

UNEDITED INTERNET VERSION
v1
[08-08-2018]

ADDITIONS

Mesillas Yesharim

ADAPTED FROM THE HEBREW SHIURIM OF
MESILLAS YESHARIM
BY THE AUTHOR OF BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH

<http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/mesillas>

| | |
|--|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 2 |
| 01 THE GENERAL SOLUTION TO LAZINESS | 3 |
| 02 PURIFYING THE HEART & MIND | 5 |
| 03 THE LEVEL OF THE HEART | 7 |
| 04 SANCTIFYING MARITAL RELATIONS | 9 |
| 05 THE CONCEPT OF HISBODEDUS – AND WHY IT IS NOT POPULAR TODAY... | 14 |
| 06 ATTAINING INNER PURITY | 17 |
| 07 HASHEM – YOUR ONLY COMPANION | 20 |
| 08 HAPPINESS & DANCING | 24 |
| 09 ENDURING INSULTS | 26 |
| 10 CHOOSING GOOD FRIENDS | 27 |
| 11 WHY WE MUST LEARN TORAH IN-DEPTH | 29 |
| 13 TWO WAYS OF CONNECTING TO G-DLINESS | 30 |
| 12 MAINTAINING REVELATIONS OF HOLINESS | 31 |

Introduction

The Rav's *peirush* on *Mesillas Yescharim* was printed in three volumes in Hebrew. The first section was translated into english.

This document contains selected portions from the Rav's *peirush* on the classic *Mesillas Yescharim* translated into english.

The selections were chosen by our translator simply because he thought they were of public interest.

מסילת ישרים ח"ג עמ' לה - לו

01 | *The General Solution To Laziness*

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes: “The general rule is, that a person always needs to strengthen himself and increase his zeal to do the *mitzvos*, and throw away the laziness that is preventing him.”

What is the way in which one should go about the *avodah* of overcoming laziness? How indeed can a person inspire himself and overcome his laziness?

A person needs to **get used to doing things**, not because he is **obligated** to do those things – but rather because he **wants to go against** his lazy nature.

For example, if a person is sitting by the table and he suddenly notices that there is a fork there instead of a spoon, he might say to himself, “Okay, so there’s a fork there instead of a spoon. What’s so bad?” But he should get up anyway and switch the fork for a spoon, specifically so he can overcome his laziness. He shouldn’t do so “because it’s a *mitzvah*.” No, it’s not a *mitzvah* - But do it anyway, because it’s worth it just to overcome laziness!

After a person begins to become aware that there are certain things he doesn’t do simply because he is lazy, he should now take this a step further and begin to do actions that counter his laziness. He should do things even when he doesn’t feel like doing them, simply because he wants to overcome his lazy nature.

Of course, it’s better if he overcomes his laziness when it comes to the area of doing *mitzvos*, but even if it the act in question is not a *mitzvah*, he should still force himself to go do an action, whenever he’d rather not do it out of laziness.

A person should get used to do this exercise, doing it for 20 times, 100 times, or even 1000 times – doing things that he doesn’t feel like doing.

Obviously, a person should only do this sensibly. A person should not derive himself from sleep for 24 hours when he feels that he’s tired. What we mean is that when it comes to things that aren’t a problem for us to do, and the only reason why we are not doing it is because of laziness, it is these things which we should go against our nature to do.

We gave the example of getting up one’s seat to go change the spoon for a fork. There is no one who is physically incapable of getting from his seat to get up and change the spoon with a fork, and the only reason why a person wouldn’t do it is because of laziness. It is an example like this in which a person should deliberately go against his lazy nature.

Of course, there will be some things that will be harder to do than others, and our laziness is heavier when it comes to those things. But if it’s an easy thing to do, such as picking up a piece of paper from the floor, then force yourself to pick it, even though normally you don’t exert yourself to bend down and pick it up.

Slowly go against your nature in these kinds of scenarios which don't take up that much energy from you, and you will see that your laziness will weaken with time. You will then discover that even things you thought were difficult to do were actually not that difficult.

There are stories of our *Gedolim* that even on the last day of their life, when they were utterly weak, they would still exert themselves physically to do certain things, because they suspected themselves of laziness.

Understandably, it is a very subtle matter to know if the reason why we don't do something is a sign of laziness or simply because we can't do it. Indeed, only the greatest *tzaddikim* were able to make this subtle reflection and sense that if it was coming from a degree of laziness. The *tzaddikim* were able to discern such a thing, because they had purified themselves so much from materialism that they were able to sense if they had the smallest trace of laziness left in them.

But for most people, the *avodah* is, generally speaking, that a person should get used to doing things that he is really capable of doing, and the only reason why he doesn't do them is because of laziness. He must try going against his nature and force himself to do those things [with conscious awareness that he is doing this in order to overcome his laziness], so that he can counter his laziness.¹

¹ See the Rav's series on *Fixing Laziness for a more detailed approach*.

מסילת ישרים חלק ג' עמ' תט-ת

02 | *Purifying The Heart & Mind*

The *Mesillas Yescharim* brings the statement of the *Talmud Yerushalmi*: “One who speaks in between the blessing of *Yishtabach* and the first blessing of *Kerias Shema*, has sinned, and he must be returned from war. Here we see how far one must go to be careful, and to have truly clean deeds.”

What is the problem that lies behind talking in between *Yishtabach* and the first blessing of *Kerias Shema*? And why doesn't the *Gemara* say this with regards to talking in between the blessings of *Kerias Shema* and the blessing before *Shemoneh Esrei*?

Simply speaking, the *Ramchal* is proving from this statement of Chazal that even something which seems like a small act of carelessness is really a big sin, and it is a major part of *shleimus* (self-perfection) for one not to be lax in. That is true, but in these words of Chazal lays a hidden depth. Since the example that the *Ramchal* brings is that of one who speaks in between *Yishtabach* and *Kerias Shema*, it is upon us to understand this concept and the light that we can glean from it.



As is well-known from our Sages, there are four parts to *tefillah*:

(1) The recital of *korbonos*, which represents the realm of action. (2) The recital of *pesukei d'zimrah*, which is parallel to the realm of *middos* (character traits and emotions). (3) The blessings of *Kerias Shema*, which represent the realm of thought. (4) *Shemoneh Esrei*, which represents the highest realm, the world of *d'veykus* (attachment with Hashem).

In between *Yishtabach* and the first blessing of *Kerias Shema*, a person is making the transition between the realm of emotion to the realm of thought. If one talks in between, it symbolizes a disconnection between his thoughts (mind) and emotions (heart). If there wouldn't be this disconnection, he wouldn't talk in between *Yishtabach* and *Kerias Shema*!

This is the deeper understanding of why talking in the midst of *Pesukei D'Zimrah* was a reason to return from war, and it is like the idea discussed earlier, of one who first puts on his *tefillin shel rosh* before his *tefillin shel yad*.

The Baal Shem Tov would say that if someone speaks to a person who committed a sin that day, the person who sinned will inadvertently drop a hint in his words of the sin that he committed that day. Speech is the “ink of the heart”; a person's words reveal his heart. If there is sin present in his heart, it is revealed in his speech.

Thus if a person spoke in between *Yishtabach* and the blessings of *Kerias Shema*, he had to be returned from war, because if he cannot fight his own internal wars, he won't be able to fight the physical wars of the world.



Why is the *Mesillas Yesharim* discussing all of this in the chapter about *nekiyus* (cleanliness)? It is because *nekiyus* is about *nekiyus hadaas*, having a cleaner kind of thinking, which stems from a cleansed heart. The deeds of a person were discussed in the chapter about *zehirus* (watchfulness); what does the chapter about *nekiyus* discuss? It is discussing *nekiyus hadaas*, cleaner thinking, which is rooted in *nekiyus halev*, a cleansed heart.

Generally speaking, the path is “*And you shall know today, and you shall settle the matter upon your heart*”; we start from above and go downwards, from the brain\mind to the heart. If one talks in between *Yishtabach* and the blessings of *Kerias Shema*, though, he is like one who is making a separation between the heart and the mind, for before *Yishtabach*, he was in the realm of *middos* (the heart), and after the blessings of *Kerias Shema*, he rises to the level of intellect (the brain).

