for those who have already traversed all of the previous steps in this *sefer***. Such a person has already built the previous rungs of the ladder in order to reach his *Yechidah*. If one isn’t built properly, he will fall from his ladder and end up in the lowest depths, *chas v’shalom*.

So if a person feels that this *avodah* is doing any detriment to him, it is a sign that he is not there, and if that is the case, he must remain below this level, and instead he should focus on developing his lower levels of the soul.

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<sup>121</sup> *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:8



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## *15 / Meditating On The Creator Through Thought*

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### The Third Stage of Hisbodedus (In Thought): Thinking About The Creator

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The previous chapter explained the second stage of *hisbodedus*: how man bonds with the Creator. In order to complete the picture, we will progress to discuss the third stage: the thought about the very reality of the Creator.

To think about the Creator is to think one thought alone: the simple fact that Hashem exists. If one thinks about anything else in this stage, he is still at the lower stage, which is to bond oneself personally to the Creator, or the stage below that. In the third stage, which is higher, one is not even thinking of his personal bond with the Creator. He is thinking solely about Hashem's existence.

So the final step is for one to simply focus on his thoughts on the Creator's existence alone. Of course, if this just feels like a mere thought to the person, then it is a superficial awareness. But when it is experienced on the real level, it is a soul experience, and it is then that one truly experiences the level of thinking about the Creator. It is a thought that has no agendas to anything else. It is to think about Hashem's existence alone, the fact that Hashem is existing.

### The Innermost Point: Sensing Hashem In The Heart

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These words alone do not describe what the experience feels like; the words here do not say much, because it is something that your soul has to actually experience. We are describing it as "thinking of the existence of the Creator" but that description really does not do any justice to this experience.

To try to describe this is more inner language, it is to **grasp the existence of the Creator in your heart**. At this stage, a person is not thinking of himself at all, and he's not even thinking about his personal bond with the Creator. He is not even thinking that "I am becoming one with the Creator." He is simply letting his thoughts stay focused on the fact that the Creator exists.

The essence of our existence, which is called our *havayah*, is covered by three garments: action, speech, and thought. The purpose of all our *avodah* is to reach the point higher than all of these garments: our essence (*havayah*).

Thinking about the reality of the Creator, His existence, is a far deeper kind of thought than any other kind of thought. Our regular thoughts are complicating and multi-layered, but the thought of the Creator's existence is not a complicating thought at all – it is a "simple" thought with nothing else involved in it.

We define it as a ‘thought’, though, so as to enable us to enter this deep and inner arena. It is an inner sense. Just as you can feel yourself as existing, so can you feel the endlessness of Hashem, so to speak. So it is only categorized as ‘thought’ as a borrowed terminology, for lack thereof. The title ‘thought’ therefore does not mean that it is a mere thought, rather, that it is trying to convey to us an understanding that the soul grasps and experiences.

Thinking about the existence of the Creator is only the garment that covers over this inner grasp. The actual grasp itself is **when a person feels the *havayah* of the Creator as his own *havayah*.**

We will repeat and emphasize that this is not an emotion. It is a sense - an inner kind of sense - in which one feels his existence as being that of the existence of the Creator. It is felt no less than how one can feel his own self existing. It is not any of the seven emotions that one has in his bond towards the Creator; it is to grasp reality itself.

A person has to first traverse the first three levels of thought (thoughts of the soul<sup>122</sup>, then to think of his bond with the Creator, and then to think of Hashem’s existence), though, until he can get to this inner kind of ‘thought’. When he gets to it, first he must simply think of the fact that Hashem exists, but this is not yet the essence of the experience. It is only the garment that covers over the actual experience. The inner point of the experience is when a person senses his own existence as being that of the Creator.

This concept is actually the inner point of all of Creation. It is the purpose which all creations are meant to reach. All of the steps of *avodah* that were explained in this *sefer*, as well as in all other *sefarim*, and all of the 6,000 years of this era (and even beyond that), are all but a path to get to this inner point. The inner point is: **to sense the actual endlessness of the Creator.** It is first reached through accessing the perspective of the *Yechidah* in our soul, and from there it can spread to the rest of the soul’s lower layers.

There is not much more we can say about this and explain, because most people do not recognize this concept at all. When people do have a feeling of the Creator, it is usually felt on a personal level, such as through prayer, when a person feels like he is missing a lot of things and he realizes that only Hashem can fill his void; or when he feels love or awe of the Creator, and other deep emotions towards the Creator. A person can also reach deep perceptions in his thoughts of the greatness of the Creator and of His Divine Providence, and the various other methods of reflection that are brought in the *sefarim*.

But beyond all of these perceptions is to sense the actual endlessness of the Creator, and it is a concept which is very hidden from most people. It is a concept that is barely mentioned in the *sefarim hakedoshim*, and it is a matter that is not explained clearly, so it is something of a mysterious matter. It is therefore not of that much place in a person’s life. In fact, this deep concept is not even to be termed as an ‘*avodah*’ that one “works” on. Instead, it is a “*hasagah*” - a perception; or a “*tefisah*”, a grasp of reality.

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<sup>122</sup> This first stage included the five kinds of thinking of the soul: *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*. It was also preceded by a preliminary stage, in which one simply becomes aware of his power of thought to begin with.

We will not summarize the third level of *hisbodedus* when it comes to our thoughts, which is to think of the endlessness of the Creator. It is the path, and the precedent, which one needs in order to reach his essence – in which one feels his existence as being that of the Creator's.

## A Clarification

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We must be clear about the following important point, being that the words here are about a subtle matter.

When we describe 'thinking about the reality of the Creator', this does not mean, *chas v'shalom*, for one to ponder the ways of Hashem and what defines the Creator. This is because the Sages state, "No thought can comprehend Him at all."

Many failed with regards to this point and became mistaken, and many even became heretical, once they began to think about giving definitions of the Creator. If someone thinks he understands the Creator in essence, he is not there at all. One who is *there*, however, is one who feels the reality of the Creator in his heart, which is where He can be found; and he feels that he is integrated with that great reality. He doesn't think about anything else. He is only grasping reality - reality as it is.

Thus, our goal can be defined as recognition of the existence of the Creator, so to speak, from within ourselves. The purpose of Creation is that we all be brought to the **absolute** recognition of the reality of the Creator. This is the inner point of which it is said, "The mouth cannot speak of it, and the thoughts cannot ponder it." It is not something that can be spoken about by words, and it is not something that can be analyzed in our thoughts. It is only the grasp of reality itself.

"As for the rest of it - go and finish it."<sup>123</sup>

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## *16 / Bonding With The Creator Through Hearing*

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### 1. The Sense of Hearing: An Introduction

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Throughout this *sefer*, we have explained ways to reveal the *neshamah* (the Divine soul of a Jew), by way of the sense of sight and the power of thought. We explained at the beginning of the *sefer* that there are four primary senses [of the soul], which are: sight, hearing, smell and speech. We have finished explaining, with *siyata d'shmaya*, the first and longest step from all of them, which was about the sense of sight. This included the eyes' sense of sight as well as the 'sight' of our mind, which is the power of thought. We will now turn to explaining the sense of hearing, and in turn, how we can reveal the *neshamah* through this sense.

As we have done until now, there will be five levels of the soul to traverse in each of the stages: *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*. We will continue this path as well with the sense of hearing. We will be learning here how to hear through the *Nefesh* level of the soul, how to hear through the *Ruach* level of the soul, to hear from the *Neshamah* level of the soul, to hear from the *Chayah* level of the soul, and to hear from the *Yechidah* level of the soul.

We will also explain, with *siyata d'shmaya*, the three stages of *hisbodedus* when it comes to the sense of hearing: revealing the self, revealing the bond of the self with the Creator, and revealing the reality of the Creator.

### 2. Revealing The Soul's Sense of Hearing – In Relation To Revealing The Self

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#### *2a) Hearing on the level of "Nefesh"*

As explained earlier, the *Nefesh* level of the soul corresponds to the *oisiyos* (Hebrew letters) in something. With regards to the sense of hearing, the *Nefesh* hears the actual words that are being said or spoken.

Anyone who knows a little bit about life can recognize that you can have two people talking, and after they finish their conversation, you can tell that one of them heard something else entirely than what his friend was telling him. Reuven will talk about "A" to Shimon, and Shimon hears "B". Stories like this happen every day. What is the root of this phenomenon?

Usually, it is because people hear what they want to hear. Shimon imagines in his mind the kind of response he hopes to hear from Reuven, which would satisfy what he wants. Even when Reuven responds to him differently than how he hoped, Shimon is still hearing what he wants to hear, and now what Reuven is actually telling him. Of course, only in extreme situations would Shimon hear "Yes" when Reuven actually said "No." Usually, a person will not delude himself to the point that he

switches a Yes for a No. But if the response is not that clear, the listener may interpret it according to what he would like to hear, and change the intention of what was said.

There was a story with the Brisker Rov, where there was a person who didn't have that much fear of Heaven (to say it in the least) who asked what the Rov's opinion was about a certain topic. The Brisker Rov didn't answer him. The questioner asked him again, and again the Rov didn't answer him. He kept repeating the question, and the Rov remained silent, clearly not wanting to answer him. Eventually, the questioner realized that the Rov wasn't going to talk to him, so he turned and left. After the person left, they asked the Brisker Rov why he didn't want to answer the person. The Rov answered: "It doesn't matter what I would tell him. He would interpret what I'm saying in the way he wants to interpret it."

It is not only words which can be misinterpreted by the listener. Even silence can be misinterpreted. If a person is quiet, we may interpret his silence as a "Yes", or as a "No".

Hearing from the "*Nefesh*" level of the soul is similar with the ability of thinking in the "*Nefesh*" level of the soul. It means to grasp the reality as it is – to hear the actual words that are being said. It is to know: If you ask a question, what is the person answering you? If you are having a conversation, what was really said in this conversation?

If a person would go around with a recorder and record every conversation he has, and then he listen to the recording, he would discover that many times he heard a certain thing from another, when in reality, the person said something else. This could only mean that he heard what he wished to hear, and not what was actually being said to him.

Thus, the *avodah* of a person [with regards to hearing] in the level of "*Nefesh*" is to hear what is actually being said. Sometimes we are told something that is unclear, and we need to clarify what was said. But at other times, it is very clear what is being said to us, and even so, we may misinterpret what we are hearing, because we may wish to hear it differently. The work here is to try to hear what was actually said, exactly.

### ***2b. Hearing on the level of "Ruach"***

Every sentence a person utters contains a certain "direction" [emotion] that it is moving in. A person may be expressing love or dislike, or joy or sadness. But in any case, a person never says anything that contains no emotional content. There is always something he is trying to express. The content of a person's words may be friendly or it may be distancing, but there is always some emotion being expressed. A person can hear someone talking and he can focus on which emotion it is leading him towards.

For example, if a person hears good news, he can be aware that he is hearing something that causes expansion to his soul, and if he hears of a tragedy or bad news which saddens him, he can hear how the words are leading towards a contraction of his soul.

Hearing from the “*Ruach*” level of the soul is for a person to know, when he hears something: “Which emotion does this evoke in me?” Of course, sometimes this will not be clear. But when you generally try to figure out what emotion you are having when you hear something, you slowly bring your soul to the level of hearing that is of the “*Ruach*” level of the soul.

### **2c. Hearing of “*Neshamah*”**

There is nothing you hear which doesn’t contain some wisdom to it. Hashem created this entire world in His *chochmah*, in His wisdom, and therefore, all of Creation contains wisdom. Whenever a person hears something, he first needs to understand what is actually being said (*nefesh*) then he can feel which emotional direction the words are leading towards (*ruach*), and then he should reflect into the wisdom that is hidden in what he has heard. This level of hearing is called the “*Neshamah*” level of hearing.

There in an expression in the Sages, “You don’t hear me, you don’t reason like me.” In other words, if something doesn’t make sense to me, my ears do not absorb it – I do not “hear” it. From the above statement of Chazal, we learn that hearing does not just mean to hear with your ears. Rather, even if you heard it, if you think the words don’t make sense and you do not want to accept it, it means that you did not hear the words. To really hear out another person is to absorb the wisdom that is contained in the words that he has said. When you absorb the wisdom in what was said, it can then make sense to you and then you can connect to what you heard.

Shlomo HaMelech said, “*And You have given to Your servant a heart that hears, to judge Your nation, to understand between good and evil.*”<sup>124</sup> Thus, when there is an “understanding heart”, this is the meaning of a “heart that hears.”

Hearing through the *Neshamah* level of the soul means to hear the reasoning contained in another’s words, to hear the hidden wisdom contained in a statement. For example, one person may hear a certain Chassidic saying, and he may hear it as “a nice idea”, whereas another person will deeply analyze what the saying and he will wonder: What wisdom has been said here? There is something here which I need to understand. In turn, he will also study it better, and even more so, he will be able to connect to the inner point of the statement.

Thus, hearing through the *Neshamah* means to hear the logic and wisdom in something. If one connects to the words he has heard, that means that he has “heard” it. But if he heard it and he doesn’t want to accept it, this is what Chazal are referring to in the statement, “You don’t hear me”.

### **2d. Hearing on the level of “*Chayah*”**

There are four aspects [contained in Hebrew words]: *oisiyos* (letters), *tagim* (crowns), *nekudos* (pronunciation), and *taamim* (tune). The *taamim*, the tune in a word, correspond to the *Chayah* level of the soul, for *taam* (tune) gives *chiyus* (vitality). In simple words, *taam*/tune is known as *niggun*, song.

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<sup>124</sup> *Melachim I: 3:9*

When a person hears a plain statement, he will not derive *chiyus* (vitality) from it, unless he thinks into the depth of it, or unless it is a particularly joyous thing to hear. But as for anything else a person hears, usually it will not mean that much to him (unless he is a very internal kind of person). What do all people love to hear and find meaning in? Everyone enjoys hearing a sweet *niggun* (tune), each on his own level, and according to his own nature. People receive vitality from a sweet, melodious sound, and this vitality is apparent.

Although hearing the wisdom in something can also provide a person with vitality, it is less apparent, because a person has to reflect deeply in order to discover this vitality.

Indeed, a person with a strongly developed mind can naturally see the wisdom in each thing. This is the secret of the “*Neshamah*” and “*Chayah*” levels of the soul, which are also called “Two friends that do not separate from each other.” Just as the *Chayah* provides *chiyus*/vitality to a person’s soul, so does the *Neshamah* [in the form of wisdom] provide *chiyus* to a person. But a person can only get *chiyus* from the *Neshamah* level of the soul when he deeply reflects into something as he tries to understand it. In contrast, the *Chayah* level of the soul is vitality-giving even without deep reflection.

When a person hears something that contains wisdom, in order to get vitality from it, he needs to think into the words. But when one hears a *niggun*, he does not have to think about it in order to get vitality from it. In fact, if he thinks about the *niggun*, he loses the *niggun*, because the thinking faculties cause a person to leave *niggun*. The deeper reason for this is because the *Chayah* level of the soul is the “first thought”, and the first thought of a person does not require any deep mental reflection. The depth that can be gained from listening to a *niggun* is precisely when a person doesn’t think about it, for the deeper he thinks about it, the more the *niggun* will lose its power.

Hearing the “*taam*” (tune) of something, which is to hear from the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, is to hear the “song” contained in something. Reb Nachman of Bresslov said that everything contains a *niggun*/song. However, we cannot always hear the “song” in something. Anyone can put a disc into the music player and hear a song, as long as he has is not deaf, but hearing the “*niggun*” in something means to hear the song of the entire Creation - who hears it? Creation contains an inner song to it, which is actually the *chiyus* (vitality) that energizes each thing in Creation.

The *Mishnah* in Tractate Shabbos<sup>125</sup> states, “All animals may go out with a *shir* (a kind of ornament).” The *Baal HaTanya* says that the *Mishnah* is hinting that “the animalism [of a person] goes out with *shirah* – song – in other words, the song of Creation causes all animalism and materialism in human beings to become elevated to a higher level of existence.

If a person connects to the “song” in each thing, he essentially lives what each thing is. If he doesn’t connect to the inner song in something, he may connect to on the level of “*Ruach*”, identifying what direction it leads him to, but he is not necessarily being led to a proper direction. In fact, sometimes it can bring him to a state of sadness, and he surely will not derive vitality from this. Additionally, he may connect to something on the level of “*Neshamah*” – to have mental reflection about something - which can be vitality-giving; but that will only happen if his power of mental

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<sup>125</sup> *Shabbos 51b*

reflection is deep and if he can use it connect strongly to what he thinks about. But when a person learns how to hear the “song” in each thing, he can receive true vitality from each thing he comes across.

We see that a person can receive vitality from a joyous *niggun*, or even a saddening *niggun* (which is a different kind of vitality than a joyful *niggun*). Just as a person can receive vitality from something that is bubbly and lively, so can a person receive vitality from things that are very much the opposite of this. A large amount of *niggunim*, in fact, does not sound lively and joyous, yet they still provide a certain kind of vitality to a person.

There is nothing that does not contain a “song” in it. It is just that in most cases, this “song” is hidden. We can hear a “song” in the guise of letters and words, as well as in the guise of non-word [when it is just wordless sound].

In the recent generation, there has been an increase of composers, who have composed all kinds of songs involving an endless amount of words. Sometimes they are good, and sometimes, they are not that good. But where does this come from? Of course, from a superficial perspective, we can say that it comes from a desire of the producers to make money. But there is an inner source to it. It is because the “*Chayah*” level of the soul is becoming more revealed in the world, and therefore there are much more opportunities for people to expose the song and tunes contained in each thing.

There is no letter that cannot be combined with another letter, and there is no letter which does not contain a tune to it, as we see in a sefer Torah, where every letter contains a *taam*/tune. There is a tune/song in each thing, which is its *chiyus*/vitality. But there are some things in which the song is revealed, which a person will derive vitality from, and there are other things in which the song is not revealed, so a person will not derive vitality from them. As proof, we can see many times that a tune does not fit to the words of the song. (It is like forbidden mixtures, such as *shaatnez*, in which the properties are not meant to fuse together). A person might take saddening words and compose a joyous *niggun* to it, or vice versa.

It is known that there were great *tzaddikim* who, when certain songs were brought before them, they would sometimes use the same words but switch the tune of the song, or they would use the same tune but switch the words. The power to combine letters or words with a tune is essentially a power to reveal the *chiyus*/vitality in something. The *chiyus* in something is multi-colored. Just as a person can take certain words and attribute different meanings to them (our Sages state that there are “70 facets of understanding” to the Torah, and there are “50 gates of understanding” in both the Written Torah as well as the Oral Torah), and the intellectual meaning of something is its vitality, so is the “song” of something its vitality.

There is song in the form of word, and there is also another kind of song which we are more familiar with: wordless song. Both kinds of song – the tune in a letter or word, as well as wordless song – can reveal the soul. We cited earlier the words of the *Baal HaTanya*, that when a person wishes to divest himself of all materialism and animalism, he can do so through the power of song.



One of the strongest abilities we have that can reveal the soul is the secret known as *taam* (tune) – the secret of *niggun*, song.

Why? As is well-known, the *nefesh* level of the soul resides in the liver, the *ruach* in the heart, and the *neshamah* in the brain. Since these parts of the soul are clothed within man, they are also blocked somewhat, depending on one's spiritual level. But the *Chayah* level of the soul is called "*makif*", "surrounding", and it corresponds to song – therefore, when a person awakens song, he is awakening the part of the soul that is "above" him [the *Chayah*].