From purity of the heart, a person reaches a purified *daas* (mind). At first, one’s knowledge is not complete, for he does not yet have a purified *daas*. He knows of truths, but he has not yet internalized them in his heart. After his knowledge has become settled upon his heart, the internalized knowledge in his heart can then go back into the brain\mind, whereupon he receives a purified *daas* (mind); his *daas* becomes “*daas Torah*”, a Torah-thinking mind.

One who talks in between *Yishtabach* and the blessings of *Kerias Shema*, however, represents a person whose heart has not yet purified his mind, and so he cannot reach the level of *nekiyus*, spiritual cleanliness.

מסילת ישרים חלק ג עמ' תז – תח

03 | *The Level of The Heart*

The *tefillin shel yad* are worn parallel to the heart, and the *tefillin shel rosh* are worn on the head. The two pairs of our *tefillin* reflect the verse, “And you shall know today, and you shall settle the matter upon your heart.”² The *tefillin shel rosh* represents our task to “know”, and our *tefillin shel yad* (parallel to the heart) represents our task to internalize our knowledge into our heart.

A person is not allowed to talk in between putting on the *shel yad* and the *shel rosh*; the deeper understanding of this is that if he talks in between, it is like a separation between his mind and his heart, and a reflection that he is not internalizing his mind’s knowledge into his heart.

The Mesillas Yesharim brings the statement of Rav Huna in the name of Rav Acha, who says that there is a problem as well if one puts on his *shel rosh* before his *shel yad*. What is the problem with this?

The level of a person’s heart is measured according to his *maasim* (deeds). The word *maaseh* is from the word “*asuy, v’gomer*”, “made and finished”. What a person “knows” in his intellect is not yet “made and finished” to him. Only what he has become a permanent level to him, only what settles on his heart, is called “made and finished” to him. Knowledge that remains in one’s intellect alone does not become “*asuy v’gomer*” to him.

If a person is the kind whose “deeds increase his wisdom”, meaning that his actual level of self-completion in his soul is more prominent than the amount of wisdom that he knows – such a person’s deeds are being performed above his actual level. He is performing from the level of *emunah* (belief/faith), which is higher than the level of *yediah* (knowledge). This is the true kind of *avodah*.

But if one’s “wisdom increases his deeds”, he is performing according to his own wisdom, his own perspective. The problem with a person who first puts on his *shel rosh* before he puts on the *shel yad* is because he is like a person who gives prominence to his brain over his heart. This is not a matter of external preference; it is about the level of a person. When the level of one’s mind is above the level of one’s heart, this is one whose “wisdom increases his actions.”

The *Chovos HaLevovos* says. “There was a pious individual who met people returning from war with their enemies, who were enjoying the spoils of after having a great war. He said to them: “You are returning from a small war and enjoying its spoils. Prepare for the big war!” They said to him: “What big war are you referring to?” He said to them: “The way with the evil inclination, and his army.”

These are not mere words of *mussar*, or a hint. Who is truly a person who can fight a war against enemies? Only a person who has fought his own internal “war” can be a person who can fight the war with the nations of the world, and win. Warring with the nations of the world can only be a mirror reflection of one’s internal state.

Only someone who has become righteous, who has conquered his own evil inclination, can war with the other nations. From the very same power that one uses to fight the “seventy nations” contained in the “seventy forces” of his own soul, can one have the power to fight the seventy nations of the physical world. If a person did not overcome his own evil inclination, he won’t be able to more successful when trying to overcome anything else in the

² Devarim 4:39

world. That is the deeper reason of why only the *tzaddikim* went out to war, and those who were not *tzaddikim* remained behind.

One who first puts on his *shel rosh* before putting on his *shel yad* is like a person whose “wisdom increases his actions”. Why?

As mentioned, there are two parts to our *avodah*. There is the part of “*And you shall know today*”, and there is the part of “*And you shall settle the matter upon your heart.*” The part of “*And you shall settle the matter upon your heart*” is really referring to our point of free will, which is the area in which we fight the evil inclination. In the part of “*And you shall know today*”, however, there is no war with the evil inclination. One whose wisdom increases his actions is really a person who has never internalized his knowledge into his heart, because he has not yet succeeded in overcoming his own internal wars; therefore he cannot succeed in wars that are on a general scale.

Only one who first puts on his *shel yad* before his *shel rosh* can go out to war – meaning, only one who has overcome his evil inclination, which shows that his heart is on a proper level; he is one who can have the power to succeed in fighting a war on the world and return victorious.

בלבבי על מסילת ישרים ח"ג – עמ' תקמו - תקנז

04 | Sanctifying Marital Relations

The *Mesillas Yescharim* [in *Chapter 13: The Trait of Perishus\Abstinence*] writes: “Although the act [of marital relations] is permitted, it can still make a person drown in this lust, and from that he will also come to commit sins.”

The level of *perishus* (abstinence) includes two parts: It is to abstain from sin, and it also includes abstaining even from acts which are permitted. We find that even when certain actions are permissible, they can lead one to commit a sin.

For this reason, the Sages enacted that a Torah scholar must immerse in a *mikveh* the day after he has marital relations, so that he won't indulge in marital relations with his wife as if he's a hen. Since he knows that he will have to go to the *mikveh* the next day if he has relations, he won't do it as much.

Someone asked Reb Pinchos Koritzer ז"ל: What does immersing in a *mikveh* help? How does it detach a person from physicality? Reb Pinchos answered: “You have nothing to worry about. The *mikveh* will purify you.” The explanation behind this is that although having marital relations attaches a person to materialism – for women represent the material world – still, as soon as a person exits the *mikveh*, he is purified, because the *mikveh* has the power to lead a person away from being pulled too much after materialism.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* continues: “As the Sages say, “Man has a small organ. If he satisfies it, it will be hungry; if he starves it, he will be satisfied [*Sanhedrin 107a*].” The simple meaning of this is that a Torah scholar should not engage in marital relations so much, as the Sages find it unbecoming for a Torah scholar to resemble a hen, who indulges in marital relations. But there is more depth to the matter.

Dovid *HaMelech* declared that he was born out of his parents' desire for each other [*Tehillim 51:7*]. In other words, even Yishai, the father of Dovid *HaMelech* – who was one of the four people who did not sin – was still influenced to some degree by the evil Snake, who introduced desire into the world.

In marital relations, there are three factors involved: 1) The aspect of giving, in that the husband gives pleasure to the wife, through the act of marital intimacy. In this way, one resembles Yosef *HaTzaddik*, who represents the trait of *yesod* [“Foundation”, to guard one's personal holiness], for he was the one who provided for the land of Egypt, always giving to the land. Therefore, if a person engages in marital intimacy not for the sake of giving pleasure to his wife, but for the sake of his own personal pleasure, he goes from being a giver to becoming a taker.

Yet, there is always some personal motives involved when one engages in marital relations, and for this reason, Dovid *HaMelech* declared that even his father Yishai, who was pure from sin, did not entirely engage in marital relations for the sake of giving pleasure. If he would have done it only for the sake of giving pleasure, it would be considered *lishmah* (for the sake of Heaven) and Dovid *HaMelech* would not mention it. There is always some pleasure involved in the act, and therefore the act always contains some element of taking pleasure.

So far we have mentioned that marital intimacy involves giving pleasure, as well as some element of taking pleasure, due to the inevitable pleasure that one has in it. There is a third aspect as well in the act: The connection between the spouses which it engenders.

These are the three possible motivations that exist in marital relations – the will to give, the desire to take, and the motivation to achieve a connection.



When one exercises his *perishus* \abstinence by avoiding sin, this is the initial level, which is really included in the level of *zebirus* (watchfulness). The next step is for a person to take extra measures so that he won't come to sin, and this is called "*perishus*" \abstinence. Finally, the highest level is when a person avoids physicality, because he is 'disgusted' by physicality. This is a higher level than *perishus*.

To give a deeper explanation, there is a kind of *perishus* which we practice through our thoughts, but there is also a *perishus* we can utilize through our very soul. So besides for being willing in our thoughts to abstain from indulgence in permissible desires, there is another depth to the matter: that we should detach from pleasure itself. This is how we utilize *perishus* in our soul.

The Sages say that "Man has a small organ – if he satisfies it, he starves it, and he if he starves it, he satisfies it."³ When the Sages said that one should "starve" the male organ from marital relations, they did not just mean it on the simple level, that one should refrain from the act [of marital relations]. They meant it on a deeper level as well, that one should refrain from his need for pleasure sometimes.

However, the question is: There is a *mitzvah* of the Torah upon every married man of *onah*, to engage in marital relations with his wife. If so, what did Chazal mean that one should "starve" the male organ from marital relations?

The simple answer to this is that the Torah only obligates one to engage in marital relations in the situations that require him to do so [ex. on the night of her immersion, or if he is going out to travel, or if it is Friday night] but if it's not one of these situations, one should refrain from marital relations.

But the deeper answer is that even when one is obligated to engage in marital relations, he must feel as he if he "starving" himself in the sense that he's not doing it to receive pleasure, but rather, because he wants to give pleasure. As the *Gemara* says elsewhere concerning the Sage Rabbi Eliezer, [*Nedarim 20b*], that he would engage in marital relations "as if a demon forced him to". The *Mesillas Yesharim* indeed brings this practice of Rabbi Eliezer in the next paragraph, which alludes to the deep answer we are presenting. And when one "starves" his male organ in this way, he comes to be "satisfied."

When a person still longs to receive pleasure from the act, he is like someone who seemingly satisfies his male organ, while in reality, his male organ will be left unsatisfied. The more a person seeks to take pleasure from the act, the hungrier his male organ will become, no matter how much he seemingly 'satisfies' it through the act of marital intimacy.

But when he "starves" his male organ, as the Sages say to do – in other words, if he does it for the sake of giving pleasure, and not for the sake of taking pleasure – he removes himself from taking mode, and he will gain in that his male organ will feel that it has been satisfied.



On a deeper note, there is a pleasure even in giving pleasure, and therefore, one must learn as well to abstain even from the pleasure of giving pleasure.

There is a rule that “The cow wishes to nurse is young calf even more than the young calf wishes to nurse.” Giving is a more pleasurable feeling than the feeling one has when he takes pleasure. This is a pleasure which is also never satisfied, because a person always wish to give pleasure to others, with even an greater desire than the one who wishes to receive the pleasure! So just as there is also an *avodah* for one to abstain from the pleasure in taking, so is there is a deeper *avodah*: to abstain from the pleasure of giving. This is the true level of *perishus*.

This is what it really means to “starve” the male organ. Not only does it include that a person restrain himself from taking pleasure, but he must also learn to refrain from the act even if he’s doing it so that he can give pleasure. This is because giving involves pleasure as well, and it is very difficult for one to detach from his pleasure in giving to others; thus, there is an *avodah* for one to detach even from an act that is about giving pleasure.

These are two areas in which we must learn to abstain from – to abstain from acts of taking pleasure, as well as to abstain even from acts that involve *giving* pleasure.



What we still need to understand, however, is: Why is it that starving the male organ causes one to have his intimate needs satisfied? It is understandable that “satisfying” it too much leaves a person feeling “starved”, because indulging in marital relations is a recipe for being left unsatisfied [as we explained above]. But why is it that “starving” the male organ is what satisfies it?

The answer lies in the secret of Shabbos. Hashem created the world in six days, and then on Shabbos, He rested. Shabbos is a time in which we rest from labor, in which we are supposed to view all our labor as being done. On Shabbos, although we are not going to work, we lack nothing. Shabbos is a concept in which we are complete, and we do not need anything else to complete our existence.

In the same vein, Hashem wants us to feel satisfied inside ourselves, that we are not lacking for anything. When we “starve” the male organ, it is not simply that we must overcome our lust. That is true, but there is more depth to the matter. It is about feeling satisfied inside ourselves. It is to realize that our hunger for physical desires is not really a hunger, but rather that it is something which cloaks our essence, and in our essence, we are satisfied.

Thus, even if a person starves himself from marital relations, he shouldn’t feel that he’s “starving” himself at all. He shouldn’t feel deprived at this. If he feels that he’s depriving himself, he will never come to be satisfied. As an example, there are people who fast all day, but when it comes the end of the day, they feel like they’re starving. Such people miss the whole point; they feel like they are ‘depriving’ themselves. They will always feel hungry when they abstain from food, because they still feel that they need the food in order to feel satisfied.

If a person reveals the secret of Shabbos [secret is called “*sod*” in Hebrew, which is similar to the word *yesod* Foundation\the feeling of satisfaction that one has upon guarding his holiness], he has left the attitude that his hunger must be “satisfied”, because he does not feel deprived at all abstaining from the physical pleasure.



This is the deeper definition of *perishus*. Until now we explained the basic level of *perishus*, which is for one to avoid actual sin or to detach from materialistic pursuit. On a deeper level, a person detaches from materialism because he doesn't feel deprived at all with not having materialism. He has *perishus*, because he feels complete.

Usually, we understand that the concept of *perishus* is for one to abstain from physical desires in the sense that he has to overcome his bodily drives and instead listen to his soul. But the depth of *perishus*, the inner kind of *perishus*, is for a person to feel that *he doesn't need the physicality*. He doesn't feel that he is being "starved" in any way. He feels completely satisfied, and from his inner satisfaction he feels with himself, he comes to have *perishus* as a result.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* continues: **"Furthermore, even concerning a time that one is obligated to engage in marital relations, it was said the Sage Rabbi Eliezer would only reveal his body just a *tefach's* worth in the front, and he was covered for two *tefachim* worth in back of him. He resembled someone who looks like he is being forced by a demon to do it, so that he wouldn't have to enjoy the act even as he was enjoying it."**

Our Rabbis dealt extensively with this subject. It is a matter that is in need of understanding.

Earlier, we mentioned how even Yishai, the father of Dovid *HaMelech*, who was one of the four people that never sinned, still had a desire for marital relations. Dovid *HaMelech* said that he was born out of his parents' desire for each other. So how can it be that the Sage Rabbi Eliezer was more pious than Yishai? Yishai never sinned once in his life, yet he still had a desire for marital relations. Rabbi Eliezer was clearly not as perfected as Yishai, yet he did not have enjoyment from marital intimacy. How are we to understand this?

The answer lies in understanding what it means that he revealed "a *tefach's* worth" in front his body, yet he was covered in back by "two *tefachim*." It is hinting to us something deeper.

In man, there are three general forces. The highest part of man is his *neshamah* (G-dly soul). The lowest part of man is the "animalistic" part of his soul, which is called his *nefesh habehaimis*. In between these two levels of the soul, there is also a middle layer, which serves as a bridge between the higher and lower levels of the soul. The middle of the layer, when accessed, either connects a person to his *neshamah*, or it brings him down into the *nefesh habehaimis*.

Man's soul comes from Heaven, and his body was created from earth. Man can connect to the completely spiritual through his *neshamah*, and draw forth spiritual pleasure from there. Or, he can descend into the pleasures of the body, deriving pleasure that is animalistic in its nature.

When Rabbi Eliezer revealed one *tefach's* worth of space in front of him during marital relations, the intent is that part of him enjoyed the act. This is the inevitable result of being human, for we see that even Yishai, who never sinned in his life, also had a degree of enjoyment in the act. The physical aspect of the intimacy gave him a degree of pleasure – but as for the higher parts of himself – his *neshamah* and his middle layer of his soul – those other two parts of himself did not enjoy the act at all. We will explain this more.

Our *neshamah* is G-dly in its essence. It does not enjoy physical pleasure. Our physical body, though, needs animalistic kinds of pleasures to sustain itself. As for the middle level of our soul, man has the choice if he will use it or not to connect to spiritual pleasure through it. When Rabbi Eliezer covered himself for the amount of two *tefachim* behind his body, the meaning of this is that he "covered" it and did not reveal it – he covered it from physical enjoyment [choosing to use it to connect to spirituality instead].