The "above" part of the soul, which is outside of man, is more powerful than the parts of the soul which reside within man. That is the reason behind the concept mentioned earlier a person leaves all of his 'animalism' through *shir* - song. It is because song is a higher power, above man, which can take man out of his current state.

It is reflective of the statement of our Sages, "A captive cannot release himself from prison."<sup>126</sup> With regards to us, the soul levels of *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah* are found within the body, and they are like the captive who cannot release himself from prison. How, then, can a person free his *neshamah* from his body? Through the power of the *Chayah*, and even more so, through the *Yechidah*, which are the higher parts of the soul that are not within the body and who are thus not in the "prison" of the body, who can free the *neshamah* from within the prison of the body.

G-d forbid, if a person's mind is not working, like if he is ill and he is brain damaged, or if he has any other mental illness which debilitates his mind, and we wish to rectify his soul, we can do so through singing holy *niggunim* in front of him, sung by truthful people and from the depths of the heart, and we can thereby raise him to a higher level. It is brought in *sefarim hakedoshim* that there are souls who cannot learn Torah on this world, for their minds have been damaged, and their souls can achieve rectification through hearing the *niggun* of a *tzaddik*. How?

If a person can only raise his spiritual level through accessing the "*Neshamah*" level of the soul, it means that he can raise himself through the power of the intellect, for part of the *neshamah* resides in the mind, and part of it is outside the mind. Therefore, the intellectual faculties of a person are partially outside and above a person, and partially inside him [so the *Neshamah*, or the intellectual faculties of man, is not powerful enough to completely raise the spiritual level of a person]. But the *Chayah* level of the soul is entirely outside the person, for it is *makif* (surrounding), in the form of song. That is why a person can elevate himself greatly through song, as well as others.

Thus, hearing a song, whether it is a song with words or a wordless song, can be a very strong way to reveal the soul. This is on condition, though, that the song is from a holy source.

Let's explain the difference between song with words, and wordless song. When a song has words, it is on the level of *Nefesh*, for the *Nefesh* perceives letters and words. In contrast, when a song has no words to it, and it is just the tune itself unattached to any letters or words, it is not bound to the level of *Nefesh*. Since it has no letters to it, there is no 'garment' for the song to 'clothe' itself in.

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<sup>126</sup> *Berachos 5b*

We can compare this to a person who lowers himself through a rope into a well in order to draw water, and the rope snaps, and we want to raise him out of the pit in order to rescue him. Either we can raise him alone and his pale of water will be left behind in the well, or we can find a way to get him out of the pit together with his pale of water. The lesson from this is that through the power of song, there is a way to release a person from within himself, but he will not remain with any of his external garments. That is how we can describe wordless song. In wordless song, the external garments of man do not remain with him [when there is a release of his soul from his body]. In wordless song, a person escapes his materialistic aspect, from within himself. But in a song with words, the person is pulled to a higher level even with his external and lower soul layers, because the power of a song with words is that it can raise the words and letters (*Nefesh*) to a higher level.

On the other hand, there is an advantage to wordless song over a song with words. In a song with words, a person is descending to a lower level [letters/words/*Nefesh*] and, usually, the spiritual elevation will be closed at a certain point. That is why the revelation of soul achieved by a song with words is less than the revelation achieved by wordless song. In wordless song, there are no letters and words, [no “garments”], to close him off and prevent him from reaching higher degrees of revelation of the soul.

Thus, both a song with words and a wordless song have their advantages as well as disadvantages. In wordless song, the advantage is that there are no words [garments] to block him from getting higher, but the disadvantage is that the song won't penetrate to his lower layers, because it is not becoming clothed in them. In contrast, a song with words has the advantage of elevating even a person's lower soul layers; at the same time, the disadvantage of it is that he will be somewhat prevented from getting further into the elevation, because just as garments conceal the person wearing them, so do letters and words conceal the depth of the revelation of song.

Let us think now about an additional point. The *taamim*/tune of a word generally divides into two parts. We have so far explained how *taam* is in the form of *niggun*, song. Another kind of *taam* is reasoning. There are logical reasons we can give for something; there is an expression called *taam v'daas*, “reason and understanding”, and there are *taamei haTorah*, reasons for the *mitzvos* of the Torah. A basic difference between these two kinds of *taam* is that *taamei HaTorah* are clothed in the ‘garments’ of letters and words, whereas a *niggun* does not have to always be clothed in any ‘garments’, for it can be a wordless song.

There is a famous saying in Brisk, “A song with words, without the right tune, is like a body without a soul, and a song without words is like a soul without a body.” Meaning, a wordless song can only be a *niggun*, but it cannot ever be *taamei HaTorah*. In Brisk, they mainly learned *taamei haTorah*, which is to understand the reasoning and to give Torah definitions, which is a kind of *taam* (not in the sense of explaining reasons, but in feeling the taste of something, through studying words). That is why in Brisk they said, “A song without words is like a soul without a body”, because the *taamei haTorah* which are in the category of understanding needs to be clothed by the garments of letters, whereas a *niggun* does not have to be clothed by any letters.

Thus, there is a song with words, which is rooted in *taamei HaTorah*, which are clothed by the garment of letters; and there is wordless song, which is actually the highest level of song that exists, and it is like a soul without a body, and therefore, wordless song has the power to elevate the body.

Wordless song gives a person the will to go to a different place. After that, a person must go back to reality, and there the song stops. But in a song with words, a person can extend *chiyus* (vitality) into his mundane reality, for such a song is able to be ‘clothed’ in ‘garments’.

Any person, when hearing a song, can feel calmed. But the deep way to use song is to let it penetrate into the soul and to then reveal it from within the soul. Thus, the purpose of listening to a song is not just for relaxation (through that, too, can be very constructive. We are just saying that the purpose of song is not just meant to calm us down on a physical level). Rather, the purpose of hearing a song is to reveal the depth of the *neshamah*.

For this reason, there is a holy Jewish custom to sing Shabbos *zemiros* (Sabbath hymns). Shabbos is called “day of the *neshamah*”, and we can notice that on Shabbos there is a considerable amount of singing that is wordless (especially in the Chassidic courts). These *niggunim* with no words attached to them are called “march songs”. The depth of this matter is based upon what we have explained here: Shabbos is the level of the *Neshamah*. On one hand, it is a preparation for the six days of the coming week, and in that sense, there are songs with words that are sung on Shabbos, for the words are “garments” and are reflective of the six days of the week. But on the other hand, Shabbos is also a “semblance of the World To Come”, a day of total *menuchah* (serenity), and correspondingly, there is wordless song on Shabbos.

Thus, to reveal the “*Chayah*” level within us, a person needs to reveal the “song” in each thing. In letters or words, the song may be clothed in the form of intellectual perception. In wordless song, sometimes a person may attach intellectual perception to it to a certain degree and try to give it some form, but on a deeper level, hearing a wordless *niggun* is supposed to bring a person to a state in which he is **totally divested of all physicality**.

Sometimes a person hears a wordless song, a *niggun*, and tries to give it some form. If he does so, he is adding letters and words to it that come from within himself. Although *niggun* itself is wordless, a person can add letters and words to it from within himself. But the deeper level is for a person to hear a *niggun* and reach a point where he is not thinking about anything. That is the perfected level of *niggun*.

One kind of *niggun* takes on the form of words. A person may sing deeply the words of “*How I love Your Torah, all day it is my conversation*”, and he can keep concentrating deeply into the words he is singing, feeling the words. In such a *niggun*, a person is receiving *chiyus* (vitality) from the song in the garment of the intellect, emotions, and words. He is connecting himself to the words he is singing, and this is one kind of *avodah*.

If a person is not paying attention at all to the words he is singing, of this it is said “*In his mouth and lips he honors Me, and his heart is far from Me.*” The true way to sing is to pay attention to the

words and reflect on the words, thinking into their meaning, as well as becoming emotionally aroused from the words; this encompasses the levels of *Nefesh* (words), *Ruach* (emotion), *Neshamah* (thought), and *Chayah* (song). However, this level of singing is still within the mode of intellect, so it is not yet the complete level of being divested from the physical.

Sometimes a person, in the midst of singing, will close his mouth and shake his whole body back and forth. This awakens the body, and doesn't allow for a total divesting of the physical. It is therefore better for a person not to sing himself, but to hear a song from another person who is singing the *niggun* in a manner of holiness.

As we explained here, through hearing a *niggun*, a person can slowly calm all of the garments of the soul: he calms the soul's area of "action" by not doing anything, he calms the area of speech by not saying or singing anything, he calms the area of thought by silencing his thoughts, and he can deepen this experience until he reaches a point of total silencing. There, he can reach his very essence. The deeper a *niggun* is, and the more attuned the *niggun* is to a person's nature and current level, the deeper a person will be able to reach.

The *niggunim* which were composed by great *tzaddikim*, such as the famous *Chabad niggun* which depicts the Four Worlds which the soul ascends and descends to, are specifically designed for this purpose of reaching deeper into the soul. One needs to reach a point in hearing the *niggun* where he awakens the highest world in himself, *Atzilus*, his very inner point and essence, and to go even beyond the self.

*Niggun* (song) is like the "ladder that is footed on earth and ascends to the heavens". The power of hearing a song is (if it is possible to say this) the ability that is most revealed in most people.

The intellectual faculties are not so strongly developed in most people, each on his own level. The sense of smell, which is the holiest of the senses, is not revealed amongst anyone (as we will explain in the coming chapter, with the help of Hashem). Speech for the most part does not awaken anyone, as we can see that many people speak forbidden speech as well as extraneous speech, and even when it is words of holiness, the mouth has already become spiritually contaminated from forbidden speech and therefore a person is usually not inspired from the words that come out of his mouth. As proof, we can see that people speak words of Torah and *tefillah*, yet they don't feel a thing from it. In contrast, song can awaken even the most distanced Jew, causing him to feel something. Even a very coarse person, when he hears a sweet *niggun*, gains a small opening to something inner.

Therefore, we can possibly say that the strongest power which we have to escape from our physicality - the power which we have the most access to, and which most people can relate to (if not all people) - is the power of song. The power of listening to a song is the great key we have and the strongest way to awaken the soul. After one reveals it, a person can extend its power to many directions. For a large amount of people who wish to enter inward into themselves, whether it is before doing *hisbodedus* or whether it is to simply relax the body, the power of song is the strongest existing power through which a person can reach inner calm.

### ***2e. Hearing on the level of “Yechidah”***

By Har Sinai, there was a “*great voice, that did not end*”<sup>127</sup>. The simple understanding of this is that there is sound which ends, and sound which does not end. The kind of sound we recognize has an end to it. A person talks, we hear him talking, and then we don’t hear him talking.

But the voice of Hashem, which spoke to us at Har Sinai, never ends. Just as it is heard from one end of the world to another, so it can be heard endlessly throughout time. The voice of Hashem which we heard at Har Sinai can still be heard in the time we are in now.

There is a concept that everything exists in three planes – in the world, in time, and in the soul (*olam, shanah, nefesh*)<sup>128</sup>. So if the voice of Hashem can be heard in any place and in any time, so too can it be heard in our own soul. Hearing it in our soul is, in turn, a form of revealing the soul.

When we hear something, a sound rings in our ears. Is it forever, or does it go away? For example, when one is informed that a relative of his has passed away, and he is saddened upon the news, does he remain sad forever? No; the reason for this is because Chazal say that Hashem makes us forget a deceased person after 12 months. The feeling we had upon hearing of a person’s death eventually goes away, and in that sense, the hearing of that news goes away with it. So what we hear does not remain forever. But sometimes, a person can hear something and he remembers forever the message of what he heard. This is called a degree of the “*great voice that did not end.*”

Let’s say a person hears that he must do *chessed*, and then he acts upon this and he goes to perform a *chessed*. He heard something, he acted upon it, but he doesn’t remember what he heard later on. But sometimes a person hears something and he retains it deeply, and it affects him for his whole life.

There is a well-known story about the Alter of Novhardok, who was a merchant when he was a young boy. Once he was doing business and he met Reb Yisrael Salanter, who was passing by him on a caravan. (Perhaps some details here have been distorted, but this is the general version of the story). Reb Yisrael asked him, “What will become of all your business and all of your money...?”

The words penetrated deeply into the words of the young Alter, and he immediately went and sold his business. We all know what he became of him in the end. Through the words of Reb Yisrael Salanter, the Alter went and founded ten yeshivos and he trained many young servants of Hashem who became great in Torah and in *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

This is an example of a “great voice that does not end.” It is not merely a memory; a computer also has memory. It is a point which goes into one’s soul and builds the soul, and it remains forever imprinted on the person, and the person cannot budge from it for the rest of his life.

This is the voice of the *Yechidah* that one can “hear” in his soul. It is to hear a certain message which stays forever in the person’s conscious, never forgotten. It is a point that one remembers

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<sup>127</sup> Devarim 5:19

<sup>128</sup> Sefer Yetzirah: 3

which becomes a part of his being. On a deeper note, not only does it become a part of the person, but it serves to reveal to a person his own essence – thus, it is forever.

Compare this to a person who hears a loud noise, so he runs to a shelter. So too, hearing the *Yechidah* causes one to run into and enter a certain point which he never leaves.

Until now, we have explained the first part of hearing, which is how we hear through the soul in order to reveal the self. Now we progress to the second stage: to hear in a way that causes one to connect himself to the Creator. We will try to continue in the way that was explained until now: through each of the five dimensions of the soul.

### 3 - Using The Sense of Hearing To Bond With The Creator

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Until now, we explained the first part of how we use the sense of hearing in *hisbodedus*, in relating to revealing the self. We will now turn to explaining the second step, with the help of Hashem, of how we use the sense of hearing: in regards to bonding with the Creator. We will try to take the same approach we have taken until now, explaining this stage through the give levels of the soul.

#### ***3a. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of “Nefesh”***

The Torah writes, “*And Moshe will speak, and G-d will answer him in a voice.*” The Sages explain this matter to be a mixture of Moshe’s voice with the Creator’s voice, in the term, “The *Shechinah* speaks from his (Moshe’s) throat.” The *sefarim* of *Chassidus* deal heavily with this concept, in emphasizing that a person must know that when he speaks, there is an entire world of speech that is coming from within him. In other words, when a person speaks, his words are not solely his own – rather, they are really emanating from Hashem’s words, the “world of speech.”

Therefore, when a person hears a person speaking with him, he should stop and reflect: Who is talking to me? When Reuven and Shimon are having a conversation, and Reuven hears Shimon talking, who is really talking to him? Simply speaking, the answer is that it is Shimon who is talking to him. But the Baal Shem Tov and others taught a fundamental rule in our *Avodas Hashem*, that whatever a person sees or hears is really a teaching from the Creator. Therefore, it is not only Shimon who is talking to Reuven. It is *the Creator* speaking to Reuven – through Shimon.

Perhaps you will now ask, “If it is only the Creator Who is talking, then if so, when two people come to give testimony in *Beis Din*, their testimony should not be accepted, because it is only the Creator talking, not them, so we have no testimony!” This is not what we mean. Rather, when a person talks to you, there is a person here who is talking to you, and this must be acknowledged to some extent.

Thus, the idea is that whenever you hear something, there are really two voices taking place. You may be hearing the words of a person, or an electronic announcement or a diskette playing, but that is only the ‘garment’ of a more inner sound. So whenever I hear something, there are really two

voices speaking to me – The physical voice which I am hearing, which is reaching me through the physical sound waves, and a more inner sound, the “G-dly light” that is clothed in it, which is also speaking to me. This is what it means to hear from the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul with regards to one’s personal bond with the Creator: identifying every sound that comes to you as both a physical voice as well as an inner sound.

### ***3b. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of “Ruach”***

Earlier, when we explained the “*Ruach*” level of the soul and how it is revealed through the sense of hearing, we defined it as a sense of hearing the emotional path that the words are conveying. Words may be loving, spiteful, joyous, saddening, contractive, expansive, etc. But when you use the sense of hearing to reveal a bond with the Creator, it means to hear the voice of Hashem in the words that someone is saying to you.

When you identify that it is really Hashem who is speaking to you – by way of another person, or by way of any other sound that reaches you – the next step is to identify what emotion Hashem wants you to feel now: Am I hearing words of closeness, or words of distance? Am I hearing words that convey love, or dread, or any of the other emotions that exist?

When two close friends are talking, they will speak words of love and closeness to each other, and when two enemies talk to each other, they exchange words of hate and distance. So too, when a person identifies that it is Hashem Who is talking to him through the words he is hearing, one should try to identify if Hashem is sending him a message of love, or dread, etc. In every word you hear, you can identify what emotion it is conveying, and in turn, you can then discern what Hashem is saying to you, through the emotion.

The first step is to hear through the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul, where you simply identify the very reality that it is Hashem Who is talking to you, through another’s words. The next step is to hear from the “*Ruach*” level of the soul, where you identify what emotion Hashem wants you to feel now.

The Baal Shem Tov said that every word contains each of the seven main emotions: *chessed*, *gevurah*, *tiferes*, *netzach*, *hod*, *yesod*, and *malchus*. Thus, a person needs to hear in every word the emotion that Hashem is conveying to him, in the sense of “*Like water, a face reflects one face to another face, so is the heart of man to another man.*”<sup>129</sup> The heart of the Creator, so to speak, is reflected towards a person in the way that the person feels towards Hashem. Therefore, one should discern which emotion the Creator is conveying to him, through the words he is hearing.

### ***3c. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of “Neshamah”***

Hearing [with regards to bonding with the Creator] through the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul is to hear the G-dly wisdom that is contained in something. It is for a person to understand that the sound or words he is hearing is really the voice of Hashem speaking to him, and since “He and His wisdom are one”, one can look for the G-dly wisdom that is revealed in each word.

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<sup>129</sup> Mishlei 27:19

When we explained how to use the sense of hearing to reveal the “*Neshamah*” in relation to revealing the self, we explained that it means to look for the wisdom in something. If someone is speaking to me, I need to look for the hidden wisdom that is contained in his words. However, the Baal Shem Tov taught a fundamental rule which offers us a deeper perspective into this. The Baal Shem Tov said that any *sefer* which was written through *ruach hakodesh* can be explained in countless ways. Why? Even if its author wasn’t aware of the many explanations in his own words, since he had *ruach hakodesh* at the time of its writing, the words are not his own, but the words of Hashem. Hashem is infinite, and therefore there are countless explanations to the words he has written.

True, the author of the *sefer* didn’t intend for any of those explanations at the time of the writing. His thinking then was limited and he only had one intention in the words he was writing. But the inner aspect of the words themselves are the words of Hashem, so there is an infinite amount of explanation and meaning in the words he has written.

Thus, when a person hears another person talking, the superficial level of hearing is to hear what the person is simply saying, and the only issue is what the person could have meant, what he was thinking. But the inner way to listen is to hear another’s words as a ‘garment’ of a more inner kind of speech being conveyed. It is really the G-dly light which is speaking from within the person. If so, there must be wisdom contained in what the person is saying, and this is a whole different kind of listening.

For example, if a person tells me a story that happened yesterday, either I can understand that he is referring to a certain event and I can relate to it according to the way he intended [the superficial way of hearing], or, I can hear something else entirely which is being conveyed to me – I can hear something completely different than what he intended to say!

Perhaps we can even say that this is the deep reason of why people sometimes don’t hear what was actually said to them, which we discussed earlier in the stage of hearing from the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul. It may happen because, from a very inner viewpoint, the words can really mean something else entirely [even though the person talking didn’t intend these other meanings], which is the “*Neshamah*” level of hearing. However, this spiritual light may descend to improper places, down to the level of “*Nefesh*”, and then a person will confuse letters and words and misinterpret the meaning.

On a deep level, there is an *avodah* to switch around the letters and words that one has heard, and to then hear different meanings in the words. Every word a person utters is combined of different Hebrew letters. A person needs to hear the actual combination of letters that was said, and then he can combine the letters together and hear a different arrangement of words. The Baal Shem Tov taught about the secret of “elevated listening”, in which a person hears words and “elevates” them with a higher meaning. For example, a person may hear of a sad or troubling event, which reads as “*tzarah*” in Hebrew (צרה), and he can switch around the letters to read “*tzohar*” (צוהר), which means “light.” Or, a person may hear the word “*nega*” (נגע), which means “affliction”, and switch around the letters to form the word “*oneg*” (ענג), which means “pleasure” - and other such examples.



If I simply hear what a person is saying, and he intended to tell me about a saddening or troubling event, I will not be able to switch around the meaning of what he is saying, because this is not what the person intended to say. But if I hear in someone else's words that there is a G-dly light contained in what he is saying, I am removing the 'garment' of the words I have heard, and I can hear the spiritual light contained in it, which is its inner essence. That is how one can change and switch around the letters and words [and thereby find a deeper, greater meaning to the words].

Thus, there is an ability of a person to identify the G-dly light that is clothed in the words that another person is saying. After one identifies it, he can then intellectually reflect into the meaning of the words. Firstly, he will discover a deeper intellectual meaning, in the actual combination of letters he has word. After that, he can find different combinations of these letters and words [and see different meanings of the words]. It is like the well-known rule that two Hebrew letters build two houses, three Hebrew letters build six houses, and so forth.

In summary, hearing from the *Neshamah* level of the soul is that after I have identified what was actually said, I can then reveal the hidden wisdom contained in the words, which are beyond the actual intention of the person who said them - to the point that I can even switch around the order of the letters and words and discover different meanings in them.

### ***3d. Bonding With The Creator Through The Hearing of "Chayah"***

The first of the Ten Commandments was, "*I am Hashem your G-d*". The Sages state that the Hebrew word for "I am", "*Anochi*", is an acronym for "*Ana Nafshi Kesavis Yehavis*", "*I have given you My soul, in writing.*"<sup>130</sup> As it were, Hashem gave of His very 'soul', so to speak – in the writing of the Torah. Similarly, when Rachel gave birth to Binyamin, her soul left her, and in the mystical teachings, this is explained to mean that she gave her own soul to Binyamin. This concept is rooted in the verse, "*My soul leaves when I speak with Him.*"<sup>131</sup> The faculty of speech in the soul is called "*nefesh chayah*", the "living spirit", for the Torah states that when Hashem gave man a soul, He breathed into him a "*nefesh chayah*", and *Targum* translates this to mean as "*ruach memalelah*", a "talking spirit."<sup>132</sup>

Thus, whenever a person speaks, on any level, he is somewhat connected to the concept of "*My soul leaves when I speak with Him.*" With most people, however, this is rarely experienced (unless a person gets very angry, or if he is particularly joyous). But the more internal a person becomes, the more he speaks from a source of *chiyus* (vitality) within him. When such a person speaks, his *chiyus*/vitality accompanies his speech, for he is realizing the true meaning of the "*nefesh chayah*" in man - the power of speech.

This level of hearing means that when a person is hearing a person speak, he doesn't just hear the words that are being said. He hears the words as a 'garment' of the *chiyus* (vitality) that is contained in the words. It means that when I hear a person talking, I can identify two kinds of speech which I

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<sup>130</sup> *Shabbos 102a*

<sup>131</sup> *Shir HaShirim 5:6*

<sup>132</sup> *Beraishis 2:7, and Targum Onkelos ibid*

am hearing: the person who is talking to me, and the G-dly light which is hidden in his words. Firstly, I will be able to feel the *chiyus* of the person who is talking to me (which will cause me to connect to him and thereby love him). But even more so, there is a deeper purpose: I can identify the “G-dly vitality” that is hidden in each thing. When a person hears in this way, he receives vitality from the Source of all life – from the Creator.

If a person hears another person and he perceives it merely as a person talking to him, even if he connects to the *chiyus/vitality* of the person, he will not be able to receive *chiyus/vitality* from the words, because any person cannot become a Source of vitality. You may be able to reach a high level of connection to him, and it may become a great tool of *ahavas Yisrael* and *achdus* (unity) with him, for when two live beings become connected with each other, there is resulting unity. [But you will not be able to derive vitality from the person].

However, when you identify that each word contains a G-dly vitality to it, and if you are deeply aware of this and it is just superficial knowledge to you, you will be able to receive a level of spiritual inspiration from the emotion that is being conveyed in the words [*Ruach*], then you will be able to reveal the G-dly wisdom that is contained in it [*Neshamah*], and then you can receive G-dly vitality from it [*Chayah*].

Understandably, when we say that every single word contains G-dliness to it, it is too difficult for us to actually live with this concept all the time, for we cannot live all the time with such an all-inclusive awareness. But every person on some level can reveal the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, which can receive the G-dly vitality in the words he hears.

There are many stories told of *tzaddikim* in which they would hear various words and expressions of gentiles, and they would receive inner vitality from it, using the words as a deep lesson of how to serve the Creator. This is reported about the great Chassidic leaders, as well as the Chofetz Chaim. These *tzaddikim* knew how to connect every word to the source in the soul where the words were coming from, and from this they would receive inspiration in how to serve the Creator. From a deeper understanding, it is because these *tzaddikim* connected to the Source of vitality contained in the words.

The above concept has the following deep ramification. When a person hears a person talking to him and he perceives it merely as a person saying something to him, and the talker happens to be a gentile, or, *rachmana litzlan*, a Jew who does not have that much holiness to him (to put it mildly) – in such a case, hearing the person talk will have a negative spiritual effect on the listener.

In contrast to this, it is well-known that *tzaddikim* were able to hear coarse kinds of people who would speak vulgar and negative language and yet be able to spiritually elevate them. How does this work? Whenever a person hears words, there is really a ‘double’ hearing process involved – hearing the person who is talking, and hearing the G-dly light in the words. The *tzaddik identifies* more with the G-dly light in the words, and identifies less with the person saying them. He can thereby elevate the words.

To illustrate the concept, Chazal say that whenever the *Megillah* says the word “*HaMelech*” (the king), it is really referring to the “King of the world” (Hashem).<sup>133</sup> When the *Megillah* says “And the king said”, it really means that Hashem was speaking. Let us reflect: When Esther heard Achashveirosh talking, what did she hear? She surely heard Achashveirosh talking, but she also heard within it the King of the world. This was an example of hearing from the “*Chayah*” level of the soul. Since that was the case, the wicked Achashveirosh’s words did not have a negative spiritual effect on her.

If Esther would have only heard Achashveirosh talking, she would have been spiritually harmed by the words of this wicked king, of whom Chazal say was more evil than Haman. But when Esther was hearing Achashveirosh talking, only a small percentage of her hearing was focused on Achashveirosh talking, for the main part of her hearing was focused on the King of the world talking. The G-dly light that was hidden in the words was far more interesting to her than the private conversation that Achashveirosh was having with her. Therefore, she was protected almost entirely from the harmful influence of Achashveirosh’s speech, and that was how she was able to attribute each word to its Source.

If one isn’t aware that all words really contain this ‘double’ hearing process, he will not be able to elevate the words to their Source, for he attributes the words solely to the person who is saying them. But when identifies that the person saying the words is but a ‘garment’, and he mainly connects to the inner point contained in the speech [the “G-dly light” in it – Hashem’s speech] as opposed to the ‘garment’ [the person talking] – he can then elevate the words to their Source, whether they are the words of a gentile or anyone who is far from holiness.

In summary, hearing from the “*Chayah*” level of the soul [with regards to bonding with the Creator] is to hear this ‘double’ process in any words that a person hears, and to thereby connect the Source of the *chiyus* (vitality) contained in the words.

### ***3e. Bonding With The Creator through the Hearing of “Yechidah”***

When we explained how to hear through the *Yechidah* with regards to revealing the self, we described it as a message that one hears forever, which he never forgets. On a deeper note, it serves to reveal the soul. Now we will explain how this concept is applied to bonding with the Creator.

We are pulled after certain sounds. A person is walking in the street and he hears a nice song playing, and he follows the sound; he’s captured for a few moments by the sound.

There are stories of certain *tzaddikim* who said that they would bring the redemption in their lifetime. But, as we know, all of these *tzaddikim* left the world without bringing the redemption. One of these *tzaddikim* was asked in a dream, “Why didn’t it happen?” And the answer was: “When I reached Heaven, I heard a sound that was so pleasant that I was totally pulled after it, unable to concentrate on anything else. I was brought into Gan Eden, and I forgot about what I had promised.” There are other such stories like this, which contain great depth, but here we will take

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133 *Megillah 11a*

out the following deep point: A person can be so pulled after a certain sound and then he connects to the source of the sound, and then he totally forgets about everything else.

When a person hears through his *Yechidah*, he hears the “G-dly light” that is contained in a sound. He feels the meaning of “*Pull me after You, quickly.*”<sup>134</sup> He connects to the Source of the sound he is hearing and he is captured by it, like a rope is pulling him in.

Chazal say that at Har Sinai, our souls left us.<sup>135</sup> We heard the voice of the Creator, and we were so pulled after it that we wanted to return to it, for it is our Source. When a person hears the innermost sound there is, the reality of the Creator, he is pulled after it, and captured by it, and he bonds with the Creator.

This is what it means to hear through the *Yechidah*: to hear the reality of the Creator, which causes one to connect completely to that reality. This is a very inner sound, and when a person hears it, he feels a powerful G-dly light that envelopes him and penetrates into his innermost point of his soul.

It can be experienced sometimes when a person listens to a very holy *niggun* (tune) as a person is amidst a deep inner silence. One can then feel “*My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living Almighty.*”<sup>136</sup> And that thirst is filled through “*Pull me after You, quickly.*”

## 4 – Using The Sense of Hearing To Reveal The Creator Alone

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We have explained how one hears from his soul in order to reveal his self and his bond with the Creator. Now we will proceed to the third step of hearing: to hear the Creator, as it were.

We explained earlier that the purpose of using the sense of hearing is to bring oneself to a point in which he is not thinking of anything at all. But there is an even deeper level: one can use his hearing to reach the depth of his soul, and there, he forgets completely that he exists.

When a person hears something, he is usually very aware of what he is hearing. He thinks into the words. When one thinks of the letters of a word, we said that this is essentially what it means to hear through the *Nefesh*. When one is inspired by what he hears, he is hearing through his *Ruach*. When one is inspired by this to the point of reflecting on what lays behind the words, he is hearing through the *Neshamah*. When a person can identify what the tune of a song is conveying and he realizes that it can be a source of vitality to him, this is hearing through the *Chayah*.

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<sup>134</sup> *Shir HaShirim* 1:4

<sup>135</sup> *Shabbos* 88b

<sup>136</sup> *Tehillim* 42:3

Hearing through the *Yechidah* is to reveal the endlessness of Hashem in what you are hearing. It is beyond the level of one's private *Yechidah*, and it is even beyond the level of *Yechidah* when one personally bonds with the Creator. It is to reveal the endlessness of Hashem within oneself.

It is accessed when a person hears something that is so deep that he forgets he even exists. This does not mean that he hears the Endlessness, of course; this is impossible. It means that one hears so deeply that he has totally abandoned any thoughts about his existence.

There is a kind of hearing which pulls a person after it, as we explained before. In that kind of hearing, a person is still aware of his existence, but he connects himself to the Creator. There is still some trace of one's "I" here. But in the absolute level of hearing, the hearing is such a deep experience that a person doesn't feel himself at all. He does not feel what he is doing. He does not feel any words he is hearing since all is silent; his feelings and thoughts have become integrated in their Root.

At this level, a person doesn't feel his "I" at all; he doesn't feel a thing. When a person is there, he doesn't feel a thing, for it is the level called "*ayin*", nothingness. When one returns from that state, he is very calmed and renewed, and he feels that he has been created anew. It is experienced when a person hears a *niggun* deeply and it touches the depths of his soul, until he feels totally nullified from his own existence. He is consciously aware after this experience that he has become renewed from this state of nothingness; he feels the meaning of how Hashem renews all of Creation.

A person can reach the absolute state of "*ayin*" within himself, and then he can return to consciousness, whereupon he feels like a renewed being. He can now feel like he has become a whole new person.

We have merited to explain, with assistance from Hashem, of how to hear from the soul: to hear one's self, to hear one's bond with the Creator, and to hear the existence of the Creator alone. May we be given from Hashem the ability to really enter within ourselves and reveal our bond with the Creator, until we merit to totally integrate with Him.

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## *17 / Bonding With The Creator Through Scent-Movement*

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### I. Two Different Perspectives – Before the Sin of Adam and After the Sin of Adam

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In this chapter, we will explain, with the help of Hashem, the concept behind the sense of smell.

It is explained in *sefarim hakedoshim* (in *sefer Bnei Yissocher* and in others), that “The sense of smell was not damaged by the sin of Adam HaRishon.” The Gemara also says that “What is something that the *neshamah* (the soul) derives pleasure from, which the *guf* (the body) does not derive pleasure from? It is the sense of smell.”<sup>137</sup>

Since we are up to explaining about how to reveal the soul by way of the sense of smell, we can see from the above two statements in our Sages that it is the sense of smell where the soul is clearly revealed, because the soul enjoys smell. The sense of smell is therefore the area where we can more apparently reveal our soul, for it is the only sense that never received any spiritual damage from sin.

This is a puzzling matter, and it requires some explanation. There are four primary senses, which are sight, hearing, smell and speech. The sense of sight is the most elevated of all the senses, for it is in the eyes, which is in a higher place in the body than the ears (hearing), the nose (smell) and the mouth (speech). If anything, it is the sense of sight which shouldn't have become damaged through the sin. Why is it that only the sense of smell remained undamaged?

The sense of smell is the sense which the *neshamah* enjoys, and it is also the sense associated with Mashiach. The Gemara says that Mashiach will render judgment not through what he sees or what he hears, but from using his sense of smell.<sup>138</sup> He will be able to ‘sniff out’ the truth in everything, and based on this sense, he will judge. There is also a term of “breath”, *ruach*, associated with Mashiach, for it is written of Mashiach, “*The breath of our nostrils, Hashem's anointed*”.<sup>139</sup>

We will attempt here a little to explain this matter. Firstly, we should establish the fact that there are two abilities in our nose: the ability to breathe, and the ability of smell. In Hebrew, these words are similar: *ruach* (air), and *reiach* (smell). There is also a close connection between air/breathing and smell, for Mashiach will possess “*ruach*” (for the term “*ruach apeinu*” is said of Mashiach) and he will also have the unique ability to “sniff out” the truth, which is smell.

The depth of this is laid in understanding the difference between two different ‘modes’ of the Creation – the level before the sin of Adam HaRishon, and the level after the sin of Adam HaRishon.

The simple understanding we are familiar with, which is after the sin, is to be aware that there is movement within Creation, but we do not perceive the entire reality of Creation as a force of movement. The higher understanding, which was the level of before the sin, is the awareness that all of Creation is a force of movement.

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<sup>137</sup> Berachos 43b

<sup>138</sup> Sanhedrin 93b

<sup>139</sup> Eichah 4:20

Generally speaking, we need to see in something what the perspective of “after the sin” is and what the perspective of “before the sin” is, and our *avodah* is to return [on some level] to the level of before the sin of Adam.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, part of our *avodah* is to return to the perspective of before the sin of Adam, where not only does movement play a role in Creation, but that the entire the Creation is a force in movement.

We established in the beginning of this sefer that the *avodah* of man is to recognize that his very existence is movement. However, it is clear to me that not many of those who have heard (or read) these words will immediately understand the importance of this concept. Why is this concept so fundamental in our *avodah*? But now we have explained why. It is because our *avodah* is to return to the perspective of before the sin, where man perceives his very existence as movement. Only now that we live after the sin do we think that movement is just another one of the many forces within Creation.

This is the very first definition we should be aware of here, and it is a very deep one. We will try to explain it more and expand further upon this point, with the help of Hashem.

Let us now explain the difference between these two perspectives. The Torah says, “Six days you shall perform work, and on the seventh day you shall rest.” What happens when we rest from movement? In the perspective before the sin, where all of the reality (*havayah*) is movement, the *menuchah* (serenity) of Shabbos was essentially a revelation of the point above our own *havayah*. But in the perspective after the sin, where all of our *havayah* has become movement, the revelation of *menuchah*/serenity means the revelation of the unmoving reality of Creation, where Creation ceases from movement. It is the point of the *havayah* itself, which exists regardless of movement or not.

This is also the difference between the level of Shabbos we have which came after the sin, and the level of Shabbos of the future. After the sin, Shabbos to us is the *menuchah* which comes after the six days of work. It is a Shabbos within the Creation, which is a reality of movement, but which still exists regardless of movement. When we rest on Shabbos from work, there is still the reality of this Creation, even though there is a cessation of movement. But in the Shabbos of the future, all of *havayah* will be movement, so when there is *menuchah*/serenity, it is a cessation of movement and therefore a cessation of the very *havayah* of Creation. When there is no *havayah*, there is nothing but the light of the Infinite. That will be the state of the Next World.

Thus, either we perceive the Creation as a reality defined as movement [the perspective of before the sin, and the future] or we perceive it as a moving reality [the current state, the perspective after the sin]. These two different perspectives are at the core of all our inner *avodah*, for we wish **to bring our soul into a calm, serene state**. The truth is that **all paths of *avodah* have the ultimate purpose of bringing us to a state of settled mind (*yishuv hadaas*), balance, calmness, and serenity** – no matter which “perspective” we are in, whether it is the six days of the week, or the holy Shabbos, or any of the other viewpoints. They are direct a person towards inner serenity, *menuchah*.

Based upon the above, let us now consider: Why should we wish to reach a state of calmness and serenity? What is it that can be revealed there?

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<sup>140</sup> Editor's Note: A source for this concept is in sefer *Adir B'Marom of the Ramchal*.

If we view it from the perspective after the sin, where there is a moving reality, the reality can still exist regardless of movement [where there is non-movement]. Simply speaking, we regard non-movement as the trait of laziness, because if a person exists and he doesn't feel like moving, we call this laziness. But from the perspective before the sin, where the very reality is defined as movement, the point of non-movement is a "holy" kind of laziness. It is a state where I am not moving because there is no existence of an "I", for it is the state of revelation of the light of the Infinite.

In summation, as long as there is an existent reality even when there is no movement, non-movement is regarded as laziness, but if reality is defined as movement, non-movement is a cessation of my reality, and then there is no possibility of laziness within Creation.

Thus, when a person reaches a state where his soul is not moving – which is really the depth of man's *neshamah* – how does he interpret this?

If he has the lower perspective, which is that movement is connected with *havayah*/reality (and that the reality can still exist independent of movement), this will mean that a *havayah* divorced from movement is a state of his own private *havayah*, for he perceives movement as an additional layer to his *havayah*, and in turn, when movement is removed, the person is left with his own private *havayah*. This serene state would only be a serenity within the dimension of This World.

In contrast, the serenity of the Next World stems from the higher perspective: I am defined by movement, and when I am in a state of non-movement, that means that there is a cessation of the "I". This state of serenity is the secret behind the revelation of the light of the Infinite, where there is no movement. It is an entirely different dimension of non-movement, than the non-movement of This World.