Thus, it is true that all people have enjoyment from marital relations, as we see that even Yishai did. But that is only with regards to the physical aspect of ourselves. The physical body in us is the part of us which sins, and therefore it also has animalistic pleasures.

But the higher part of man, the *neshamah*, does not enjoy the physical part of the act. It instead is enjoying the fact that there is *Shechinah* between a man and woman, when they merit it.

The rest of Rabbi Eliezer did not enjoy the act at all, and it was rather like being forced by a demon to do it. This was with regards to the middle layer of his soul.

Thus, the fact that Rabbi Eliezer revealed one *tefach* in front and two *tefachim* behind him reflected how only the lowest part of himself, his body\ *nefesh hebeheimis*, enjoyed the physical aspect of it. But as for the other “two *tefachim*”, he left them “covered” – his *neshamah*, and his middle layer of the soul – did not enjoy the physical aspect.



Hashem knows what's really going on in a person's heart, where he's really deriving his satisfaction from in the act. Hashem knows if a person's enjoyment in physical intimacy is coming only *partially* from his body (while his soul remains connected to spiritual enjoyment as the same time), or if a person is getting his *entire* enjoyment from the physical aspect of it.

בלבבי על מסילת ישרים ח"ג עמ' תרכא

05 | The Concept of Hisbodedus – And Why It Is Not Popular Today...

The *Mesillas Yescharim*⁴ writes: “And more precious than everything is *hisbodedus* (Jewish meditation), for just as it removes worldly matters from one’s eyes, so does it remove the desire for this world from one’s heart.”

The matter of *hisbodedus* is more precious than anything else! What exactly is *hisbodedus* about? *Hisbodedus* is that a person identifies with a concept of forming an eternal kind of bonding [to G-d].

The connection that a person has to this world eventually becomes severed. A person gets married and has children, and he has a bond with them, but most people take leave of the world at a different time than their spouse and children; so there will come a point in time where the bond with one’s family is severed. We are not always together with our family. Who will a person always be together with? Hashem is the only one whom we are always together with.

Hisbodedus, besides for being a means to help remove a person from his pull towards this physical world, also contains a deeper aspect: it is about forming a connection with the eternal.

A person must connect to the Creator, Who is eternal, and to Torah, which is eternal; as well as to the souls of the Jewish people who are eternal, for it is written, “*The eternity of Yisrael does not lie.*” If a person connects to others simply in the social sense, he is not connecting to their souls, but simply to their bodies, which is only a “garment” atop the soul, and not a person himself. This kind of [superficial] connection is only a temporary connection with others; and it causes a person to lose his connection to the eternal.

The depth of the concept of *hisbodedus* is to have a constant connection [with the eternal]. The truth is that doing *hisbodedus* for only an hour a day is something that contradicts the whole concept of *hisbodedus* - because *hisbodedus* is to have a constant connection, and it cannot be accomplished through having a bit of time set aside for it. It is constructive of course, but it is not yet the inner and complete *hisbodedus*.

Hisbodedus is about maintaining a permanent and constant connection with the eternal. It should not ever be interrupted. We live in a world which distracts us from having this inner connection, and therefore we must separate ourselves from this world.

The purpose of *hisbodedus* is thus for a person to wish to leave his connection to this world, which is only a temporary connection – and to choose to enter into a constant kind of connection.



If *hisbodedus* by essence to be constant, when should a person detach from *hisbodedus* [besides for anything that obligates him according to *Halacha*]?

⁴ *Mesillas Yescharim*, chapter 15

The general answer to this is that it depends on what it will cause. If leaving *hisbodedus* will not cause the person to lose his constant connection, then he can temporarily stop *hisbodedus*. But if he will lose his constant connection when he leaves *hisbodedus*, then leaving *hisbodedus* is detrimental for him.

Hisbodedus is the tool which can help a person reach his constant connection with the eternal. If a person leaves *hisbodedus* and goes to a noisy place, or if he leaves *hisbodedus* for too long, then this interruption will make the person lose his constant connection. Such a person should not leave his place of *hisbodedus*.

Hisbodedus is all about acquiring a deep power in the soul to always have a constant connection. It is that even when a person has to stop his *hisbodedus* temporarily and go out into the world, he still maintains his deep connection, and even if gets interrupted, he knows how to immediately return to his connection. The further a person advances in his *hisbodedus*, the less danger he is in when he has to go out into the world.



The *Mesillas Yeshtarim* continues: “Dovid *HaMelech* has already mentioned the praise of *hisbodedus*, for it is written (*Tehillim* 55: 7), “Then I said, O that I had a wing like a dove; I would fly off and find rest. Behold, I would wander afar; I would dwell in the wilderness, *selah*.” The prophets Eliyahu and Elisha would find designated places in the mountains for *hisbodedus*, and the Sages and pious ones of old followed in their footsteps. They had found the best tool to acquire the complete abstinence from this world, so that the vanity of their society could not influence them.”

Here the Ramchal states that the most precious way to serve Hashem – the way which was traversed by Dovid, Eliyahu, Elisha, and the Sages who came after them – was to designate a place in the mountains and be in *hisbodedus*.

It is therefore very perplexing: how can it be that we almost never see anyone doing *hisbodedus*? Even when someone practices *hisbodedus*, people think he is strange....

The Ramchal states here that *hisbodedus* was the way of the previous generations, all the way down from the earliest prophets to the Sages. They left civilization and found a place in the mountains for *hisbodedus*.

It is upon us to understand: How could it be that *hisbodedus* has become forgotten and lost? To where has it gone? We will try to go a little deeply into this matter.



One’s personal *avodah* (as we mentioned before, in the name of the Baal Shem Tov) consists of the three stages of *hachnaah* (subjugation), *havdalah* (separation) and *hamtakah* (sweetening).

In the initial stage of one’s *avodah*, a person has to overcome the pull toward materialism; this is *hachnaah*, subjugating the desire to this world. The second stage is *havdalah*, separation – to disassociate oneself from materialism and instead connect to his soul. The final stage is *hamtakah*, “sweetening” – otherwise known as the level that is “*kedushah*”, holiness – which is for a person to return to this world and all its materialism with a pure outlook, since has achieved sanctity and has an attachment with Hashem.

These three concepts not only apply to our soul, but they apply to time as well. Thus, there are also these three stages of *hachnaah*, *havdalah*, and *hamtakah* when it comes to time as well.

The world will last for 6000 years (Sanhedrin 97a). We are currently at the end of the 6000 year period, and we are close to the end of days, which will essentially be an end to our period of *avodah*. The end of *avodah* is *hamtakah*, and therefore – we are found in the “time” of *hamtakah*, as opposed to *havdalah*. We are in a “time” of *hamtakah*, but in our personal souls, we are still at the level of *havdalah*. What results from this is that we feel a contradiction between the stage that our **soul** is at, with the stage that **time** is at.

To give an example of this concept, *Chazal* say that a Torah scholar resembles Shabbos; an ignoramus resembles the weekday. This is only true in terms of the soul, but in terms of time, a Torah scholar contains in himself the weekday as well, and an ignoramus can have Shabbos.

In terms of our soul, we have to go in order of the three stages of *hachnaah*, *havdalah*, and *hamtakah*. The middle stage, *havdalah*, is essentially the concept of *perishus* (abstaining from this world), and this expresses itself in the act of *hisbodedus* – being in solitude and away from civilization.

But in terms of time, we are close to *hamtakah*, in which we will achieve the universal connection with all people. (And actually, due to this, there is great abundance of physical nourishment available in today’s times; its source is holy, being poured down from Above, but unfortunately, all of this sustenance is being used for unholy purposes...)

This creates a contradiction to our souls. Most of us in our souls are at the lower stages, *hachnaah* and *havdalah*; but from the perspective of time, we are at *hamtakah*, since we are at the end of days. Thus, the *avodah* of *hisbodedus* has become somewhat weakened in the later generations.