We have so far defined the two different perspectives towards the Creation: The perspective before the sin, where the very *havayah*/reality of the Creation is defined as movement, and the perspective after the sin, where there is a moving reality but where the reality can exist independent of movement. Now we will return to discussing the "*Ruach*" faculty of our soul, which is synonymous with our sense of smell.

## 2. Reality Is Movement: The "Breath of Mashiach"

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In the beginning of this chapter we explained that the nose is the seat of our sense of smell, which in Hebrew is "*reiach*", which is related to the Hebrew word "*Ruach*". We explained the connection. But we should now understand the deeper function of the *Ruach*'s power of movement. If we view it simply as a power of movement, this is the perspective of after the sin. The deeper function of the *Ruach* is really the "*ruach apeinu, mashiach Hashem*"<sup>141</sup> – "The breath of our nostrils, Hashem's anointed." This is not the *Ruach* which we are currently familiar with. Rather, it is the perspective where the reality is defined by movement - by *Ruach*.

The Sages said that scent/*reiach*/*Ruach* is a power that reveals the *neshamah*, and this does not refer to the level of *Ruach* in our times. The air and wind that blows through the world today is not

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<sup>141</sup> *Eichah* 4:20



the “breath of Mashiach”. The Sages said that the “breath of Mashiach” is synonymous with the “spirit of G-d [which] hovered over the face of the water”.<sup>142</sup> In other words, in the future, we will understand that the very *havayah*/reality is *Ruach*/movement.

When revealing the *neshamah* by way of the nose – the sense of smell – this is not referring to the current perception of “*Ruach*” which is the state after the sin. This cannot be, for our true sense of smell has become concealed ever since the sin, as well as the other senses. Rather, when the Sages said that the *neshamah* is revealed by way of the nose/scent, this is referring to the perspective in which our very *havayah*/reality is movement.

Thus, it is now clear that when we discuss the “*Ruach*” faculty of the soul here, it is referring to “*ruach apeinu, mashiach Hashem*”, to perceive the very *havayah*/reality as movement, and that this is a root of revealing the *neshamah*. The Vilna Gaon said that before the sin of Adam, the Creation was in a higher, more spiritual mode of existence, and after the sin, Creation descended to a lower existential level. **After the sin, we now perceive everything from the view of the “*Nefesh*” part of the soul**, with the “*Ruach*” level of the soul above it, and above that, the *Neshamah*. But before the sin, our primary view was from the *Ruach* level of the soul. Thus the Vilna Gaon wrote that when Adam was in Gan Eden, he lived in the dimension of *Yetzirah*, which corresponds to the “*Ruach*” level of the soul.<sup>143</sup>

This is the depth behind the concept of before the sin, where Adam perceived reality as *Ruach*, movement, and after the sin, we now perceive reality on a lower dimension, with the “*Ruach*” level is esoteric to us and it is perceived by us as the hidden motivating force which powers our reality. Thus, in summation, when revealing the *neshamah* by way of the nose [the sense of smell], the first step is to understand this concept, that there is a higher dimension in which reality itself is movement – meaning that movement is the reality.

### 3. The Connection Between Scent (Re’iach) and the “*Ruach*” level of the soul.

*Re’iach*/smell corresponds to the “*Ruach*” level of perception, as follows.

When you see a table, you can only see the table when it is in front of you. If the table is removed, you can’t see it. The same goes for a sound you hear. You can only hear the sound as long as the sound can be audibly heard. But if you are not within audible reach of the sound, you will not hear it. The sense of smell is different. Long after you have smelled something, you can continue to smell it, even after the source of the smell is removed. For example, if a barrel of wine was in a certain place for a long amount of time, and then it is removed from there, the scent of the wine

<sup>142</sup> *Beraishis Rabbah* 1:1

<sup>143</sup> Editor’s Note: To give a brief description, there are four “worlds”, or dimensions of existence, which are each parallel to the levels in the soul: “*Asiyah*” (lit. “Action”, the level of deed), which corresponds to the *Nefesh* level of the soul (and our current initial mode of existence); “*Yetzirah*” (lit. “Formation”, which also corresponds to *middos*, character traits and emotions), which corresponds to the *Ruach* level of the soul (this was the level of Adam in Gan Eden); “*Beriah*” (lit. “Creation”, corresponding to thought), which corresponds to the *Neshamah* level of the soul; and “*Atzilus*” (lit. “Emanation”, corresponding to life-source and closeness with G-d), which corresponds to the *Chayah* level of the soul. (A fifth, higher dimension than this is “Adam Kadmon”, (Primordial Man), the sublime state of total integration with G-d, which corresponds to the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul).

continues to linger in that place. (The depth of this is because a scent can exist even when there is nothing here).

An additional point about smell is that whenever we move a scented item, the scent becomes stronger. When we shake a bottle of *besamim* (spices), it gives off its scent. Thus, scent is connected with movement. The less we move it, the weaker the smell. The more we move it, the more we can smell it.

Thus, there are two aspects in smell: The smell continues to linger after its source has been removed, and smell is revealed through movement. This is connection between *re'iach*/smell and *Ruach*/movement. We have been explaining that movement is reality. So in order to “smell” properly, I must “move” something – and even if the source of the smell is removed, some of the smell still lingers. This is because the movement produces the smell.

## 4. Using The Sense of Smell To Reveal The Self

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Let us now explain how the sense of smell/movement can be used [in *hisbodedus*] throughout the five levels of the soul: the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*.

### **4a) How The “Nefesh” Level of the Soul Perceives Movement**

When we discussed the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul in earlier stages of *hisbodedus*, we explained that it is the simple grasp of reality. What is smell/movement in the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul? It is to simply relate to this concept, that movement is reality.

When it comes to the senses of sight, thought, and hearing, this concept is on a simpler level. But when it comes to the sense of smell, which is linked with movement, the perception of the “*Ruach*” level of the soul, we are dealing with the level of the future. This is known as either the “light of Mashiach”, the “light of the World To Come”, the “light of before sin”, the “light above sin”. The most basic level of this perception, which is from the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul, is to relate to the fact that the very reality is movement. It is that there our reality is in movement – rather, it is that the very reality *is* movement.

This is unlike any of the perceptions through our “*Nefesh*” level of the soul which we have described until now. In the earlier chapters when we spoke about the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul, it was a perception towards reality which is after the sin. Here, however, we are speaking of a sense that directly reveals the soul, which is connected with the level of Mashiach, and it is a perception of before the sin, where the very reality is defined as movement. In this higher perception, reality is not just in movement – rather, the reality itself is movement.

We have had to repeat this several times, but, practically speaking, it will be difficult to absorb this concept. The truth is that we cannot absorb it fully, because we are currently found in the perception after the sin, in which we have become negatively affected by the Serpent. But with the more that the light of Mashiach shines in the world, the more it penetrates into our soul. First, we must at least become intellectually familiar with this concept, and to understand the difference between the two perspectives, even though we cannot absorb it fully.

We will continue to the next step, but all of the coming steps are based on the above perspective.

#### ***4b) How The “Ruach” Level of the Soul Perceives Movement***

The *Ruach* level of the soul is utilized when we understand different directions of movement. There are six general directions to move in (east, west, north, south, above and below). There is the eastern wind, western wind, northern wind, etc. We can discern these different directions of movement through the “*Ruach*” level of the soul.

#### ***4c) How The “Neshamah” Level of the Soul Perceives Movement***

The *Neshamah* level of the soul is used in order to understand the source of movement, the destination of the movement, and its purpose. The *Neshamah* level of the soul corresponds to understanding and intellect – to understand what is being presented by the information in front of us.

Thus, the *Nefesh* level of the soul grasps how reality is movement, the *Ruach* level of the soul grasps what kind of movement it is, and the *Neshamah* level of the soul thinks: “What is it for?” It is about knowing the reason of the movement. When the reason for the movement is understood, one can then determine which direction it is going in. When we know the reason for the movement, accordingly, we can direct the movement.

#### ***4d) How The “Chayah” Level of the Soul Perceives Movement***

The *Chayah* level of the soul perceives how life, itself, is movement – and to thereby derive *chiyus*, life-giving vitality, from movement.

Once a man came with his child to the Chazon Ish, and as the father was talking, the child was laughing, jumping, and being rowdy. The father was uncomfortable that his child was misbehaving in front of the Chazon Ish. The father was about to tell his son to stop the wild behavior. The Chazon Ish said, “He is a child, and this is what he lives from. This is his childhood – don’t take it away from him!”

In other words, the child receives life-giving vitality from his jumpy movement. In adulthood, although we mature past this level, the concept of receiving vitality from movement must remain intact – we only have to refine it. Others become even more childish when they get older, which is not good. In either case, the idea of receiving vitality from movement is meant to carry into adulthood as well. A child becomes energized from playing games, from running after a ball, etc. There are also adults who become energized from merely running. However, even if an adult does not gain vitality from running, in the depths of the soul, he still feels more alive when he moves. This is true for all of us.

The root of the entire Creation is movement. It is explained in *sefer Eimek HaMelech*, and in other places, that the root of Creation began from a removal of Hashem’s Infinite Light – there was a movement. Without getting into the depth of this matter, which is certainly not a simple matter to understand, the basic definition is that movement is the root of Creation. Since movement is the root, it is also the source of our vitality in life.

In order to move, we need a space to move into. If a person is tightly squeezed into an amount of space that holds the exact width and length of his body, he cannot move. One needs some space in

order to move; the bigger the space, the more he can move. The Hebrew word for “space” is *chalal*, which is also equal in value to the Hebrew word for “life”, *chaim*, because the quality of our life is based on how much space we have to move.

At the very beginning state of Creation, the Hashem’s Infinite Light filled all of existence. Afterwards, He removed His Infinite Light to the sides, which left an empty void in its place, where an imprint [of the Infinite Light] remained. What this meant for us is that our life is measured by how much space we have to move into. If we have no space to move into, we have no life – whether we are lacking in physical movement, emotional movement, or mental movement. Thus, we really live from movement.

The less a person is in touch with himself, the more he will deny this fact. The more inward one becomes, the more he realizes that he lives from movement. It is like the verse, “*And the chayos (angels) run and retreat*” – which is explained by early commentaries to mean that the angels receive *chiyus* (vitality) from the very act of running/advancing and retreating.

Thus, the *Chayah* level of the soul, when it comes to movement, is when I feel that I receive vitality from movement. Usually, though, a person receives *chiyus*/vitality from a different source: from the fact that he possesses things. He buys a new piece of furniture, or a new car, or a new house, and this gives him a greater feeling of being alive. However, this is because the person generally has the lower perspective – he acknowledges that reality is in movement, but he does not recognize that movement is reality – and therefore, he feels more alive from the fact that what he possesses. But if we realize that movement is reality, not only will I feel more alive from what I possess, but I will **feel more alive even from the very act of acquiring it.**

We understand clearly that movement and action is a sign of being alive. A dead person cannot move and he cannot do anything. But when it comes to our daily living, do we actually feel more alive from movement? Often, we are living life like a dead person. We generally will feel more alive from what we possess, but not from the movement and actions in our life. But the truth is that a person really does live from movement and action, and not just from what he has.

The Gemara<sup>144</sup> brings a dispute if the land of Eretz Yisrael is inherited by those who left Egypt, or by those who entered the Land. According to one opinion in the Gemara, it is inherited by those who left Egypt, who were already deceased by the time the nation entered the Land, because there can be “inheritance in the grave”, whereupon the deceased person has an acquisition of his inheritance and now passes on the inheritance for his children. Without getting into the details of this discussion, the point we want to take out from this is that even a dead person can acquire something, at least momentarily. Therefore, acquisition or possession of something does not symbolize life, for even a dead person can acquire something.

What, then, is life? Life is only when there is action and movement. A person really derives vitality from the effort of trying to acquire something, and after he acquires it, he no longer derives vitality from it, and he is onto acquiring the next thing. It is like the verse, “*Stolen waters are sweet*” – from whatever I already have, I do not derive vitality from, and I only derive vitality from the act of the movement towards that which I want to acquire.

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The truth is that even a dead person has some degree of vitality which keeps it intact. This is called *kista d'chiyusa*.<sup>145</sup> It has this minimum degree of life, and without it, it wouldn't be here at all. Today, the *chiyus* (vitality) of people resembles this small degree of life that even the dead have. There is barely any genuine *chiyus* today.

However, **the more a person learns how to derive vitality from movement, the more he can tap into this source of energy at every moment, and become revitalized from it. Even if you are physically still, but your emotions or thoughts are active, you can derive vitality from this kind of inner activity.**

On a subtler level, even the physical body is always in movement. When a person is completely still, he won't be able to feel this, because the movement is so subtle. **But from the act of breathing, one can feel his abdomen moving, and the like. This movement is the root of our *chiyus*.**

This understanding, that we can derive *chiyus* from the mere act of moving, is really a perception which comes from before the sin of Adam. However, as with all other powers available in Creation, it can also be misused, such as when a person moves in order to do something evil, *chas v'shalom*. But the root of the perspective itself, of deriving vitality from movement, is a perspective which comes from before the sin. As emphasized, it is not a feeling of vitality derived from what we acquire and have, but from our acts of movement.

There are two kinds of movement [which we can derive vitality from]: a movement in order to acquire something, and a movement in order to negate something. The first kind of movement, which is about acquiring, is referred to as the power of “*Kayin*”, from the word “*kinyan*”, acquiring. The other kind of movement, which is for the purposes of negation of something, is called the power of “*Hevel*”, for the word “*hevel*” means “nothing.”

Before the sin, Adam HaRishon bore two sons, Kayin and Hevel. The children of a person are regarded as the revelation of all the potential forces in one's soul. Kayin and Hevel were thus the revelation of Adam HaRishon's inner potential. “The deeds of the righteous are considered their offspring, and their offspring are considered their deeds.” Before the sin, the perspective of Adam HaRishon was all about movement – either for the purposes of negating (Hevel) or for the purposes of acquiring (Kayin). Thus, what is life? It is entirely about these acts of either acquiring or negating.

In summation, the “*Chayah*” level of perception towards movement is the deep understanding of our soul that we receive our *chiyus*/vitality from the mere act of movement.

This is what is meant by the verse of “*The breath of our nostrils, Hashem's anointed... under whose protection, we had said, we would live among the nations.*”<sup>146</sup> When we are found amongst the gentile nations, it is as if we have no acquisitions of our own, for today we are still in the category of slaves - “We are still the slaves of Achashveirosh”<sup>147</sup> - and a slave does not own any possessions because all that a slave acquires is acquired by his master.<sup>148</sup> If we try to derive *chiyus* from what we possess, we

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<sup>145</sup> Zohar Beraishis 83a

<sup>146</sup> Eichah 4:20

<sup>147</sup> Megillah 14a

<sup>148</sup> Pesachim 88b

will have no true *chiyus*, for we really do not possess anything of our own. But if I derive *chiyus* from the mere act of moving, then even when I am found amongst the gentile nations, and I am bare and with nothing of my own, I can still move. That is only the source of vitality I can drive, which remains with me no matter how much I will lack.

#### ***4e) How The “Yechidah” Level of the Soul Perceives Movement***

Everything in Creation contains the secret of “a thing and its opposite” (*dovor v’hipucho*). If a person wants to understand anything, he also needs to know what its opposite is. Only then will he truly grasp what he wants to understand. If a person only sees “one side of the coin” and he doesn’t see the other side of the coin, then he doesn’t really understand the side of the coin which he sees. This is a fundamental rule which is explained by our Sages, and which is brought by the Vilna Gaon in his commentary to *Mishlei*, and in other places.

For example, a person cannot enjoy wealth unless he knows what it’s like to be poor. Only after being poor can he truly appreciate what it means to be wealthy. If he only knows what it’s like to be wealthy but he has never been poor, he hasn’t truly tasted his own wealth. (Not that being wealthy has a good ‘taste’ to it; we are considering this matter from his perspective.....)

The same is true for a person who wishes to know what wisdom is. If you want to know what it means to be wise, you need to know how a fool thinks. Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest person ever, also understood what foolishness is. He knew what the opposite of wisdom is. This is the secret of *dovor v’hipucho*, a “thing and its opposite – since Shlomo HaMelech knew what a fool is thinking, he was able to understand what wisdom is.

So if we want to understand how all of our life is defined as movement, we also need to understand what **non-movement** is. The reason why we need to know what non-movement is so that we can better understand what movement is. If we were already living from non-movement, we wouldn’t need to understand both sides of the coin (movement and non-movement) – it would not be necessary for us to understand a “thing and its opposite”. The entire reason why we need to understand both sides of the coin in something, “a thing and its opposite”, is because we live from movement.

Thus, in order to what movement is in terms of our soul, we need to have some understanding of non-movement, and then we will be able to have a more genuine understanding of movement.

In terms of our own soul, the *Chayah* level of the soul draws energy from the *Yechidah* level in the soul. It is written, “*And wisdom, from where is it found?*” The wisdom comes “from where”, and in Hebrew, the Torah calls this by the term of *ayin* (nothingness). True wisdom is nursed forth from this source, *ayin*.

When a person does not get his wisdom from this source, *ayin*, he thinks that the wisdom itself is the source of life. He will not relate to a concept of non-movement, so he will not either fully understand what movement is. By contrast, when a person knows how to derive vitality even from the non-moving point of *ayin*, he can receive vitality in his movements from the source, non-movement. Then a person can reveal what movement is, and what non-movement is, and he can then see “both sides of the coin” clearly.

Based upon what has been explained here, we can now understand that the concept of the *Yechidah* is to reach the deepest, innermost point in the soul – which is unmoving. On a deeper level, one needs to go through a cycle of deriving vitality from non-movement, then movement, then non-movement, etc. Then a person will understand the secret of movement – its source, and how it is the true source of our vitality.

When one gains both of these perspectives in his soul – movement and non-movement – he appreciates how non-movement contributes to the vitality in his movement. He understands that if he receives vitality from non-movement, this will infuse his movements with vitality and vice versa. Non-movement must be seen as a way to appreciate movement. Otherwise, a person will try to only live from non-movement, and this is not possible in our current state.

Only when we become fully integrated with the Creator, can we live entirely from a non-movement. We will explain more about this later. The balance we need to have is to be able to derive vitality from both movement and non-movement, in a cycle. Since we are using non-movement in order to relate better to movement, that means we will never fully understand non-movement. Thus, when we are in [*the first stage of hisbodedus*] the stage of revealing the self as a *neshamah*, it is not possible to fully grasp what non-movement is.

## 4. Bonding With The Creator Through Movement

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Until now, we explained the concept of movement through the five layers of the soul – *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*. This was all the first stage of *hisbodedus* – revealing the self – via [the means of the sense of scent, which we have defined here as] movement. It is now upon us to understand the next two stages of *hisbodedus* with regards to movement: the stage of bonding with the Creator, and after that, the stage of revealing the Infinite. In this higher stage, the non-movement is on the absolute level, whereas in the first stage, revealing the self, we cannot have total grasp of non-movement.

### ***4a) Bonding With The Creator Through Movement of “Nefesh”***

Earlier in this chapter, when we explained the first stage, revealing the self, we explained that the “*Nefesh*” level in this stage is to grasp the very concept that our reality is movement.

When it comes to the next stage – bonding with the Creator – this will mean that I perceive myself as a moving force by the One who is moving me. In the first stage, where the purpose is to reveal the self, I simply perceive that my existence is a moving force, as if “I” am moving myself. But in the second stage, where the purpose is to bond with the Creator, I acknowledge that my existence is movement as attached with the Creator: my existence is a force of movement that is being simulated by the Creator.

This concept is also known as “*Yediah*”, the perspective of “higher knowledge”, which is beyond the dimension of our *bechirah*, free will. From the point of our free will, I am a force of movement and I am also causing myself to move. There is an “I” here that is moving me. I can choose how I

will move, I can motivate myself, etc. But from a higher perspective, my entire existence is being moved by the Creator. This higher reality is the *yediah*/knowledge that is above my *bechirah*/free will. Both viewpoints are true and existing – it merely depends on what which perspective of the soul I am viewing this matter from.

This is the “*Nefesh*” level of bonding with the Creator through movement: to understand that our reality is a moving force, which is motivated by the Creator.

#### ***4b) Bonding With The Creator Through The Movement of “Ruach”***

The “*Ruach*” level in bonding with the Creator through movement is built upon the previous level, *Nefesh*. It is to identify which direction the Creator is moving me [or others] towards. For example, one realizes that Hashem is using His trait of kindness upon him [or on another]. He sees how Hashem is dealing with him *middah k'neged middah*, “measure for measure”, either meting out kindness to him, or judgment; or when one recognizes that Hashem is punishing the wicked.

So far, we have explained how reality itself is movement, it is being simulated by the Creator, and that there are different directions which Hashem moves us in. One should analyze the “movements” he comes across and see what kind of movement it is [i.e. if Hashem is using *midas hachessed*, the attribute of kindness, or *midas hadin*, the attribute of justice etc.].

#### ***4c) Bonding With The Creator Through The Movement of the “Neshamah”***

We have defined so far that our reality is entirely a force of movement, and its Simulator is the Creator. The next step is to see: What is the purpose of a particular movement?

This is all explained at length in the *sefarim* of the Ramchal, who explained that the ultimate purpose of the entire Creation is “to reveal the oneness of G-d”. The Ramchal explains that the entire universe moves towards this one direction alone: the revelation of the Creator upon everything. This is the purpose of all the “movements” in Creation.

This is the “*Neshamah*” level in bonding with the Creator through movement: to recognize that all of reality is movement, it is being conducted by the Creator, and the purpose of all of these movements is to reveal His oneness upon the universe.

#### ***4d) Bonding With The Creator Through The Movement of “Chayah”***

Earlier, when we explained the “*Chayah*” level of the first stage of *hisbodedus*, revealing the self, via movement, we explained that it is for one to understand that he is a being who receives *chiyus* (vitality) from his very movements. The stage after that was to bond with the Creator through the *Chayah* level of the soul, which is to derive vitality from the fact that we are being led and conducted by the Creator.

In the first stage, a person learns how to feel more alive from his very movements, for the purpose of developing his own private self. Since the focus in this stage is on the “I”, a person in this stage



will have the understanding that it is his own “I” which gets him moving. It is a stage where one feels vitality from the fact that “I am the one who motivates myself.”

But in the next stage, bonding with the Creator, one must identify that his movements are being conducted by the **Creator**. Here, one receives vitality from a sense of self-nullification, a realization that “I” am not the motivating force of my own movements. Rather, the Creation, in His infiniteness, is the One who conducts all of my movements. The *chiyus* here is derived from the fact that **I am totally nullified to the Creator, for He leads me.**

Moshe *Rabbeinu* is called the “faithful shepherd.”<sup>149</sup> A shepherd’s entire role is to lead and direct the flock. In the same way, Moshe led the entire Jewish people. It would seem that he was leading us due to his own power. But Moshe *Rabbeinu* is also called “trustworthy servant”<sup>150</sup>, for he sensed that all movement did not come from his own power. He was not just a “servant” in the sense of not owning anything for himself, but a “servant” in a manner of the soul, of being totally nullified to Hashem – meaning, he senses that his entire power to lead was not coming from himself, but from Hashem.

Moshe was leading the nation, but the “*Shechinah* spoke from his throat”, so who was truly leading the nation? Hashem! When one has the perspective that “Moshe” can lead the nation, this is really the perspective that comes from the “I”. But when one is aware that Moshe’s power to lead is entirely that the “*Shechinah* spoke from his throat”, he is aware that it is the Creator Who leads the nation.

A person may feel more energized from his movements, in the same way that a child becomes excited from running, without recognizing that it is the Creator Who is moving him. He experiences the movement purely as movement, without attributing the Creator as its source. But when one reaches the inner understanding, the deep point in the soul, that man’s movements are entirely conducted by the Creator – and along with this, he also feels a vitality from these kinds of movements – he is living from the Creator’s movements of him.

Compare this to the following parable. A father takes his child and enables him to jump up and down, holding him strong so that the child can jump high. If the child would be jumping on his own, without the father’s support, it would be with far less excitement. The child feels excited from the fact that his father is enabling him to jump.

This parable does not fully illustrate the lesson we are trying to convey here. In the depth of the soul, one can feel, “*Like an infant on his mother’s lap*”,<sup>151</sup> to feel alive from bond with the Creator. When one feels that his movements come from the Creator, there is certain pleasure that can be felt in in this.

When we explained the level of “*Neshamah*” level of bonding with the Creator through movement, we defined it as being aware of the purpose of a movement, and that the purpose of each movement is the revelation of the oneness of Hashem. But in the “*Chayah*” level of bonding with the

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<sup>149</sup> Zohar Beraishis 106a

<sup>150</sup> Bamidbar 12:7

<sup>151</sup> Tehillim 131:2

Creator, we are not focusing on the purpose of all movements; rather we are focusing on the fact that Hashem is causing me to move, and, as a result, we feel certain vitality from this awareness.

Understandably, in order to feel *chiyus* from the fact that Hashem is allowing all of your movements, you first need to have a feeling towards Hashem “*as an infant on his mother’s lap*”, or like a child riding on his father. The deeper of this feeling one has, the more he can revel in his movements when he is aware that they are all being allowed by the Creator of the world. Accordingly, the less a person is deriving vitality from his bond with the Creator in the first place, the less he will feel vitality from his movements even if he knows that they are empowered by Hashem.

#### ***4e) Bonding With The Creator Through The Movement of “Yechidah”***

Earlier in this chapter, when we explained the first stage in *hisbodedus*, of revealing the self, we defined the “*Yechidah*” in terms of understanding “something and its opposite” (*dovor v’hipucho*). The *Chayah* level of our soul is within our movements, whereas the *Yechidah* level of the soul is the mode of non-movement. When we can understand something and its opposite, we can then understand what the absolute level of movement is.

In the stage of revealing the self (through movement), we explained that we cannot fully understand non-movement. This is because our entire experience of the “*Yechidah*” level of our soul, or our non-moving point, can only be accessed through moving from our “*Chayah*” level of the soul towards the *Yechidah* level of the soul, then from the *Yechidah* back to *Chayah*, and repeating the cycle. Therefore, our entire understanding of the “*Yechidah*” part of our soul is always viewed, on some subtle level, through a perspective that is within movement.

The unmoving Reality which exists – to use a borrowed terminology, for lack of a better description – is the existence of the Creator. All of the creations, in contrast, are in movement, and even more so, their very existence is a force of movement. The *EinSof* (Infinite) of our Blessed Creator has no physical properties, and there is no physical resemblance of Him. Even the spiritual form of our physicality – the inner makeup of man, which is called *Adam Kadmon* (Supernal Man), is in the category of movement. Thus, when we say that the Infinite has no resemblance in the physical, we mean that the Creator does not exist as a moving reality, but as a non-moving Reality.

A human being is imperfect, and he moves from completion, to incompleteness, then back to completion, etc., in a cycle. In contrast, the Infinite of the Creator is complete, with no “movement”, as it were – for movement implies that there is something here which needs to become complete, and this cannot apply to the Creator, Who is already complete.

Thus, if we are coming to reveal the non-moving point in our soul, the absolute non-movement is only in the light of the Infinite. All created beings are a force of movement, and only the Infinite of the Creator is, so to speak, non-moving. So, **if we want to reveal the non-moving point, the only way is to reveal the light of the Infinite.**

There are two stages to this. The first stage is to reveal the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul for the purpose of bonding with the Creator, which is the current, intermediate stage that we are explaining. The higher, deeper stage is to reveal the Infinite - for that very purpose, and for no other reason.

Let us reflect about these two stages: The stage of bonding with the Creator through the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul, and then the stage of revealing the light of the Infinite.

The first stage, revealing the “*Yechidah*” level of our soul in our bond with the Creator, is a kind of movement. There is my “I”, there is the Infinite of the Creator, and there is the bond between. This parallels the concept of, “The Holy Blessed One, Yisrael, and the Torah, are one.” There is the Jewish people and the Creator, and the point that connects them together is the holy Torah. We relate to this as “three” different points – Hashem, the Jewish people, and the Torah. Clearly, a system of “three” points is within the perspective of movement, for if there would only be one point, there is no movement. One point will not move, whereas three points will involve movement.

Thus, when bonding with the Creator through the “movement” of the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul, there is an “I” – otherwise known as my “*Chayah*” point of the soul – “I” am being moved by the Creator, and I move to form a bond with the Creator. There, I reach the level of absolute non-movement, as it were, since the Infinite is absolute non-movement. Then I can return from non-movement into the mode of movement, and vice versa, in a cycle.

## 5. In Summary of the Three Applications of Movement Through The *Yechidah*

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In order to better understand these definitions, let us establish the single definition of the three different perspectives we explained so far which involved the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul, one by one:

1. **Revealing the “*Yechidah*”, In Relation To Revealing the Self:** In this level, I perceive my existence as my very “I”, and even in the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul, I perceive movement in terms of moving back and forth between my “*Chayah*” and “*Yechidah*” levels of the soul. This is not the total level of non-movement [because it is about my “I”].
2. **Revealing The “*Yechidah*”, In Relation To Revealing My Bond With The Creator:** In this level, to touch upon my *Yechidah* level of the soul means for me that I am touching upon the light of the Infinite (the *ohr EinSof*). Although I am relating to this Infinite Light from a perspective of movement, I am still somewhat “touching” upon a level (a spiritual light – the light of the Infinite) where there is no movement.
3. **Revealing The “*Yechidah*”, In Relation To Revealing The Creator (Within The Presence of Created Being)** – In this level, there is no identification with my “I”, for when the light of the Infinite Light is truly revealed to a person, it is not in relation to his “I”. It is a state where a person receives the spiritual light in which there is no movement at all. Although a person after reaching this state will still be returning to his “I” afterwards, this does not mean that he reached the light of the Infinite from any attempt to “move” towards it [rather, he has reached it because he has touched upon the point where there is non-movement].

Now we will review the above three definitions in detail, for they are each very subtle points of the soul.

**[5a: Revealing The Yechidah – In Order To Reveal The Self]**

Revealing the *Yechidah* level of the soul, for the purpose of revealing the self, contains *dovor v'hipucho*, a “thing and its opposite”, because it incorporates both the concepts of movement and non-movement. However, it is all within the “I”.

We can try to understand this with the following illustration from our physical world. Sometimes a person is walking, and sometimes a person is standing. But even when a person is standing, he is essentially a walking being. He is only “standing” with regards to the fact that he isn’t walking. Even when one is standing still, he perceives his “I” as a moving force, for he knows that he is capable of movement. I connect outward to anything by moving towards it, and whatever I receive is all within my movement. Even if I am resting and I am totally still, it is only a rest with regards to movement – the fact that I am currently not moving. We see rest (*menuchah*) as a way to rest from movement, and this is not the true level of rest (*menuchah*).

This is why, when we are at the stage of revealing the self through the movement of *Yechidah*, it contains *dovor v'hipucho* – “a thing and its opposite”. The *Yechidah* is the total opposite of the concept of movement, which means that the non-movement of the *Yechidah* [when it comes to revealing the self] is only in relation to movement.

Compare this to the difference between a person who is not walking, because he is standing, with a person who is not walking because he is paralyzed. They are both standing still, but we can see that their stillness is on the same level? Certainly, the person who isn’t paralyzed is only being still for the moment, whereas the paralyzed person is still because that is his natural state.

**[5b: Revealing The Yechidah – To Bond With the Creator]**

In the next level of *hisbodedus*, a person reveals the *Yechidah* for the purpose of bonding with the Creator. How can I connect with my Creator? From within my movements. But what is it that I am connecting with? To the light of the Infinite, which is non-moving.

This is the difference between the first and second stages when connecting to the point of non-movement. In the first stage, I am connecting to non-movement for the purpose of better understanding movement. This involves a “thing and its opposite”, for in this stage, there is both the aspect of movement as well as non-movement. The non-movement here is only with regards to movement, and therefore, it is not the complete level of non-movement. In the higher stage, though, which is to connect to the Creator through the *Yechidah* level of the soul, I am connecting to a point that is non-moving, but I am not doing so through moving towards it. The light itself which I am connecting with is a non-moving light, but my tool to get there is by way of movement.

**[5c: Revealing the Yechidah – To Reveal The Infinite]**

In this highest level, a person is not focusing on revealing his bond with the Creator. Instead, he is interested in one thing alone: to reveal the very reality of the Infinite, as it were. Here, a person has no sense of self. All he feels is the reality and presence of the Creator, the Infinite, Blessed is He - alone.

Here, a person is not connecting to the *Yechidah* level through movement – which would be through his “I” – because if he is trying to connect to there from his “I”, he is “moving” from the *Chayah* level in the soul to the *Yechidah* level of the soul, and his entire connection would come about through a mode of movement. Since the definition of recognizing the reality and presence of the Creator is not in relation to the self, the power to connect to this reality is not through the “I” at all. And since it is not a connection brought about by the “I”, the spiritual light which one can receive from this level is from a plane of non-movement. Hence, the only way to connect to this place is through a mode of non-movement.

## 6. “It’s Not About Me”

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This is a matter which requires explanation, for we have defined the final level as a level that has no relation to the self of a person, but on the other hand, how can we ignore our own sense of self, when it is ultimately our *self* which must perceive and *feel* the light of the Infinite?

Thus, it is upon us to understand if this level is reached through our “I” or if there is “no I” here. In other words: We need to know when something is in the category of our “I”, and when something is in the category of “no I”.

The understanding of this matter is as follows. When I have a sense of self, of my “I”, and I am revealing any of the various levels, the definition is that I am revealing that level within the self, my “I”. Meaning, when I feel my bond with my Creator, I am feeling my Creator in relation to myself. But if I am only sensing my Creator without a sense for myself, on one hand, there is definitely an “I” here, because otherwise, there is no “I” here to feel anything; but on the other hand, this can be defined as a state where there is “no I” [for I am only feeling the presence of the Creator with no sense about myself.]

The more that a person purifies himself internally, the less he focuses on his sense of self, on his I, whereas the less purified he is, the more he identifies with the I, and he will not be able to go beyond the level of his personal bond with the Creator to the higher level - which is *reveal* the Creator, alone.

## 7. The “I” Is A Garment of the Infinite Light

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While presenting these lessons, a question arose from one of the listeners in the audience: If the highest level is absolute non-movement, and it is reached through touching upon the point in the soul where there is non-movement, how then is it possible for us to define this is something we can “feel”, since feeling is an example of movement?

The answer to this is in the same way we can understand that a person can perceive that he exists, not because of any movement or feeling, but simply because he has the ability to perceive himself. Therefore, we use the word “feel” or “sense” simply because we have no better way of expressing this point. We can compare it to the ability in a person to sense his own existence, which is not due to

any feeling per se, and not because he sees himself as a moving force. This is also the source of the ability of a person to sense the Infinite.

When one senses his existence, this does not elicit any movement from him, except if he is feeling his ego, which is connected to movement. The very sensing of your own reality, however, is unmoving, and it does not elicit any movement – for it is already built from within itself.

However, when a person senses the revelation of the light of the Infinite [the presence of the Creator], his very self becomes turned into movement. Let us explain how this works.

If we have a totally superficial perspective, we do not define man as a being of non-movement, but as a moving being. This perspective would be applicable to a person who has never revealed the light of the Infinite within him. But if a person has revealed the light of the Infinite, his very essence becomes that of movement, because as soon as he integrates himself into the light of the Infinite, he does not feel any sense of self, and in that state, he reveals the state in which his entire existence is that of movement.

As long as a person views non-movement as the deepest point he can reach, he cannot reveal the state where he perceives his very existence as movement. When he can feel that his very existence as movement? The moment he reveals the light of the Infinite, he reveals that **his “I” is but a “garment” of this Infinite Light** – his “I” will sometimes be sensed, and sometimes it will not, so he has become an existence of movement.

This is the depth of what we explained in the beginning of this chapter, that it is the inner work of man to perceive his very existence as movement.

We first explained the difference between before the sin and after the sin. When we perceive movement within reality but we do not attribute movement as the very force of reality, this is the perspective of “after the sin”, and when we perceive all of reality as being movement, this is the perspective of “before the sin”.

Now we have just clarified that as long as a person has not yet reached the light of the Infinite, the deepest point he can feel in his soul is his very “I”, and he will feel it constantly, and he will view “non-movement” as the very “I”. In his perspective, he is a reality of non-movement, so he still has not yet perceived that his very reality is movement. He views himself as a being of non-movement, and he views movement only as a garment atop his very “I”. But when a person reveals within him the light of the Infinite, he will sometimes feel the “I”, and he will sometimes not feel it; as a result, he reveals his very “I” as non-movement, and he will then be able to view the very reality of all of Creation as movement.

## In Conclusion

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These words are very subtle and very deep. It is difficult to understand them at first glance and it requires a lot of thinking, until a person gets used to hearing or reading material of this sort. A person will have to review this chapter several times and then think and reflect about the material here, in order to understand the depth of the words.

It has been explained here that we need to view our very reality as a “garment” of the light of the Infinite, and not simply as a “reality” per se. Pharaoh thought he was a god, and the depth of his attitude was because he thought he is a being of non-movement. He thought that he had reached his very “I” and that he had discovered the very final point to reach, which he thought was the point of non-movement. When a person reaches the depth of the Infinite Light that is within him, he perceives his existence as a garment for the Infinite Light, whereupon he becomes an existence of movement. He can then understand and perceive his very reality and existence as being a force of movement.

Since there is a rule that “the end is contained in the beginning”, we can learn that the endpoint of the soul, the “*Yechidah*”, is really rooted in the perspective contained in the elementary level of the soul, the “*Nefesh*”. When we explained the *Nefesh* level of the soul in regards to how we perceive movement, we explained that it means to perceive our reality as movement, and that this is the secret of the matter of Mashiach, who is also the most secret level of the *Yechidah*. The *Nefesh* level of the soul is rooted in the *Yechidah* level of the soul, because the *Nefesh* can only perceive our reality as movement if it has the perspective of the *Yechidah*, which is to view our reality as a garment of the light of the Infinite.

As long as we view ourselves as nothing but a “reality” that is not connected with the reality of the Infinite Light, we view our very essence as non-movement and we view movement as just another force that plays a role in Creation. But when we perceive our reality as a garment for the Infinite Light, our soul will then sometimes feel a sense of self and sometimes it will not feel any sense of self. In that level, we become movement, which we are – and then we will perceive our very reality as movement.

May we all merit, with Hashem’s help, to integrate ourselves with the Creator, completely.