These words are extremely subtle and deep points about our soul. There are people who go to faraway places from civilization to engage in *hisbodedus*, but it does almost nothing for them; it simply pulls them away from learning Torah and keeping the *mitzvos*. But if someone truly wants to go in the way of our ancestors, who learned Torah every second and kept all the *mitzvos*, without a shadow of a doubt, yet they also made sure to designate times of *hisbodedus* in the mountains – if he can have this balance, this is surely the proper way to go in.

(In summary, our first step in *avodah* is *hachnaah*. The second stage in our *avodah* is *havdalah*, which is, ideally, to designate a place away from civilization for *hisbodedus*.⁵ And after this can come the third stage, *hamtakah*.)

⁵ Refer to *Reaching Your Essence_015_Hisbodedus In Your Schedule*, where the Rav recommends getting away from civilization once a week, as part of the *avodah* of *hisbodedus*.

בלבבי על מסילת ישרים חלק ד עמ' יז – יט

06 | *Attaining Inner Purity*

The *Mesillas Yescharim*⁶ says that in order for a person to be at the level of *taharah* (inner purity), he does not do things in order to be praised by others or to receive reward for his deeds, and even if a person does not do things intentionally to get complimented, if he still feels good when someone compliments him and this causes him to perform with a bit more self-consciousness, he hasn't yet reached *taharah*.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* then cites the story of the daughter of Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, who was taking particular steps when she walked, and when she heard that people were saying about her, “How beautiful are the steps of this daughter”, she became more self-conscious of how she was walking and she began to walk more carefully. The *Gemara* criticizes her for this. Although it was only a sliver compared to the rest of her act, which was good, that little bit of self-consciousness that she felt from the compliment detracted from the purity of her deed.

When a person has reached the depth of the soul, he is at level of doing things *lishmah* (for non-ulterior motives). With most people, however, they are at either one of two levels in the soul. Either people are acting from their desires (*retzonos*) of the heart (*lev*), which are not yet purified; or they are acting from their *da'as* (mind) which thinks of what needs to be done.

Once a person came to ask advice from the Chozeh of Lublin of what he should do. The Chozeh told him, “Besides for what is permissible and forbidden according to Halacha, whenever you want to do something, always do the opposite!”

Why did he say this? It was because the person who came to him did not yet purify his heart. The person's actions were stemming from a heart that hadn't yet been cleansed from the mixture of good and evil that are in the heart's desires, and most of it is evil, with only a little bit of good. Therefore the Chozeh told the person that he should always do the opposite of what he wants.

A person is usually acting either from his natural desires, or from his thoughts about what Hashem wants him to do. If a person is acting from the natural desires in his heart, before he has purified his heart, it is impossible for him to act with pure intentions that are *lishmah*, since most of the heart's desires contain evil before it has been purified. Even when a person's actions are stemming from his thoughts, where his logic is dictating to him what he should do - this is not either *taharah*.

A common error that people make is that they think that their thoughts automatically represent their personal level. It is very possible that a person receives a subtle thoughts and he understands what he must do (although many times a person doesn't even know what to do even on an intellectual level, because when the heart hasn't yet been purified, his mind is 'bribed' by his heart's various desires, and he cannot think properly), yet he is not actually being motivated by the pure *neshamah* that resides within him; it is rather his logic which is guiding him.

As an example, sometimes a person will do a *taharah* (purifying a corpse) because he wants to come out of his own impurity, which is for his own personal reasons [and not because he wants to do a kindness with the dead].

⁶ *Mesillas Yescharim* chapter 16

In order to reach the level that is *taharah* \purity, one needs to penetrate into the depth of the soul, where there are no blemishes there. Then he will know how to stop fooling himself in thinking that he is acting absolutely *lishmah*.

The truth is that there are only individuals who reach this place in the soul. Most people do not get to the depth of the soul, the place in the soul which resembles the situation before the sin of Adam; therefore they are not able to access the state of acting absolutely *lishmah*. However, even if a person has not yet revealed G-dliness within himself and he has not yet reached the place in the soul where there is no possibility of sin, it can be applied “*There is no righteous person on the earth who does good and never sins*”.

To be clearer, there are layers in our soul, with outer layers that are not yet corrected. Those outer, unrefined layers of the soul will cause a person to have ulterior motivations in how he acts.

That is why we see sometimes (to one who has a discerning eye) that there are people who have are connected to their inner world, but their actions do not reflect this connection, and it is difficult for us to understand this contradiction in the person. A superficial perspective would be to judge that person and say, “It must be that this person thinks he is spiritual, but he is mistaken, if he can act in such a way.” That is how it seems.

But the deeper perspective is that it is very possible for a person to have a deep connection to his inner world, and he has revealed G-dliness and purity within, and it is just that the outer layers of his soul are still not yet corrected, which affect his own purity. He might act out of purity, but by the time the action is complete it has already been tainted with ulterior motivations, to the outer unrefined layers of the soul that it has passed through; and that is why he may end up doing it for the sake of getting complimented for it, or for the sake of reward.

If he didn’t have pure intentions to begin with, that is a different matter. But if he did start out with pure intentions, and he only became tainted with ulterior motivations at a later point, this is something else.



The result is that he will do it for the sake of getting complimented for his actions.

There are situations where a person becomes affected by personal agendas, and as a result he will act in a self-conscious way; such as what we see with the daughter of Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, when she was complimented for how she was walking and then she began to pay more attention to how she was walking, walking in a more precise manner. Here the satisfaction she was receiving was causing her to change her actions, not just her intentions in the act.

But there are also situations where a person can maintain more self-control and not allow the satisfaction for personal gain to change his actions, yet in his thoughts, he is still feeling satisfaction from the compliment. Here it is only his intentions which are lacking in purity. This too is lacking in *taharah*.

Sometimes we can see that a person isn’t acting from a pure place in himself, and sometimes he is still acting in a pure way but his intentions or his feelings are tainted with thoughts of self-gain, which means that his actions are not really stemming from a pure place in himself.

In This World, there are no ‘waters’ that are perfectly ‘clean’ - and “there is no water except Torah.” Nothing on This World is totally pure, and a person has to search for the purest source possible. He should seek those in the

generation who have purified themselves as much as possible, whom he can easily receive from (as long as they are suitable to his unique soul root).

בלבבי על מסילת ישרים ח"ד – עמ' כג - כח

07 | *Hashem – Your Only Companion*

The *Mesillas Yescharim*⁷ writes (when discussing the level of “*tabarah*”, inner purity) that a person should only turn to Hashem, and to no one else; this is what Dovid *HaMelech* means in Tehillim (73:25), “*Who else do I have in Heaven? And when I am with you, I do not desire this earth.*”

The Ramchal is telling us that when a person wants to be on the level of “*tabarah*” [spiritual purity] – he should only turn to Hashem, and to no one else.

After a person dies, when his soul leaves his body, his immediate desire is to see his parents, whom he hasn’t seen in such a long time. There are people who die with a list full of questions that they are waiting to ask in Heaven – their souls immediately go straight to the Heavenly school (the “*mesivta d’rakia*”) so that they can ask questions on the *sefarim* to the authors who wrote them....

This sounds like a nice thing - but the *possuk* says that we should want something else entirely: “*Who else do I have in Heaven.*” In other words – the only one we should be seeking in Heaven is Hashem Himself! There is no one else whom we should be concerned with.

This is a very subtle and deep perception of our soul. It’s not enough for a person to overcome his desire to be honored by others. It goes even more than that; a person has to learn that he doesn’t need to turn to anyone else, other than Hashem.

Imagine if a person is told that he will live for 100 years and be alone, with no one to talk to. How would he feel? Chazal say, “Either a friend or death” (*Taanis 23a*); we need companionship if we are to survive. Yet, Chazal also tell us that Hashem is called our “Friend”, whom we should never abandon (See *Rashi to Shabbos 31a*). We definitely need companionship, but who says that companionship has to mean another human being....