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## *18 / Bonding With The Creator Through Speech*

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### Introduction: Using The Soul's Power of Speech

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We have merited until here, with Hashem's help, to explain how to use the senses of sight, hearing, and smell [in *hisbodedus*]. In this chapter, with the help of Hashem, we will explain how to use the sense of speech [in *hisbodedus*].

In the previous senses which we explained about, we divided the use of the senses into three stages: in relation to revealing the self, in relation to revealing man's bond with his Creator, and in relation to revealing the Infinite (so to speak). With speech, however, there will be five applications of this power:

1. Speaking with oneself (like we find by Channah, mother of Shmuel HaNavi, when she spoke "with her heart").
2. Speaking to another.
3. A teacher who is speaking to his students, or a leader speaking to a gathering of people.
4. Speaking to the Creator.
5. Speaking about the very revelation of the Infinite (so to speak).

As in the past, we will explain how these modes of talking are expressed through the five dimensions of the soul: the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*.

### I- Using The Sense of Speech to Reveal the Self: Talking with Oneself

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#### *1a) Speaking from the "Nefesh" level of the soul*

The "*Nefesh*" level of the soul is about perceiving reality as it is. The role of the *Nefesh* is to know: What is the reality? What is the conceptual definition?

Speech on the level of "*Nefesh*" is when one [is speaking from a perspective in which he] perceives the reality of man as being a creature of speech (*medaber*).

There are four levels of creations – *doimem* (the "still" – i.e. rocks), *tzomeiach* (growing organisms, such as plants), *chai* (living beings, such as animals), and *medaber* (social creatures – human beings). When one perceives the very concept of man as being a social creature, this is the speech of the "*Nefesh*" level of the soul.

Let's be clear about this definition. This is not a superficial understanding in which a person simply views himself as a "*medaber*", (social creature). It is a rather a more inner understanding, in which one perceives that the very essence of man is to be a *medaber*, a being that is meant to utilize



the power of speech [for spiritual purposes], and he is speaking from that inner attitude. It is when one is speaking with the realization and understanding that his very reality is to become a “*medaber*”.

Perceiving oneself as a *medaber* is also linked with the concept that man is a creature of movement (*tenuah*), which we discussed in the previous chapter. Speech is in the category of movement, for it is the force by which a person leads and guides. The rocks and the land, the plants, and the animals do not lead and guide Creation from beginning until end. Only man - the “*medaber*”, the being capable of speech - can lead and guide the Creation from beginning until end. For one to perceive himself as a *medaber*, he must realize that he has the power to lead, guide, and move things [to his human and limited extent, of course].

Before the sin of Adam HaRishon, man was mainly a creature of movement, and after the sin, man is mainly defined as a creature of speech. Movement corresponds to the “*Ruach*” level of the soul, as explained in the previous chapter; the primary mode of man before the sin was movement/*Ruach*, and after the sin, the primary mode has become speech.

We can see both of these modes apparent even now: we breathe in and out through the nose (in Hebrew, nose is “*af*”, and the term for “breath of the nostrils” is “*ruach apeinu*”, thus the breathing through the nose corresponds to the “*Ruach*” level of the soul), as well as through the mouth (corresponding to speech). We find two forms of movement, which are each primary aspects in man – movement through the nose (breathing), and movement through the mouth (speech).

Thus, before the sin, where the “*Ruach*” level of the soul was more apparent, man could connect to the Creator through the mere act of breathing in and out. This *avodah* is explained extensively in the *sefarim* of Rav Abulefia, and it was later mentioned in other *sefarim* that are not so well-known. Through breathing in and out, man can connect to the root of all creations: movement. Now that we are after the sin, we perceive the force of movement in man as the power to lead, which is personified by the power of speech.

Thus, both speech and breathing are expressions of movement, but there are two levels of perception: there is a perception where man connects to his movement aspect just through breathing (this was the level before the sin), and there is a perception where man connects to his movement aspect through speech. When I have the understanding that speech personifies the reality of man as a moving force, this is the “*Nefesh*” level in speech.

In the previous chapter, we explained the concept of defining our reality as constantly being in motion, as well as the understanding that our reality is always being guided [by Divine Providence of the Creator]. The first level of perception is the “*Ruach*” level. This level is reflected by the personal *avodah* of focused breathing, of concentrating on the inhale and exhale without doing anything else; on a deeper level, it is to connect oneself to our very reality of movement. In the second level of perception, in which we perceive reality as constantly being moved and led by a guiding force [the Creator], it is speech which personifies this perspective. Through speech, a person guides and affects Creation.

Thus, the “*Nefesh*” level in speech is when one has the deep understanding that man is a *medaber* – a social creature – in the sense that his speech is a guiding force in Creation. As the *Mesillas Yesharim* says, when one elevates himself spiritually, he elevates the entire world with him, and when he ruins himself spiritually, he ruins the entire world with him. A person moves, leads, and guides the Creation.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was told on the final day of his life that he will not be able to “leave and enter” Hashem’s Presence. This is the movement aspect of man. Up until his day of death, his role was to “leave and enter” whenever he chose. This personified the leadership role of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who guided the entire people. Every person as well, on a private level, has the power to lead and guide himself, and this is the aspect of “Moshe” within the soul.

In summary, the “*Nefesh*” level when using the power of speech is when one realizes his power to lead, guide, and thereby affect the direction of Creation, through his words. It is when one speaks from the understanding that not only is the entire Creation a moving system, but that man is a guiding force of the entire universe.

### ***1b) Speaking from the “Ruach” level of the soul***

How does one guide his power of speech in the proper direction? After one understands that he is a *medaber* (social creature) who affects the direction of Creation through the movement of speech, the next point is to use his *bechirah* (free will) in how he will guide his speech. His words may either lead to expansion or contraction, ascent or descent, joy or sadness, zeal or laziness.

As a person is talking, he can feel which direction his speech is going in – what kind of emotion it is evoking in him. This is true whether a person is speaking with himself, or with another. One should identify if his talking is awakening joy, love, sadness, etc. Any of these emotions can be awakened either by the content of what is talking about, or by the person he is talking about, or by the place he is in, or any other factor. In any case, speech is always activating some emotion in the person, and a person should become aware of it.

We mentioned that there is a mode of talking in which one speaks with himself, and there is a mode of talking in which a person speaks with another.

**When a person talks with himself**, this is called “inward conversation”. There are several parts to a person – the five layers of the soul, which are the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*, as well as the physical body. A person has the ability to speak with himself through any of these parts of himself, addressing a higher part of himself through a lower part of himself. Just as a person can talk to another, so can a person talk with himself. A person may talk to the body, or to the lowest level of the soul, the “*nefesh habehaimis*” (animal level of the soul), or to the higher parts of the soul.

We find that by Channah, it is written, “*And Channah spoke on her heart.*” She “spoke on her heart”, meaning, she spoke with herself. Speaking with oneself is essentially a way for a person to guide and conduct oneself.

When a person talks to himself, if he is doing so because he is drunk or insane (G-d forbid), such speech is not bringing him anywhere. This is what Eli HaKohen thought of Channah when he saw her talking to herself. He assumed she was drunk, because it is the way of drunken people to talk to themselves. But when a person is aware that he is a *medaber* and that he can use his speech to guide himself, he uses the power of talking to himself as a way to guide himself and somewhere with this talking. This is all the “*Ruach*” level of speech.

Where does a person want to bring himself to, through speaking to himself? Each situation may be different. He may want to talk to himself in a way that disciplines his *nefesh habehaimis*, or he may talk to himself in a way that inspires the “G-dly” layer of the soul, his *nefesh Elohis*. He uses the speech with himself to move, guide, and conduct himself on an inward level.

The same applies to speaking with a friend: one may speak to his friend with the intention of bonding with him. **When speaking to another person**, a person is guiding and conducting the bond between them. On the most external level, a person is guided by another when he asks for directions and his friend shows him the way to go. On a more inner level, one speaks to another in order to have an emotional bond with him.

Speaking to oneself can only be beneficial on condition that it is not random, superficial babbling to yourself, which resembles the chirping of the birds.

Chazal state that there are conversations between the birds, as well as conversations between the palm trees.<sup>152</sup> Why then is man called *medaber*, if these things can talk also? If animals and plants can converse with each other, what then is the unique quality of speech that man possesses? The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that the conversations of the animals, birds and plants cannot guide or conduct anything through their words. Only man has the power to guide and conduct through his words, both in relation to conducting himself and in relation to conducting and affecting his relationships with others.

Thus, in summation, speech is an ability of movement. When one is simply aware that his speech is a force of movement, this is the “*Nefesh*” level of speech, and one is guiding the direction of the speech, whether in relation to conducting himself or his relationship with others, this is the “*Ruach*” level of speech.

### ***1c) Speaking From the “Neshamah” level of the soul***

The Ramban writes in a letter to his son, “Think about the words you will say, before you release them from your mouth.” The thinking that precedes one’s words is the “*Neshamah*” aspect of speech, for thought and reflection corresponds to the *Neshamah* level of the soul.

A person thinks about what he will say before he talks, to prepare his words. But speaking itself is also an expression of thought. The Zohar states, “*Daas ganuz b’pumei*”, “Understanding is hidden in the mouth.” When a person is speaking about a certain topic, he will first think about what he will say, and as he is talking, he will notice more details about the topic. Any person can try this with himself and see that as he is talking, he gains new insights of understanding about what he’s talking about, while talking about it.

Sometimes a person gets an idea, and he tells it over to his spouse or to a friend, and as he is talking, he begins to absorb what he is saying in a way that he did not have when he originally thought of the idea. The words release the potential of the idea. (On a mystical level, this is because speech reveals “lower wisdom”, *chochmah tataah*, which corresponds to “*Malchus*”, which corresponds to the Oral Torah.<sup>153</sup>) As a person speaks, he activates the wisdom within the words.

Thus, the “*Neshamah*” level in speech is when a person reveals thought and wisdom contained in the words. The initial level of this is when a person thinks before he talks about the words he will say, and in this stage, the thought in the words is only in its potential state. When the person says his words and he gains more insight into what he’s talking about, the “understanding hidden in the words” is activated, which gives him further understanding into his own words.

As with the other levels of the soul, this concept applies whether speaking with oneself, with others, or with the Creator.

### ***1d) Speaking from the “Chayah” level of the soul***

It is written, “*And man became a living spirit*”, which the Torah calls “*nefesh chayah*”. The *Targum Onkelos* says that this means *ruach memalelah*, a “talking spirit” [the ability of speech]. It is also written, “*My soul leaves at His word.*”

[The “*Chayah*” level in speech is when one is speaking from his inner *chiyus*/vitality.]

The *Chovos Halevovos* wrote that the lightest part of the body is the tongue [implying that speech flows freely from a person], whereas the Chazon Ish said about himself that he finds that the tongue is the heaviest part of his body. The Chazon Ish was not arguing, *chas v’shalom*, on the words of the *Chovos Halevovos*, who was one of the *Rishonim*, which are considered to be on the level of angels. Rather, it depends on how a person is talking.

If a person is talking superficially, without putting his soul into the words, then the tongue is the lightest part of the body. That was what the *Chovos HaLevovos* was talking about – when one talks superficially. When a person does not think that much about what he is saying and he isn’t investing that much energy into his words, he has no problem chattering naturally and freely. But the Chazon Ish was speaking about a deeper level of speech, where a person is investing his energy into his words. Such talking requires more energy, and that is why the Chazon Ish had a hard time speaking, because his speaking used up his energy.

The average person will not lift a 70-pound package on his shoulders, unless he has a very good reason to, because this requires a great amount of strength and energy. When a person is speaking, he is usually not using that much energy, because he is not speaking from his inner *chiyus* (vitality), and therefore he does not feel any difficulty with talking as much as he wishes. After he is done talking, he does not either feel that he has used up his energy, since he was only talking superficially and he did not put that much energy into his words.

A person may have a hard time talking, but this does not always mean that his speech comes from the “*Chayah*” level of the soul. For example, he may have a dry throat, or he might have a more inner reason, such as not wanting to waste time with chatter. But it is not because speaking drains him from his energy. In contrast, when a person is connected to the “*Chayah*” level of the soul in his speech, he wants to speak from an inner place in himself. He speaks from his inner *chiyus*, and such speaking uses his energy. When he is done speaking, he is drained from energy, and that is why he lessens his amount of talking.

Thus, when the Chazon Ish said about himself that he finds his tongue to be the heaviest part of his body, this was not because he was simply trying to guard his speech, as explained in the laws of *sefer Chofetz Chaim* (which, of course, is a precious *avodah* in and of itself). It is rather because since “*Death and life are in the hands of the tongue*”, speech releases the *chiyus* (energy) of a person, and the more one speaks on an inner level, the more he can feel that he is losing his energy as he is talking. The Chazon Ish spoke from his *chiyus* and therefore his speaking left him drained afterwards, thus he found his tongue to be “heavy” on him and that is why refrained from talking whenever possible.

Talking on the “*Chayah*” level of the soul is when a person invests his energy into what he is saying, and his words leave a mark. Such words will be “Words that come from the heart, enter the heart.”<sup>154</sup> This applies both when speaking to oneself as well as when speaking to others. When such a person a person speaks to others, his words enter their hearts, and when he speaks with himself, the words enter his own heart.

The more a person speaks from his *pnimiyus* (innerness), the more of a difficulty he will have with talking, because his talking requires more energy. In contrast, the more superficial that a person talks, the less energy his talking requires, and he will be able to talk much more. But his speaking will be on the same level as the chirping of the birds, which lack any inner, deep content.

If a person wishes for his words to “ascend to above”, he must put his inner *chiyus* (energy) into his words. In prayer as well, one needs to infuse *chiyus* into the words he is saying, and if not, his words do not result in anything. When one is praying on a level of “*My soul leaves at His word*”, and as Channah said, “*I will pour out my soul before Hashem*”,<sup>155</sup> such words will make their mark and ascend to above.

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<sup>154</sup> *Sefer HaYashar: 13* (also cited also in the name of the Chozeh of Lublin)

<sup>155</sup> *Shmuel I:15*

The Gemara states that if a person forgets his Torah learning, it is because he did not verbalize the words when he was learning it, and therefore the Torah learning didn't settle in his heart.<sup>156</sup> The inner reason of this is because when a person does not verbalize his Torah learning, his *chiyus* remains only in potential form and it was not actualized.

When a person is speaking from his soul, he is actualizing his inner *chiyus* from its potential state. Man is called *medaber*, the being capable of speech, and he is also called *adam* (man) from the word *adamah*, earth, which actualizes the potential of the seeds placed into it; the connection between these two aspects of man is that one must activate the potential of his speech, by speaking from within himself, from his soul. In this way, he infuses inner *chiyus* into his speech. Such words are truly alive, as the Gemara says, “For they (the words of Torah) are life to those who verbalize it with their mouth.”<sup>157</sup>

Speech activates the power of the soul within man. When one is speaking from within his soul, he is speaking from the point of the “*Chayah*” within him, and this is the implication of the “*medaber*” aspect, which defines man. It is the “*nefesh chayah*”, the “living soul” within man that is alive with inner *chiyus*/vitality, which expresses this inner *chiyus* through speech, where one's speech is infused with aliveness. This is what it means to talk from the “*Chayah*” level of the soul.

### ***1e) Speaking from the “Yechidah” level of the soul***

One of the Sages said, “All of my days I lived amongst the Sages, and I did not find a better body than a silent one.”<sup>158</sup> Earlier we brought the concept that for every concept in Creation, there is always an opposite concept. Thus, if one wants to make the full use of the power of talking, he also has to develop its opposite power, which is silence.

If someone only knows how to talk and he does not know how to be silent, any silence he does have is only superficial; he is either silent when he's tired of talking, or because he doesn't have what to say anymore. This is not true silence. If one does not know the art of silence, even his speech is superficial, because since he doesn't know what the opposite of speech is, he won't be able to properly develop his power of speech.

Chazal say that “the world hangs on silence”<sup>159</sup>, which refers to one who is silent during strife.<sup>160</sup> When a person wants to answer back his oppressor and he restrains his urge, this is the kind of silence which upkeeps the world.

On one hand we find that the world thrives on speech, because Hashem created the world with Ten Utterances<sup>161</sup>, and the Ten Commandments were another verbal expression of these original

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<sup>156</sup> *Eruvin* 53b-54a

<sup>157</sup> *ibid*

<sup>158</sup> *Avos* 1:17

<sup>159</sup> *Iyov* 26:7

<sup>160</sup> *Chullin* 89a

<sup>161</sup> *Avos* 5:1

Expressions, which upkeep the world. On the other hand, Chazal state that silence (during an argument) is what upkeeps the world. So in order for speech to be real speech, one needs to have a mouth that knows how to be silent sometimes.

Before Hashem created the world, there was a silence. The world began with His utterances, but before Creation, Hashem was silent, so to speak. There is a power as well in the soul to speak from a place of silence. The *Yechidah* is essentially the power in the soul to be silent. A person's *chochmah* (wisdom) comes from his *Yechidah*, which is called *ayin*, "nothingness." *Ayin* is mentioned in the verse, "*Wisdom, from where (ayin) is it found?*"<sup>162</sup>

When one's speech is only coming from his speech, he is missing the source of the speech. He has "*chochmah*" (inner wisdom), he has the "*Chayah*" level of the soul, and he can speak from this deep place in himself – but he is still missing the very source of his speech, "*ayin*" - which is represented by silence.

Earlier, we mentioned the words of the Ramban wrote that one should think before he talks. When one speaks after first being silent, he knows how to be silent even as he is talking, and his words are more truthful, for they are stemming from the maturity of knowing how to be silent if need be it. But when a person talks and he can't stop himself from talking, such talking is not connected with silence, and then he is missing the ability to draw forth speech from its source.

A person's words are only effective on another if he is prepared to be silent as he's talking. If one would rather talk than be silent, his words do not come from his inner source, and then the words are missing the root of speech, which will not be that effective on others.

A person has to stop sometimes in middle of talking. He should talk, then be silent, then continue the conversation, etc. He has to know how to silence himself in middle of talking. On a deeper note, he has to be prepared not to talk at all, if need be it.

If he has that awareness before he opens his mouth to talk, his talking afterwards will then be coming from an inner place in himself. Of course, when it is a *mitzvah* to talk, such as to talk words of Torah, a person should talk, and he should not be silent. He should also talk a little with other people in order to relieve himself of his troubles, for the Vilna Gaon says that one of the ways to acquire the Torah is with little speech, and this means for one to make sure that he talks a little bit with others (as opposed to not talking at all). But even when a person does talk, he should be prepared to be silent in middle. When he is in middle of talking, he should silence himself sometimes.

There are two kinds of this silence. One kind is to refrain from talking in a certain context and to instead talk in a different context. For example, on Shabbos, one may not talk mundane matters<sup>163</sup>. The person is silent from mundane talking and must only speak matters of holiness. That is one

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<sup>162</sup> *Iyov* 28:12

<sup>163</sup> *Shabbos* 113b

kind of restraint from talking. Another kind of restraint from talking is when simply silences himself at times in the midst of talking.

So far, we have explained how to use the power of speech in the soul in relevance of talking to oneself and to others. Those two kinds of speech (to oneself and to others) were covered here together at once and it was not explained much about the differences between them, because they both share the same root.

## 2 - Speaking In Order To Influence Others

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An intermediate level of speech is when one speaks in order to lead others, when he must be *manhig* (leader) of others, in various ways. The absolute level of this is the one who is a *manhig* of the generation, but there is also a partial level of *manhig*, where one is in a position of leading others. This is also a use of man's role of being a *medaber* (a being of speech).

A king's word has the power to lead others. Normally, when a person speaks, his speech does not obligate anyone him to do anything, except in the cases of *hekdesh* (consecrating property for Temple use), and accepting a *neder* (vow) upon oneself. Although a person must not go back on his word, his speech does not create any tangible obligation to fulfill. However, when a king says something, his words obligate him to fulfill what he says. The Gemara says that a king does not retract his word.<sup>164</sup> His ability of speech is a true word which carries weight.

### ***2a) Influencing Others from the "Nefesh" level of the soul***

We explained earlier that the "*Nefesh*" level of speech is to be aware of the reality of speech, which leads and influences reality. A king or anyone in a position of power is even more aware of his ability of speech to lead and influence. His entire essence is to lead others, which is an expression of the "*medaber*" aspect of man.

We can subtly divide this into three levels: (1) The lowest level - when one is simply aware of reality, and that reality can be moved and guided. (2) The intermediate level – when one is aware that his very reality is movement, which can influence reality. (3) The highest level – when one is aware that the reality itself is a force of movement.

After the sin, man perceives the reality with the understanding that it can be moved, changed, and influenced. A king or ruler is very aware of this, realizing that his individual reality is to only lead and guide the existent reality in front of him. Before the sin, though, man perceived that all of reality is in movement, regardless of how man is influencing it or not.

The "*Nefesh*" level in leading and guiding others is when is aware that he is a "*manhig*", a leader, of others. Sometimes Hashem places a person into a position where he must be a "*mashpia*" (an



influence) to others, but the person may not be able to influence anyone, because he is unaware of his role to be a *mashpia*. There are people who have an ability to be *mashpia*, but they feel too humble to lead others - they are using the worthy trait of humility in the wrong place. This was the mistake of Shaul, who was exceedingly humble and didn't want to be king, and the prophet Shmuel reprimanded him by saying to him, "*Are you small in your eyes? You are a leader of the tribes of Yisrael, and Hashem has anointed you as king over Yisrael.*"<sup>165</sup> Surely if Hashem has given a person the ability to be a *manhig* over others, he should not allow himself to become conceited. But at the same time, he must also recognize that he has the power to lead, and that this is the reality that Hashem has placed him in.

There are many ways to lead others. One may be a teacher in a school, which is one kind of leadership role. A father in his home is also in a position of leading his home, for the Rambam says that a wife should view her husband as a king. Thus, the father has the role of a *manhig* in his home.

Every person must recognize the reality that he is in a position of leading others, and all of us at some point in life have to realize the reality of our power. All of us have areas in our life where we are in charge and in control of something, but it is not enough to just be in charge - one must recognize his role of being leader. When one is aware that he is *manhig*, he can then be responsible. We must know, of course, that we have received this ability of control from the Creator, and it does not come from our own power. One must realize, "Part of the task that has been placed on me here on this world is that I am a *manhig*."

There are people who are not regarded as the authority figure in their homes, and often this is because they aren't aware that they are supposed to be the one in charge. If you are a father and you have a wife and children, you must realize that the role of leading the home has been placed on you. A father needs to understand that his word must be listened to, and that his judgment is to be adhered to. Without getting into the exact details of this, the general rule is that when the father says something, his words must be regarded. Whether in his home or whether he is a teacher in a school, he must recognize his role as *manhig*.

There is one mode of living in which one is focusing on his own individual development, and there is another mode of living, in which one recognizes his leadership role, when he is in charge of something, where he is aware of his role as *manhig*. This awareness is the "*Nefesh*" level of the soul with regards to speech, in the area of leading others.

### **2b) Influencing Others from the "Ruach" level of the soul**

As explained earlier, when a person speaks with others and he is aware of the direction which he wants to lead the words in, this is the "*Ruach*" level of speech, and it is the same when speaking in order to lead and influence others.

Hence, when one is in a position of influencing others and he is aware of the direction he wants to lead his words in, this is the "*Ruach*" level of speech when it comes to leading others.

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165 Shmuel I: 15-17

### ***2c) Influencing others from the “Neshamah” level of the soul***

The “*Neshamah*” level in leading others through speech is when one thinks and reflects about what he will say, in order to guide others through carefully choosing his words. For example, when a *rebbe* is teaching a *talmid*, he needs to think before he talks, about how he will convey the thought.

Chazal state that even in an ordinary conversation, where two friends are talking to each other, “Who is wise? One who learns from every person.”<sup>166</sup> But this does not mean I should speak to my friend as if I am teaching him. Nobody can tolerate a person who is always trying to “teach” people whenever he speaks to people. But if a person is in a role where he has to lead, such as a *rebbe*, teacher or *rav*, he needs to understand that his purpose in having this role is to be able to teach others. This does not mean that this is the only *avodah* he has, but it is certainly a part of his *avodah*, to understand that it is his duty to teach people.

When he speaks to them with this awareness, this is the “*Neshamah*” level in leading others through speech, and from this awareness, he will limit his speech to the exact words that his listeners need to hear. This is the concept mentioned in the *sefarim* of *Chassidus*, that a *rebbe* places a *tzimtzum* (constraint) on his Torah thought when teaching a student, so that the receiver can understand it on his level.

### ***2d) Influencing others from the “Chayah” level of the soul***

Many times people go to a certain speech, lecture, or *shmuess* (inspiring talk) and they will hear the speaker talking, and even if they do not understand any of what he is saying (like if he is speaking in a language they don’t know, or if he is speaking about a lofty concept that they cannot relate to), they will leave the speech feeling more alive and invigorated, from the words they heard. This happens when the person has spoken from a more inner place of himself, which contains his inner *chiyus* (vitality). When the listeners hear words that are emanating from this inner place, they can feel the *chiyus* that is flowing from the speaker, even though they did not actually understand anything he said.

If the one speaking is only talking from a superficial place in himself, even if the listeners understand what he is saying, it is ‘dead’ speech, and it is on the level of the chirping of the birds. But the more inner of a place one speaks from within himself, the more “alive” the words are. Such speech is the implication of the “*nefesh chayah*” aspect in man [which corresponds to speech], and this is especially applicable when one is speaking to others in order to bestow *chiyus* upon the listeners, which is beyond the plane of their intellect.

There are people who feel more alive from going once a week to hear a certain Rav speak, and they receive *chiyus* from this for the entire week. The person may not even be able to tell over precisely what he has heard, but he can feel more alive from listening to this rav speak once a week. You can meet thousands of people like this. They feel more alive simply from hearing a certain

person speak, and why? It is not due to any mystical reason. It is because the speaker is speaking from a more inner place in himself, from his *chiyus*, and it flows onto the listeners, who receive this *chiyus*. It is not about the words that are being said. The mere listening to a person who speaks from his “*nefesh chayah*” – or the “*Chayah*” point in the soul, which contains one’s inner *chiyus* – is what enables those listening to receive a *chiyus* from the speaker and his words.

### **2e) Influencing Others from the “Yechidah” level of the soul**

The Sages said that the “*maaseh merkavah*” [the description of “the holy chariot” in *sefer Yechezkel*, as well as other Kabbalistic matters] should only be taught to “a wise one who understands on his own.”<sup>167</sup> A teacher cannot explain everything to a student; he can give him the general outline of the information, and the student has to come to the understanding of the matters from within himself.

The simple meaning of this that a student hears the information and expands upon it on his own. This is true. But the depth of the matter is that a teacher has to give over three things to his student: The understanding of the information, the energy contained in his words, and the root of the information. The root of the information is the part where the teacher is “silent”.

When a teacher is speaking from an inner place in himself, he speaks from his silence - from the “*Yechidah*” point in his soul. This is the inner meaning of the term of “A wise one who understands”: It is when a student learns from what his teacher omits. Silence can “speak” and convey a lot to a person. When the teacher is silent, the student can learn a lot from the silence – he can understand that there is a reason why his teacher isn’t explaining something, and thus a person learns even from silence.

The simple reason of why a *rebbe* needs to pause in middle of a *shiur* is to give time for the students to understand and absorb. That is definitely true, but there is a deeper reason as well: it is because silence also teaches an understanding to the students. When the *rebbe* is silent in the midst of his words, the silence is implying certain information.

Sometimes a *rebbe* can teach his student very well, but deep down, the *rebbe* may want the students to remain at the level of being “students”. He doesn’t really want the student to grow to the *rebbe*’s level. Such a *rebbe* who is “silent” isn’t trying to teach something with his silence – he’s simply holding back information from his student, because he wants his student to remain his student...

But if a *rebbe* wants his student to become as wise as him – when he wants him to become a *talmid chever* (a “student colleague”), then the *rebbe* “speaks” from his silence, in order to teach his student from his silence. Such a *rebbe* speaks from the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul, to the student. He teaches the student what silence is, and in that away, the student can truly become a *talmid chochom* (Torah scholar) – a student who “understands”, because through the silence, the student can then get to the root of the knowledge that is being imparted.

This is not information that can be given over in the superficial sense. It is a transferal of information from the soul of the teacher to the soul of his student – an inner processing.

We have discussed how a person talks and influences others through the five layers of the soul. Now we will move on to the next step, which is connecting how one uses his power of speech to bond with the Creator.

### 3. Bonding With The Creator Through Speech

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Using the power of speech with regards to man's bond with the Creator is the kind of speech that we are familiar with as "*hisbodedus*." In the beginning of this *sefer*, we began to explain the very concept that is *hisbodedus*. Throughout these chapters, it has been explained that *hisbodedus* is much deeper than the way people simply understand it. Although there is only small percentage of *hisbodedus* which involves our faculty of speech - conversing with the Creator - it is still a central and very important part of *hisbodedus*.

At this point, now that we have seen the parts of how we develop the structure of *hisbodedus* – in terms of the revelation of the soul - we have seen the general picture. We can now move on to explaining the stage of how we use our faculty of speech in *hisbodedus* – the stage where man converses with his Creator.

#### *3a) Speaking with the Creator through the "Nefesh" level of the soul*

The "*Nefesh*" level of the soul [when speaking with the Creator in *hisbodedus*] is, firstly, the understanding that the **bond between oneself and the Creator is built upon using the power of speech.**

Many people do not see this part as the central aspect of bonding with the Creator, and instead, they view speech as nothing but a means of expressing requests to Hashem, but without regarding speech as a power to connect. But one must know that speech, itself, is what forms a bond between man and the Creator. This is the "*Nefesh*" level of speaking with the Creator in *hisbodedus* – the basic understanding that speech should be seen as the power that connects man with the Creator.

We see that in a marriage, there are various forms of connection between husband and wife which are formed, but part of their bond is formed by the very act of speaking to each other. By speaking to each other, not only do they get to clarify things, but their very sitting down together and conversing with each other is a kind of connection. Of course, they should not remain with just that level of connection. But the very act of talking to each other, in and of itself, is a kind of connection with each other.

That is what we can use as an example to understand the "*Nefesh*" level of connecting to the Creator, via speech: It is essentially when a person has the understanding that "When I speak with my Creator, this is a way to develop the bond."

Understanding this deeper, we find several places where Chazal state, "The Torah speaks in the language of people." What is the reason of this? It is explained, especially in the *sefarim* of *Chassidus*, that a person must know that his own speech comes from a higher, heavenly "realm of speech".

Meaning, a person should not simply view his speech as his own ability - rather, one should view his own speech as a power that comes from a heavenly realm.

When a person speaks to himself, or to his friend, or when a teacher is speaking to his student, from a simple and superficial perspective, the speaker is speaking from his own power of speech. But the deeper perspective is when a person views his speech as coming from the heavenly realm, and, as is well-known, the *Shechinah* is called the “*dibbur*”, the “word”, of Hashem. Thus, not only when a person converses with the Creator does he create a bond through speech – even when talking to a friend, which seems like a simple act of talking, this ability to speak is also coming from a higher realm.

Let’s notice the subtle difference between these two levels of talking. There is one kind of speech, in which a person converses with the Creator and the very act of talking creates a bond between him and his Creator. But there is another kind of talking [a deeper level], in which a person realizes that his speech is coming from the speech of the heavenly realm. When a person views his speech as an ability coming from a higher, heavenly perspective, this itself creates a bond between him and the Creator.

Compare this to a person who steps onto a carousel, where there are many different seats to sit on. He chooses one of the seats, and when the carousel begins to move, all of the seats are moving, not just the seat he is sitting on. Or, if a person enters a car with five passenger seats, and he picks one of the seats, the other four seats will arrive at the same destination.

Thus, when I speak to the Creator, my speech must be seen as a part of the general whole that is the “world of speech”. When that is the perspective, my speech is coming from a connection to the general “world of speech”, to the speech of the heavenly realm, and I will thereby be connected to my Creator.

Surely this is not yet the absolute level of bonding [with the Creator], but it is certainly a kind of bonding. It is the awareness that man’s ability to speak is what connects him to the Creator. That is why man is called *medaber*, a social creature, for man is called “*adam*” (man) from the term, “*adameh l’Elyon*”, “I will resemble the Above”, in the sense that his power of speech comes from the speech of above.

The highest level of this was reached by Moshe *Rabbeinu*, of whom the Sages said, “The *Shechinah* speaks from within his throat”, and this was because he truly recognized that his speech was not his own, but from above. (Later, when we will discuss the level of “*Neshamah*”, we will explain more about this.)

### ***2b) Speaking with the Creator through the “Ruach” level of the soul***

When a person speaks with the Creator, the words are leading in a certain direction. One may speak words of gratitude to the Creator, words of prayer and supplication to the Creator, words of

appeasement to the Creator, or, he may sing. Whatever the tone of the speech is when talking to the Creator, this is all the kind of speech that is from the “*Ruach*” level of the soul.

This leads us to a very practical application about *hisbodedus*. If a person enters into *hisbodedus* by starting immediately to sing to the Creator, or to thank the Creator, or to ask forgiveness about something, or to request something, he has already skipped the first step of *hisbodedus* (explained earlier). First, before a person starts talking to the Creator about anything, he must realize that talking to Hashem *is* the actual connection!

## The Common Mistake People Make When Speaking With The Creator In Hisbodedus

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When people aren't aware of this, it leads to a common error in *hisbodedus*. A person may have a general, intellectual understanding about *hisbodedus*, through reading holy *sefarim* about it, in which it is explained that most *tzaddikim* reached their high levels from talking to the Creator; so a person who reads about this may think that as soon as he starts *hisbodedus*, he should immediately start talking to the Creator. But in doing so, he is skipping over the first, basic stage [for he didn't yet internalize that his very act of talking to the Creator is what bonds him with the Creator].

In any form of *hisbodedus*, in which a person begins to talk to Hashem, one first needs to actually feel that his power of speech is what connects him to his Creator. That is the basis. After we have developed this basic soul perspective – which is the level of “*Nefesh*” – we can then progress to the next stage, which is the level of “*Ruach*”.

The “*Ruach*” level of the soul, when talking to the Creator, begins with speaking words of love (*ahavah*), and then we can progress to speaking words of awe (*yirah*), words of praise (*hispaarus*), words of gratitude (*hodayah*), words of victory (*netzach*), words of connection (*hiskashrus*), and, finally, words of recognizing man's lowliness (*shiflus*). These are the seven main *middos* (traits) explained in our mystical teachings. Through these seven areas of speech, a person connects himself throughout all of the seven realms, to the Creator. But all of this must be built upon the basic perspective in which a person is aware that his power of speech connects him to the Creator.

After I perceive speech as being the power that connects me to the Creator, the question will be: Where I should begin? Should I begin with words of gratitude, or words of praise, or words of appeasement, or prayer, or supplication? Truth be told, there are no general rules for this, because each soul is different.

A person may be in a very difficult situation where it will not be practical for him to start thanking Hashem for his entire past, and in his case, he will need to first unload everything that is bothering him, and only after that can he start thanking Hashem. Of course, in the ideal situation, first a person should thank Hashem for the past, and after expressing his gratitude, he should then make his requests from Hashem.

Thus, any of the emotions that a person may express in *hisbodedus*, when speaking to the Creator, are only effective if they are preceded with an understanding that it is the very act of speaking to the

Creator which creates the bond. As a result, the person understands that **the main part of talking to Hashem is not about *what* you say – it is mainly about the very act of talking to Him!**

Many times people complain that they are having a difficult time doing *hisbodedus* on a practical level, because they find it hard to spend so much talking to Hashem; they feel that they keep repeating their words, and it gets tedious. They have a good argument. But in a large percentage of cases, this complaint stems from the fact that they don't feel how the very act of talking to the Creator is a kind of bonding.

To illustrate, a father talks to his child many times, and he usually keeps repeating the same thing over again to his child: “What did you learn today? What did you do today?” Why doesn't he get bored of this? It is because the father knows that the talking itself creates a bond with his child, and it is irrelevant to him what kind of content is in the conversation.

True, this will not work in a school, where the staff repeats the same words every week and keeps coming to the same conclusions and decisions. This is because the staff members cannot run a school together through bond-orientated conversation; they need goal-oriented conversations, which will enable them to run the place smoothly. When they speak with each other about what to do and they reach their conclusions, they can stop the subject right there and move on. But when talking is a way to form a connection [such as a father conversing with his son, or when talking to the Creator in *hisbodedus*], it is precisely through repeating the same words again and again which creates the connection.

Each day, we *daven* the same three prayers, where we speak with the Creator. As we know, the prayers are repetitive, and are almost the same every day. Here we have a bond with the Creator which is based on repeating the same exact words every single day, the same *nusach*, and for all the days of our life! Why is it this way? If a person understands that the talking itself is a bond with the Creator, he then connects himself to the Creator through all of this speech. But if one only uses talking as a means of expressing the content or topic in what he's saying, he has lost the root, and he will find it difficult to talk so much.

Understandably, our aim here is not to belittle the actual content of what a person talks about to with the Creator. Rather, our point here is to explain that all of the content in the talking must be built upon the perspective that the very talking to Hashem, in and of itself, is a form of bonding. After a person has solidly acquired this perspective, he can then develop what kind of talking he wishes to have with Hashem, the content of what he would like to discuss. He can then guide the direction of the conversation. But it should become a given to the person that even if he would keep repeating the same words over and over again, the very fact that he is speaking with the Creator is a form of connecting to Him.

The Sages state that if a person does not talk to a person for three days (out of enmity towards the person), he has the title of “enemy” towards him. From this we learn that talking itself is a form of connection. So when people are more concerned about the actual content of their conversations with Hashem, and they are busy with questions such as “What should I speak about with Hashem?” –

that is where most of the issues are. Why? Because then it means that they aren't speaking from a *natural* place in themselves.

In a similarly related issue, there are those who also have this problem in their own homes, when they have a hard time “finding what to talk about” with their family members. In the normal situation, where a person is emotionally healthy, he can speak naturally about his experiences with others. But if he cannot talk that naturally to his family, he finds that the conversations stop short, he clams up, and other such issues, and then he feels that there's nothing to talk about. What is the reason for this? It is because he is missing the ability to talk naturally. The more natural a person allows himself to be, the more he will have what to talk about. The less natural he is being, the more guidance he will need: What to say first, what to say next, what to say after that.

This is like trying to teach a person how to walk up a bunch of steps, and we say to him, “Listen! Do not first try to reach the seventh step and then the fourth step, then the fifth step and second step. First, go up the first step, then the second step, then the third.” If someone needs guidance like this, he must be in a very severe situation....