This is really an understanding that goes above human intellect. The very essence of a human being seeks companionship, and the fact that we are clothed by a physical body makes this need even stronger. We seek to be connected to others.

This need came about through Adam, who requested from Hashem that he needs a companion. Hashem indeed answered his request, and gave him a wife. Why didn’t Hashem just create her originally? Why did Adam have to first be alone?

The answer is: In the pure, initial state of mankind, man already has a companion. Hashem Himself is his companion. Adam was aware of this, but he asked Hashem that he needs a physical companion on this earth; he wanted to be connected with people. This was actually the root of his sin. The very woman that he asked for was the one who caused damage to him, convincing him to eat from the forbidden tree. The first sin in Creation did not start with eating from the forbidden tree – it started from Adam’s deviation from his companionship with Hashem.

In our pure state, we did not need to be connected with other human beings. Adam was created alone. This was not a deficiency – it was intended. It was the original plan of Creation. Hashem wanted only one man on this

⁷ *Mesillas Yescharim* chapter 16

world, as a vessel that would contain His individuality. In the original design, there was no need for human companionship.

When a person isn't totally connected with the Creator, he needs to fill this void of disconnection. He understands that animals are not his companion, so he seeks other people for companionship.

The *mitzvah* to love other Jews only came into concept as a result of Adam's sin. After the first sin, disparity entered the fabric of Creation, and now the Torah as well contains disparity, so we are commanded to unify the disparities. Had Adam never felt any need to unify with others in the first place – understanding that only Hashem is the Friend to have – he wouldn't have had to need other human beings, because there would be no one else on the world to unify with.

The very fact that we must love others is all a result of the disparity that entered Creation, as a result of the first sin. After the sin, it became possible to have separation in the world, and now there are people who start out apart from each other, and they must unify with each other and become one again.

But in the original design of mankind, we were not intended to have human companionship. There were angels in Gan Eden who served Adam, but these were not friends to him, because he did not learn Torah from them. Before the sin, Adam learned Torah directly from Hashem. Hashem was, so to speak, the *chavrusa* (learning partner) of Adam, and Adam's sole connection was with Hashem alone.

Sin caused us to feel that we cannot feel satisfaction on this world from just being connected to Hashem. It made us feel that even if we are close with Hashem, we need a companion on this earth. "Either a friend or death." But this is not the intended state of Creation.

The trait of *taharah* \purity is for a person to serve Hashem *lishmah*, "for Hashem's sake". It is essentially for a person to have "*bittul ani*", to nullify his sense of "I".

When a person is at the lower stage of his avodah – *shelo lishmah* (he serves Hashem for various kinds of ulterior motives), then he is concerned mainly about himself. But when a person reaches *lishmah*, he nullifies his existence, and he does not think and worry about himself.

When a person nullifies his "I", he can come to feel as Dovid *HaMelech* is describing: "*Who else do I have in Heaven? And when I am with you, I have no desire for this earth.*" A person cannot reach this understanding unless he penetrates into the deepest part of himself, which is the state of before Adam's request for a companion; he will need to seek human companionship.

When a person never gets to this understanding inside himself, he will go to Heaven after he dies and he might even get to visit all the Heavenly schools, and he might even get to learn in the school of Hashem Himself, but he won't last in any of these schools! He'll seek a different place than the one he is in...

A person might wonder: "What do you mean! If I get to learn in Hashem's school in Heaven, would I even entertain the notion of leaving it?"

But think about it. Why are there schools in Heaven in the first place? Hashem's school is the one that contains the entire Torah. So why are there are other schools in Heaven besides for Hashem's?!

The simple response to this is that if someone doesn't merit to get into Hashem's school, he can at least get into the other schools. But the depth of this matter is as follows: Even if a person merits to get into Hashem's school, it's not enough for him – because he still needs companionship; when he left this world, he remained with the same understanding of after the sin, in which people need companionship. That's why he needs other schools in Heaven!

“Who else do I have in Heaven. And when I am with you, I do not desire this earth.” This is describing a deep understanding of the soul, in which the person realizes that he only needs to seek Hashem, and no one else; he has no will whatsoever to seek out others for companionship.

The words here do not mean to imply that no one is on this level. We all have this ability in our souls, but it is a hidden kind of understanding, contained in the depths of our soul. It is our avodah to reveal this inner place of understanding in our soul: to only turn to Hashem.



In order to reach this inner place of the soul, a person has to develop a lifestyle of solitude.

If a person is bogged down – whether it’s from mundane life, or even from spiritual matters, he can’t get to this inner place. If a person is very involved with the public scene and does so earnestly, feeling a deep need in his soul to be involved with the public – he won’t be able to reach this inner solitude.

This is true even if a person is reserved from others and he only feels mentally connected with others. How much more so does it apply when a person is actively involved with the public. A person like this won’t be able to get to the understanding that all he needs in his life is Hashem, because he has never gotten used to the idea of ever being alone from people.

There is a kind of life of solitude that exists, and it is contained in the depths of our soul. The first step in reaching this is to first disconnect from society, simply, in the physical sense. After that comes the second step, which is mentally disconnect from others and feel totally alone in your soul with Hashem. It is then that a person will find his true Friend.

The kind of life which we see in the world today is totally the opposite of the true way that life is supposed to look like, the kind of life that Chazal speak of. It is being mentioned here in this chapter of *Mesillas Yesharim*. It is the way of life which our holy forefathers lived like. Our great *Avos* were shepherds in the desert, and they lived in solitude.

Our *Avos* did not do this out of self-centeredness, *chas v’shalom*. They were able to be personable with others, besides for having solitude. This was because they viewed dealings with other people as a garment that covers over our soul, which they would “wear” sometimes when they had to deal with people. They viewed relationships with others as a *garment*, and not as an intrinsic part of their essence.

When a person understands that “Either a friend or death” simply, that he can’t be happy in life unless he has friends, then he views companionship as part of his essence, not as a garment. He is missing the deep understanding. The deep understanding to have is that relationships with others are merely a garment that we have to sometimes wear, and sometimes remove.



The *Mesillas Yesharim* continues: “Similarly, Dovid *HaMelech* says: “*Your word is very pure, and Your servant loves it.*” The words of Hashem are pure. Hashem created the world with Ten Utterances, and all that resulted from it was pure.

If a person wants to connect to the Creator, he must reveal from within himself a deep place in his soul: a point which is completely good and pure.

After Adam’s sin, good and evil became mixed together, and mankind fell from his pure state. Before the sin, Adam resembled the Creator, in that he was completely good. Now that evil entered him and became mixed with his good, man no longer resembles the Creator, Who is completely good [and it is our avodah to return to that state of complete good].

So if a person wants to reach the inner understanding that he only needs Hashem and no one else, he must reach the place of “Your word is pure, and Your servant loves it.” He must reveal a place in himself which is completely good.

When a person hears of this concept, he might react: “What are we supposed to do - become disconnected from reality?!”

But the truth is that there is a very healthy and good way of disconnecting from reality! [But it’s only if a person can immediately return from solitude to reality in the blink of an eye]. It is a necessity to disconnect from reality – in a healthy way. If a person can’t do it, he’s burying himself in this world of falsity.

“*Your word is pure, and Your servant loves it.*” This is describing a deep yearning of the soul for a place that is completely clean, completely good, in which there is no evil. Although we can see that there is no such clean place that exists on this physical world, of this we can say: “I wait for him every day.” We await Moshiach, but the point is not to await the person who will be Moshiach. It is rather a yearning for a world that is completely pure and holy.

The more a person sees how there is little good to be found on this world, the more he can feel a yearning to be in a place that is completely good, and he seeks it more and more. The more we recoil from all the evil on this world, the more we yearn to connect to a world that is completely good, in which there is no evil.