The lesson from this is clear. If a person understands that talking to the Creator is a form of bonding with Him, the conversation will flow more openly, just as when you talk to a friend. The *Mesillas Yesarim* says that when one talks to the Creator, he can talk to Him “as a man talks to a friend.” It should be like when you meet a close friend, where you don't need to prepare a list of every word you will say to him, and the conversation just flows freely and naturally.

If you have to prepare the conversation before you talk to your friend, the more you try to get the right words to come, the more you lose the naturalness of the conversation - and the bond with it. It is the same with talking to the Creator! Although there is a perspective that speaking to the Creator should be seen as “speaking with the King”, you first need to reach the “*Ruach*” level in the soul of talking to Hashem, which is to talk to the Creator naturally – as natural as you can be.

To illustrate what we mean, if a person feels that he is paying too high of a property tax, he has no problem calling up the company and explaining to him what bothers him. If a person has problems with the gas, he picks up the phone and speaks naturally to a representative of the company, explaining to him exactly the issues with gas in his home. No one needs guidance in how to do this, of how to say each word and how to present himself, because any person knows how to act and speak from their natural feelings.

Therefore, the approach here is not to come and guide communities in how exactly to talk to the Creator. For if someone needs such guidance, it means he has a deep problem in the soul. There is only one point which needs guidance, and it is the basis: **one must speak with the Creator as if he is speaking to a good friend.**

**If you are not succeeding at it, speak with the Creator about this and ask for help from Him, that you be should be able to relate to Him as a close Friend,** in order that you able to feel like



you can speak to Him. But do not try to receive exact guidance about *what* to speak about with the Creator.

**Even if a person speaks to the Creator after having received guidance in how to talk to Him and how to state his requests, he is talking from a very superficial place in himself**, and not from his deeper essence. To illustrate what we mean, there are couples who need to learn exactly how to communicate with each other. The husband is taught how to talk to the wife, and the wife is taught how she must talk to the husband. The husband is told: “Don’t say it like that to your wife. Instead, tell it to her like this. And before you speak, think it over three times.” But this is totally not a natural way of talking!

The truth is that if a person is at a point where he needs such guidance, he really does need the guidance, of how exactly he needs to communicate with his spouse: which tone of voice to use, what to say, what not to say, etc. Surely some simple guidance can help their home situation. But it must be natural! Obviously, there are also some minor mishaps a person may make if he speaks naturally in the home. But if we uproot a person’s natural way of talking, we have basically uprooted him from the source of his life.

Many people sincerely wish to serve the Creator and to do *hisbodedus* so that they can speak to the Creator, and they seek advice from experts on how exactly to enunciate all of their problems when talking to the Creator during *hisbodedus*. But the root of most difficulties with *hisbodedus* comes from the fact that they are not speaking naturally. Since they are not speaking naturally when they talk to the Creator, they have a whole chain of questions: “Is it permitted to ask about this and this? And how exactly do I state my request? Did I say it the right way, or should I have preceded my request with a different request?”

We need to understand that it is not like a bus which comes precisely at the expected time of arrival, and that if you miss the expected time by even a second, you have missed the bus. Similarly, when you meet a friend for five minutes, you will converse with him during those five minutes about as much as you can get in, but if a man lives with a spouse at home, he is not limiting his conversations with her to five minutes. If he doesn’t finish what he’s saying to her today, he’ll continue talking about it with her tomorrow.

In the same vein, the more a person naturally speaks to the Creator, the more his questions all fall away. But the less natural a person is when he is speaking with the Creator, the more he will need an entire *sefer* that explains to him every possible issue a person may have and how to deal with it.

Let us explain, then, what the proper approach should be.

## The Proper Attitude When Speaking To The Creator In Hisbodedus

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When a person is about to begin speaking with the Creator, he must first reach a recognition that “I am speaking with my Creator, Who is called “Your Friend”, for there is a verse, “*Your friend and*

*the father of your friend, do not abandon*”,<sup>168</sup> and Chazal state that “Your friend” refers to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (the Holy One, Blessed is He).<sup>169</sup>”

When a person approaches the Creator like this, with the perspective of the soul that he is talking to his truest “Friend”, he can then guide the words accordingly to whichever direction he wants it to go in (this is the “*Ruach*” level of the soul in talking to the Creator), from the awareness that the act of the talking itself is a form of bonding to the Creator; and, as mentioned, he should be talking in his natural way of talking.

Compare this to the following. If two people schedule a flight together that will take 12 hours, do they prepare their conversations beforehand? They will have no problem talking to each other for the duration of the entire flight. Why? It is because a person directs his conversation naturally. If we lose our naturalness in our talking, we have essentially lost the root of bonding with the Creator through our speech. But if we build the bond through talking to Him in our natural way of talking, there will be less questions about how to speak with the Creator, and often a simple answer will satisfy. But we must properly build the basis.

In summary, the first step in talking to the Creator is to be aware that talking to the Creator is a way of bonding with Him. With Whom am I talking? With the Creator of the world, Who is called the “Friend” of man. With this awareness, I can let my conversation with Him flow naturally.

We should remember that just as when you talk to a friend, the conversations with him are sometimes more successful and sometimes they are less successful, it is the same with talking to the Creator: sometimes we have a more successful conversation with Him and sometimes there is less success. But [that is the way it should be, for] it is all natural.

Whenever a person feels bothered by something, he should be able to speak about it naturally to the Creator. It is like when a child comes home to his parents and exclaims: “Someone fought with me today!” or “The teacher punished me in the corner”, or “I got a prize today!” He just speaks naturally to his parents about whatever’s on his mind. If we have understood this point that we need to just speak naturally with the Creator, we have understood the entire matter – and, if do not understand this point, then we will need an entire series of lectures explaining how exactly one should do *hisbodedus*.....

We have so far explained the levels of “*Nefesh*” and “*Ruach*” in man’s bond [through speech] with the Creator. Now we will explain the level of “*Neshamah*”.

### 3. Speaking With The Creator Through The “Neshamah” Level of the Soul

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There are two angles to explore in the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul. There is a way to go from the bottom up (*m’sata l’eila*), and a way to go from above to below (*m’leila l’lisata*).

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<sup>168</sup> *Mishlei* 27:10

<sup>169</sup> *Shemos Rabbah* 27

***From the bottom up (m'sata l'eila)***

When we go “from the bottom up” (*m'sata l'eila*), this is the external level of the *Neshamah*, in which a person brings words of the intellect into his speech with the Creator. In the teachings of Bresslev, this is called “turning Torah into *tefillah*”. A person can take a matter of the intellect and transform it into prayer. He can speak with the Creator after intellectually studying the words of the Creator’s wisdom [the Torah]. In this way, one turns Torah study into a form of prayer. The Torah study can bring him to a certain inner recognition, which can lead to prayer.

***From above to below (m'leila l'sata)***

The other way to talk to the Creator from the *Neshamah* level of the soul - from “above to below” (*m'leila l'sata*) - is when a person merits receiving a flow of thoughts emanating from Heaven. This is called a “little bit of *Ruach HaKodesh*” (the holy spirit). An example of it is as the Gemara says, that “When a person wakes in the morning and his mouth suddenly utters a verse, it is a small level of prophecy”.<sup>170</sup> Even when a person is talking regularly, many times he is talking about a certain topic and suddenly his words take him in a different direction, and he can begin to feel that his mind is steering his words to discuss a totally different topic, and he can clearly feel that it is not coming from him.

This is what it means to bond with the Creator through the speech of the *Neshamah*, “from above to below”, for it is a level in which a person receives enlightened understanding as he is in the midst of talking, and his words continue to follow the stream of thoughts that is entering him.

There is also a deeper level than this which is described in the *sefarim hakedoshim*: there were *tzaddikim* who would start talking, and they were not even consciously aware that they were saying anything. They would connect their words to their Heavenly source, to the Supernal Wisdom above, and from there they would derive their own speech. Afterwards, these *tzaddikim* would ask those around them, “What did I say?” They would then study the words that they had uttered. This kind of speech is like the verse, “*Iyov does not speak with daas* (human understanding).”<sup>171</sup>

Let’s explain this further. In the normal kind of speech, a person verbalizes what is on his mind. “*Daas* is hidden in the mouth.” Of this kind of talking, the Ramban said, “Think about the words before you release them from their mouth.” Normally, when a person talks, he must think about what he is saying. But there is a higher mode of talking in which a person connects his mouth to Above, and then speaks from a higher place of understanding which is not coming from himself, and then he learns about what he has just said. There is also a more subtle level, where a person learns about the words he is saying even as he is in the midst of talking.

There were some *tzaddikim* who would only speak words after having thought beforehand what they would say, and this is a kind of speech that emanates from *daas* (human understanding). Other *tzaddikim*, many times, would speak from a point that was above their *daas*. Let us explain what the advantage and disadvantage there is to each of these modes of speech.

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<sup>170</sup> *Berachos 55b*

<sup>171</sup> *Iyov 34:35*

## Speaking From Above The Daas

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The advantage to this mode of speech is, that when the *tzaddik* would attach his speech to the speech of Above, he would connect his mind to Above and his speech was entirely being ‘written’ from these higher thoughts. He did not have to think about what he was about to say, for he was speaking from a Heavenly source, from above his own understanding. His own speech was a “garment” for the Supernal wisdom of Above. The disadvantage to this mode of speech, though, was that since this speech wasn’t passing through his own *daas*/understanding, those hearing him talk were receiving a spiritual light that was way above their level, which they could not perceive and which could not settle in them. The listeners were not able to be “containers” to receive the “light” that was coming from Above.

## Speaking From Daas:

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The advantage to this mode of speech is clear, in contrast with the disadvantage mentioned above. Since the *tzaddik* in this mode of speech would speak to others from his own *daas*, he would speak in a way that was understandable to those listening, and bring it down to their own level of understanding. The “light” could then settle in the “containers”. The disadvantage here, however, was that since the *tzaddik* was speaking from his own *daas*, the speech could not go beyond the *tzaddik*’s actual level of understanding.

## In summary

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Thus, there is an advantage to speaking from above the *daas*, in which a person doesn’t know what he is saying, and there is a different advantage when one speaks from *daas*, in which he knows what he’s saying. The proper path for a person to take is to first speak from above the *daas*, and after that, to then speak from one’s *daas*. We will not elaborate much on this, because this is a very deep matter of its own.

In summation, the level of “*Neshamah*” (when speaking with the Creator), from the “bottom up” (*m’sata l’eila*) is when a person turns words of Torah into prayer [a deeper level of recognition of the Creator, after studying Torah or contemplating any of Hashem’s wisdom], and “from above to below” (*m’leila l’sata*), it is when there is a degree of *ruach hakodesh* that descends on a person’s words [when one connects his speech to its upper source, which is usually only a level for *tzaddikim*, but which can sometimes happen to ordinary people as well].

## 4 - Speaking With Hashem from the *Chayah* level of the Soul

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The “*Chayah*” level of the soul, when speaking with the Creator, is also accessed on two levels – from the “bottom up”, and from “above to below”.

#### **4a - From The Bottom Up (M'sata L'leila)**

The “*Chayah*” level of the soul is when a person uses the power of speech as is meant by the verse, “*And man became a living spirit*” – a *nefesh chayah* – which the *Targum* translates as “*ruach memalelah*”, a “talking spirit.”

When speaking with the Creator, the “*Chayah*” level of the soul is to speak with one’s *chiyus* (vitality or energy). It is written, “*My soul leaves, when I speak with Him.*” This is when one speaks with the Creator in a manner which expends his own *chiyus*/energy.

It is explained in *Chassidic* teachings that it is a miracle for a person to stay alive while *davening* (praying). This is referring to a person who speaks to Hashem with the “*Chayah*” level of the soul. Why is it miraculous? It is because such a person is really exhausting all of his speech into his prayers, and all of his emotional energy, which should really cause him to die! When one speaks to the Creator through the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, it means that he is investing all of his *chiyus* (vitality) into this.

#### **4b - From Above To Below (M'leila L'sata)**

When one is connected to Above, he receives *chiyus*/energy from the “Ten Expressions” which Hashem created the word with. The Ten Commandments as well are from the same root of these Ten Expressions, which were both “soft expression” (external) and “strong speech” (internal) at once.

The entire Creation stems from the Ten Expressions and Ten Commandments – thus, these Ten Expressions and Commandments are the root of Creation. A person may derive *chiyus* either from “branches” – or from the “root”. When one is connected to the Creator through the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, he is connected to the beginning state of Creation, which, as *Targum* states, refers to *chochmah*/wisdom (on the word “*Beraishis*”, “In the beginning”, the *Targum* translates it as “*b'chochmasa*” – wisdom). Meaning, one can be connected to the root kind of speech that is on High, and from there he can derive *chiyus*.

It can be compared to a person who draws water from a spring. When you draw water from the spring, you are drawing directly from its source, whereas if you get the water from other places, the water is from a place that is far from the source. The further the water is from the source, the dirtier the water will be, and the closer the water is to its source, the purer and cleaner the water will be when you draw it. In the same vein, when one recognizes that the speech on High is his own source, he is not drawing forth vitality from his own speech, which is only a “branching” level of speech, but from the very “roots” of all speech, which is the speech on High – the “Ten Expressions” that the Creator used to create the world.

The entire world “moves” through the Ten Expressions and Ten Commandments which Hashem uttered. When one connects to the “*Chayah*” level of the soul, which is to connect to the concept of

“*chochmah*” (wisdom) to “*beraishis*” (beginning point) – it is when he connects to himself to the root of all the created beings, which are the Ten Expressions. He is then connected to the innermost root within Creation – to the “Infinite Light” (the *ohr EinSof*) which is clothed within Creation.

## 5 - Speaking With Hashem From The Yechidah level of the Soul

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In a previous chapter, we explained that Hashem was first silent before He created the world. Creation began with ten Utterances, but before that, there was no speech, just a silence of the Creator.

The *Midrash* states, “The ministering angels gathered together next to Hashem and said, “You existed before the world was created, and You exist after the world was created.”<sup>172</sup> There is an *avodah* we have to cleave to the state of “after creation”, which is through our power of speech; and we have an *avodah* to cleave to the state of “before creation”, which is to connect through our silence to the silence that was before creation.

This is how the “*Yechidah*” level in our soul connects itself to her Creator: through its silence, to the silence of the Creator, as it were.

Man is called “*adam*” from the word “*demamah*”, silence, because man has the deep power to silence his speech and connect himself to the silence that came before the created state of this world. It is accessed when a person connects himself to the reality of the Creator, before creation, as it were.

This is parallel to the concept of the *Shaar HaNun D’Kedushah*, the “Fiftieth Gate of Holiness”, which the Ramban says is “a creation that is not a creation.” The very creation of the world, the *Beraishis* (beginning point), is the bridging point that connects the point before Creation with the point of after Creation. Thus, the act of creation, “*Beraishis*”, contained both the aspects of speech [represented by The Ten Utterances, which was used to create the world – the state of “after creation”] as well as the aspect of silence [represented by the state of before creation]. Its external layer was the speech that Hashem created the world with, and its inner layer was the silence that came before it.

This is essentially a deep power in man to silence all of Creation [within himself] and he enters the state of *chalal* [the holy ‘void’, in which he recognizes that there is nothing in creation except for Hashem alone]. It is the secret behind the concept of silence.

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<sup>172</sup> *Yalkut Shimeoni, Devarim: 6*

## 6 - Revealing The Presence of The Creator Through Silence From Speech

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Now we will proceed to explain one last point about the sense of speech in the soul, in which a person uses speech to reach the “endlessness” (the *EinSof*-Infinite) of the Creator, so to speak.

### ***6a) Silent, Speechless Recognition of The Creator Alone, With No Thoughts About Creation:***

There are two roles of silence: with regards to being silent from speech, and silence in and of itself, which is the absolute level of silence. To try to conceptualize this, we will use an example from the human soul (and we can learn from our soul about G-d, for it is written “*From my flesh I see G-d*”). There are two reasons why a person would be silent. One reason is because the person is simply immersed in his thoughts and therefore he’s not interested in talking right now. Another reason could be because he really would like to talk, but he consciously makes the decision to be silent and restrain from talking, as in the case of one who does not respond to insult.

So too, there are two kinds of silence, in relevance to connecting ourselves to Hashem’s endlessness. One kind of silence, as we explained, is to attach ourselves to a silencing of Creation. This is called the state of *chalal* (void); here, the silence is used a ‘tool’ to “silence” Creation. But there is an even higher kind of silence: **to be silent in recognition of the endlessness of the Creator, regardless of how this affects Creation.** This is the absolute level of the concept of “silence”.

In both kinds of silence, one is silencing Creation [recognizing that there is nothing in Creation except for Hashem alone], but the difference between them is, that in the first kind of silence, a person is still relating to Creation, and although he is disassociating from it, he is still acknowledging the creations. So it is not yet the absolute level of “silence”. The second kind of silence is the absolute level - **when a person only thinks of Hashem, and nothing else other than this.** It is to temporarily ‘let go’ of Creation. Your silence here is not trying to erase Creation from existence - rather, your silence here is just focusing on the single thought that there is a Creator, regardless of how this affects anything else.

### ***6b) Focusing On Existence of The Creator Alone, With No Thoughts About Creation:***

Another way of describing this “silence” of Creation is in terms of the concept of “*Ain Od Milvado*”, “There is nothing besides for Hashem.”

The *Nefesh HaChaim*<sup>173</sup> writes that from Hashem’s perspective, there is nothing at all in Creation besides Him. When we recognize that perspective, we are silencing Creation from our own perspective, allowing Hashem’s perspective to take over, telling ourselves that there is nothing besides Him.

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<sup>173</sup> Refer to *Nefesh HaChaim Shaar III*

Yet, this is the “lower” level of the deep silencing of Creation, because it is ultimately using the silence as a way to silence Creation, and therefore one is still relating to Creation in this perspective. But there is deeper kind of silencing than this: **to simply focus your thoughts on the existence of Hashem** - and you don't think of how this will relate to the rest of creation. This is the absolute level of silence, because in this level, we are not thinking at all of how the meaning of “*Ain Od Milvado*” affects all of Creation - that is not the emphasis here. Here, we are just focusing on the very fact of Hashem's existence alone....

These final words here are very, very, deep matters of the soul. We have been brief about it. May it be the will of Hashem that all of us integrate ourselves with the endlessness (the *EinSof*-Infinite) of the Creator, and completely.



## *Epilogue*

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With *siyata d'shamaya* (Heavenly assistance), we have merited to conclude the description of *hisbodedus* (meditation) and *hisbonenus* (reflection), in which it was explained how one meditates and reflects in order to reveal the self, to bond with the Creator, and then to reveal the Infinite (*Ein Sof*).

It is our hope that after we have explained all of these matters, the concepts of *hisbodedus* and *hisbonenus* now take on much greater meaning than how we perceived it at first.

It is impossible to give exact practical guidance on how to implement all of these steps, but if we want to define what the end goal is, we can definitely say that the 'end' is 'endless' (*Ein Sof*)!

Some people have a stronger sense of sight in the soul, while others are stronger in their souls' sense of hearing. But each person, no matter what his strengths are, needs to experience all of these steps, or at least most of them. It is just that the order of the steps differs with each person, and it could also depend on the particular time that a person is in. But all those who wish to serve Hashem need to exert their minds in studying all of these steps that were presented throughout this *sefer*; first a person should simply know the material here, and then one can choose what the order of the steps should be.

May Hashem allow us to know these matters in our minds and then to let them internalize in our hearts, and that the inner point in ourselves should be revealed – which is to recognize the reality of the Infinite, Blessed Is He.