בלבבי על מסילת ישרים – חלק ד' עמ' רמח – רמט

08 | *Happiness & Dancing*

The *Mesillas Yesharim*⁸ writes, “And Dovid, who already reached this quality on a great level, said: *“It is sweet upon him My words, I shall rejoice in Hashem”*, and he said, *“And I will come to the altar of G-d, to the Almighty, to rejoice; and I will thank You with a harp, that G-d is my G-d.”* And he said: *“My lips shall celebrate for I sing to You, and my soul You have redeemed”*. This meant that the joy became strong within him, that even his lips were moving on their own and singing, as he was involved with the praises of Hashem. All of this came from the great enthusiasm of his soul, which was enthused with the joy that came before it, and this is what is meant by *“My soul You have redeemed.”*

When serving Hashem, there is a way to arouse one’s inner state through external means, as was mentioned by the Ramchal earlier, when describing *zerizus* (zeal), that there is a rule of “The heart is pulled after the actions”. A person who wants to be joyous can become enthused when reading verses which bring him to enthusiasm, and slowly his inner state will also become enthused. That is the way to use outer means as a way to affect the inner state of a person.

But here the Ramchal is explaining an opposite approach: “Even his lips were moving on their own” – how? “From great enthusiasm in his soul, which was enthused with the joy that came before it.” His sense of recognition of Hashem slowly penetrated outward from within the depths of his heart, to the point that even his lips were moving with excitement.

The *Kuzari* writes about the power of *shirah* (song), that when the soul becomes joyous and it feels thankful to the Creator, the lips connect to the depth of the soul and they express the inward joy. This is true song, which comes from the depths of the heart, when it penetrates outward, and it then moves the lips and opens up the mouth in song and praise.

We can see that at times of *simcha* (festivity or celebration), the nature of a person is that that he likes to dance with his feet. Why? It is because *simcha* (joy) actually stems from the lower elements of our being. When we are joyous, we utilize our dormant energies, and through this we raise our earthly element⁹ and we rectify it. As we have explained in the past, the concept of *simcha* is meant to rectify the trait of sadness, which is rooted in the element of earth.

Our feet are connected to the ground; they walk on the ground and feel the ground. When one raises his earthly element, it is only natural that whatever is above him becomes elevated with him as well. Compare this to a book placed on a table. When you lift the table, the book is lifted with it.

Thus, *simchah* is expressed precisely through dancing with the feet, because when we reveal joy, the element of earth in us becomes rectified and our ‘earth’ becomes elevated, and that is why our feet which are connected to the ground\earth start to jump.

⁸ *Mesillas Yesharim* chapter 19

⁹ Editor’s Note: The element of earth in the soul (*yesod h’afar*) is the root of sadness, laziness, melancholy, low self-worth, lethargy, and despair. See *Shaarei Kedushah* of Rav Chaim Vital. The Rav has explained extensively about the element of earth in the series *Understanding Your Middos* (classes 01-030), and in the series *Fixing Your Earth*, and in the *derasha* of *Getting To Know Your Happiness_003 (Happiness In Our Existence)* and *Getting To Know Your Happiness_004 (Fighting The Sadness of Amalek and Erev Rav)*

This is a true kind of dancing – to dance from a rectified place within ourselves; to dance after the sadness created by the sin of Adam has been rectified.¹⁰

¹⁰ On another note, the Rav explained that the power of dancing joyously can rectify the evil of Amalek. See *Getting To Know Your Happiness_04_Fighting The Sadness of Amalek and Erev Rav* (also available in the “Purim Talks” pdf).

מסילת ישרים חלק ד עמ' תיח – תיט

09 | *Enduring Insults*

The *Mesillas Yescharim*¹¹ says that humility includes four parts: (1) conducting oneself in a humble manner, (2) being able to endure insults, (3) abhorring positions of leadership, and (4) running away from honor.

The second aspect is: to be able to endure insults. Some people are able to do this because they want atonement for their sins, because they know that suffering atones. This is definitely a wonderful level to reach, but it does not yet mean that a person has reached the level that is called humility. Enduring insults means that one has reached a point where his humility enables him to endure the insults.

How indeed is this possible? The simple understanding of it is that a person considers himself lowly in his eyes, and then it is not possible for him to feel insulted. If a person does not “hold of himself” at all, there is no honor to take away from him, because he doesn’t think he has any status whatsoever.

But the deeper understanding of enduring insults is based upon the statement, “These words, and these words, are the words of the living G-d.”¹² When a person does not consider himself to be prestigious, he has the strength to endure anything that opposes him.

As long as a person has not yet reached the level that is called humility, he is not able to tolerate something which opposes him. He has his own personality and he cannot stand anything which is opposite of his personality. The inner level of humility is when a person never feels opposed; he is able to bear that which opposes him and is his complete opposite. This is the depth of enduring insults.

The word for “insult” in Hebrew is עלבון, which is rooted in the letters ע, ל, ב. These letters can form the words, על ב, which means “above two.” In other words, a person can be above “two”, above all opposition, and be in a place of oneness.

There is a well-known interpretation of Maggid of Mezritch on the *Gemara*, “One who wants to be wise, should go south. One who wants to be wealthy, should go north.”¹³ The Maggid of Mezritch said, “And what should one do if he wants both wisdom and wealth?” He answered that a person should make himself into *ayin* (nothing), and then he can be in both directions at once.

This is the trait of humility. A person who feels nullified will not be pulled towards any one direction, because he is in a place which includes both directions.

This is the depth behind enduring insults – it is when one can be at peace with something that opposes him, thus he does not become insulted.

¹¹ *Mesillas Yescharim*

¹² *Gittin 6b*

¹³ *Bava Basra 25b*

בלבבי מסילת ישרים חלק ד – עמ' תפב - תפד

10 | *Choosing Good Friends*

The *Mesillas Yescharim*¹⁴ says: “There is no good for man except to seek wholesome friends (*temimim*), who will enlighten his eyes to show him his errors, who will rebuke him in their love for him; they save him from all evil, for whatever a person cannot see in himself, being that he does not see fault with himself, these friends will show him and help him understand, and warn him, and he will be guarded.”

Why indeed should a person seek “wholesome” friends (*temimim*)? Simply speaking, those who are *temimim* (wholesome) are *shleimim* (complete). This is not only referring to the trait that is called *temimus* (simple earnestness).

But from a deeper understanding, it is because the root of connection is in the soul’s element of wind. Each of our three forefathers paralleled a different element: Avraham Avinu paralleled the element of water, Yitzchok Avinu paralleled the element of fire, and Yaakov Avinu paralleled the element of wind. Yaakov parallels the element of wind, and Yaakov was called *ish tamim* (wholesome man). Thus, the true power of connection to people, which is the power of Yaakov Avinu, stems from the power of *temimus* (wholesomeness).

Temimus stems from completion (*shleimus*), as opposed to being partial. Thus a *tamim* (a wholesome person) can connect to all people.

The superficial aspect in connecting to others stems from the soul’s element of wind, whereas the inner power of connecting to others stems from the attitude of *temimus*\wholesomeness, from *shleimus*\completion, from *achdus*\unity.

These are two attitudes of how a person connects to others. There are some people who are naturally friendly to others; they are friendly people by nature, and this is due to the movement of the element of wind in their souls. Others connect to others though from their *temimus*, from their *shleimus*. They feel the *shoresh haneshamah* (the root of the souls), which is *achdus* (unity), and from that recognition they connect to others.



What is the purpose of friends (at least one of the purposes)? The *Mesillas Yescharim* says “So that they will enlighten his eyes to show him his errors”, and how? Through “and they will rebuke him in their love for him”. In other words, if they do not connect to him out of a love for him, this is not real rebuke. Their words of rebuke to him will just be stemming from disparity. True rebuke to others, given out of love, stems from a feeling for *achdus* with others.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* then goes on to say that friends help a person see his faults, for a person cannot see his faults on his own. The simple reason for this is because there is a rule, “A person does not see his own

¹⁴ *Mesillas Yescharim* chapter 23

shortcomings”, a person naturally does not find fault with himself, thus he needs others to point them out to him. But the depth behind this is because when one has good friends, the *shleimus* in the connection is what reveals his faults to him with greater clarity. The connection to these friends will illuminate the fault and correct it.

So it is not just because a person does not see his own faults. It is because when a person is by himself with no friends, he is lacking and incomplete, and then his faults will not be recognizable to him. Compare to this to the difference between a dirtied object and a clean object. In a dirtied object, its stains are not recognizable, because they are so covered over. But in a clean object, any trace of dirt will be recognizable.

When one has the perspective of *temimus* (which stems from *shleimus* and *achdus*), it is easier for him to recognize any damages in his character, and a person will better know what he has to fix. That is why through connecting to friends who are *temimim*, a person is saved from evil.

This is a very deep point. Simply speaking, we would say that since a person cannot see his own faults, he can only be fixed by others, who will show him his faults. But the deeper meaning is because when a person leaves his own self, he reaches his higher root, which is *achdus* with other souls, and from that higher plane he can look down and see his own private aspects, and be able to see the faults that he needs to correct.

In deeper terms, he will be able to perceive that the “self” which he sees are actually his own faults that he hasn’t yet corrected until now, for he has not been connected yet to the root of his soul.

בלבבי מסילת ישרים חלק ד – עמ' תקטו – תקטז

11 | *Why We Must Learn Torah In-Depth*

There are many who do not understand why the depth of serving Hashem can only be reached after heavily immersing one's mind into the study of Torah.

Some people are inclined to focus more on learning just *Halachah*, and others choose to only learn about how to awaken the heart. “Why should I bother myself so much”, this person thinks, “To spend so much time thinking into Torah topics and to immerse my mind in it in-depth? What satisfaction does this give the Creator if I'm trying to work out a contradiction in the Rambam? What comes from it?”

What is the core of this mistaken attitude?

We are learning here about *yirah* (awe of Hashem), which is rooted in *chochmah* (wisdom). The highest point a person can reach is *chochmah*, for *chochmah* is the highest quality of man: “You created man with wisdom.” *Yirah* is when a person lives tangibly the *chochmah*. The way to enter into this is through the study of Torah, for “Torah brings to carefulness.” From Torah a person can work his way upwards to the highest level, which is *chochmah\yirah*.

That is why in-depth Torah study is required in order for one to enter into *yirah*. A person can only merit *yirah* if he is immersed in Torah study in-depth. If he is not immersed in in-depth study of Torah, he loses his level of *chochmah* that he is at, and he loses the level of *yirah* with it – the level that is the purpose of all our *avodah*.

The purpose of one's *avodah*, as he ascends upward, is to reach a point where his mind is working all the time; to live on a level of *mochin* (mind), where his thoughts are always active. We are not referring here to the *avodah* of internalizing the mind's knowledge into the heart; that is also a worthy *avodah*, but that is not what we are dealing with here. Here we are talking about one who has risen from the world of action and into the world of emotion, and he has also risen from the world of emotion into the world of thought.

The apex of *avodah* is at the “world of thought”, where a person can be brought to have complete *yirah*. Without being involved in the world of thought, a person cannot live the level of *yirah*, and he surely won't be able to maintain it.¹⁵

The *Mesillas Yescharim* therefore says, “**Just as much reflection is the way to acquire constant awe, so is an interruption of thinking and neglect of in-depth study a tremendous loss.**” This is not referring to losing focus on *yirah\awe*, but on leaving *daas* (thinking) and *iyun* (in-depth study) of Torah. That is what it means to disconnect from *yirah*.

“The wise walk and think constantly”.¹⁶ When one is constantly using his mind to think, he is living in the world of thought, and from there he can reach *yirah*.

¹⁵ For more on how to live in the world of thought and to develop the power of consistent Torah thinking, refer to the Rav's *Getting To Know Your Thoughts*. See also *Nefesh HaChaim*, Gate IV.

¹⁶ *Derech Eitz Chaim of the Ramchal*

בלבבי על מסילת ישרים חלק ד – עמ' תקב

13 | *Two Ways of Connecting To G-dliness*

The *Mesillas Yesharim*¹⁷ writes, when it comes to the level of acquiring the level of *kedushah* (holiness): “The effort to make is, that a person should be totally separate and apart from materialism, and to be attached constantly, at all times, in the Creator.”

The level of *kedushah* (holiness) means that one is connected to *elokus* (G-dliness) at all times. How does a person attach himself to *elokus*?

There are two ways. One way is to through **inner reflection, using the mind**, and to think into the greatness of the Creator; and through learning the inner parts of the Torah and through learning about the inner workings of Creation. Another way is, to have a **simple sense of the reality of Hashem**. It is a “heart” kind of knowledge, which can feel it simply, where a person is finds himself “before” Hashem and he is thereby connected to Him.

These are two totally different ways to attach oneself to *elokus*: one way is through the intellect, and the other way is through a simple sense of Hashem. Of course, even in the first way, where one is using the intellect to think and understand things deeply, it will not suffice to merely intellectualize; the intellectual knowledge will have to feel palpable, in order for one’s thoughts to connect him to *elokus*. But these are two distinct abilities in the soul that enable a person to connect to *elokus*.

Our Sages state that Dovid *HaMelech* and Shlomo *HaMelech* argued about where *chochmah* (wisdom) is located – if it is the intellect or in the heart. [Dovid *HaMelech* said that *chochmah* is in the intellect, and Shlomo *HaMelech* said it is in the heart, in the term, “*My heart has seen much wisdom*”). The intellect is able to have a palpable sense of *elokus*, [after reflecting into it]; and a separate ability to feel *elokus* is in the heart, which can sense it simply.

¹⁷ *Mesillas Yesharim*, chapter 26

בלבבי מסילת ישרים – חלק ד עמ' תקלז – תקלח

12 | *Maintaining Revelations of Holiness*

The *Mesillas Yesharim*¹⁸ writes (about the level of *kedushah*\holiness): “I have already said, that a person cannot do anything due to himself. All he can do is awaken himself and make effort to get something, and this can only be done after he has attained all of the good character traits which were mentioned until now, from watchfulness until fear of sin.”

If a person tries to attain higher levels before he has fixed his character traits, his physical body has too much of a hold on him, and he won't be able to separate from the body's hold and reach a revelation of the *neshamah*. Even if he does get to a revelation of the *neshamah*, it will only be because he has broken through a 'crack' in the body [and it will only be temporary].

Many times people do a good deed with *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice), and through that, they attain a light of the *neshamah*, because they have broken through a 'crack' in the body, [through the power of *mesirus nefesh*]. However, they do not always have a connection to the revelation, and they are not able to maintain the spiritual light that comes into them, because they haven't yet formed a solid vessel to hold onto the higher levels coming in. And from that point onward, they commit many errors.

We have seen this throughout the generations – there were always people who received a revelation of spiritual light, but they weren't yet a proper vessel to guide themselves further with the light. This was because they broke through a 'crack' in the body which enabled the light of their *neshamah* to shine into their body, but they weren't prepared enough yet to receive this light.

Only after a person has properly traversed the steps of the *beraisa* that Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair taught [the ten steps explained in *Mesillas Yesharim*] and he has built himself to become a proper vessel, can he be able to maintain the spiritual light that comes into him when it is revealed to him.

...This is an important, fundamental concept. Besides for receiving the light of holiness, one needs to be a container that can receive the holiness. Many times people receive a light of holiness, when they suddenly penetrate past their body and they receive a light from the *neshamah*, but it is only a temporary flash which does not last.

For example, a person might merit a revelation of holiness due to an altruistic act of kindness for another, or because he prayed a lot, or because he immersed in the snow, or because he guards his eyes in an extremely pious manner, or because he is extremely careful with guarding the *Bris*, and other such deeds. Through any of these acts, a person might reach a level of holiness, but he did not necessarily yet become a 'container' to hold onto the light. This causes a person to be fooled with himself and he will come to make errors.

Sometimes it can even be a leader of others, who receives higher levels of holiness due to a certain act he did, but he doesn't have the proper spiritual energy in himself to guide others who come to him for help, because he did not yet develop the proper container within himself to hold onto the holiness he received - although the light of holiness certainly entered him.

¹⁸ *Mesillas Yesharim*, chapter 26