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WEEKLY SHMUESS BEREISHIS

Returning to the Beginning

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The Weekly Shmuess Bereishis - Returning to the Beginning in the Beginning of the Year¹

It is the year 5778 and it's *Parshas Bereishis* this week. You are in shul hearing *Parshas Bereishis* being read from the Torah, how do you view this?

Do you feel that you are currently in 5778 and that you are just hearing about the events of *maaseh Bereishis* as something that happened in the beginning of history, a very long time ago? Or does your soul return to the very beginning of creation, when you hear *Parshas Bereishis* being read from the Torah?

If a person just views it as an event of history, it is a sign that he lacks the power of returning to beginnings.

The Depth of Returning To The Beginning Point

Let us explore this deeper. The root of imagination began with the sin of Adam, when he ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, which was called *Eitz HaDaas "Tov V'Ra"*,² a mixture of good and evil. The *Eitz HaDaas* was essentially a *harkavah*, a combined mixture, of good and evil. Had Adam never eaten from the tree and sinned, he would have lived for only six days, and then he would have gone straight into an eternal Shabbos. In other words, he would have only lived within the six days of *maaseh Bereishis*, and afterwards, the World To Come. But when he sinned, the six days of Creation spawned into six thousand years. In other words, he left the state of *maaseh Bereishis* of six days, and entered into a system where each "day" would take 1000 years – he entered into the state of "*maaseh merkavah*", of current time.

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

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

¹ This drasha was constructed from Chapter 6 of the Rav's sefer עט אט דמיון

² The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

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

Consciously Returning To A Beginning

To sharpen this concept more: We are currently at a ‘middle’ point, and we do not see ourselves at a ‘beginning’ point. This is true both from the viewpoints of time and soul. When we view ourselves from the angle of time, we are currently in the year 5778, so we are clearly not at the beginning of time. In terms of our soul, we have usually gone through several lifetimes before this current one, so it is not the first time that we are here. But every person has a permanent point in his soul where he can return, though it, to his beginning point.

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

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

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

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

Strengthening Our Emunah Through Studying Maaseh Bereishis

It is well-known that the Chofetz Chaim would say that when he needed to strengthen his *emunah*³, he would review *Parshas Bereishis*. Simply speaking, studying the account of Creation can

³ belief and faith in the Creator

strength one's *emunah* because it reminds a person that Hashem created the world and everything in it.

“In the beginning, Hashem created the heaven and the earth.”⁴ The Chofetz Chaim *zt”l* would review the account of the days of creation, learning the order and details of creation in a very simple way.

[One might wonder: Didn't the Chofetz Chaim know Who created the world? Did he have some doubt about it, *chas veshalom*? Of course not! But the explanation of this conduct is that when a person senses some weakness and laxity in his Torah study or another matter, it is likely that the weakness does not stem from that area itself. Rather, the problem stems from the ultimate foundation of everything: *emunah*. That does not mean that the individual is weak in the intellectual aspect of his *emunah*, and that *chas veshalom*, he has some doubt in his mind. Rather, the point is that the light of *emunah* in his heart has become somewhat weakened, and it is no longer actively illuminating his heart. When there is a weakness in the ultimate source, which is *emunah*, one senses a weakness in Torah study and other aspects of one's *avodah*.

Let us ponder this point and consider it. The Chofetz Chaim was truly one of the greatest of his generation. Yet, he himself did this in order to awaken within himself the most basic point of *emunah*. He did not engage in sophisticated philosophizing, but rather returned to the simplest, clearest points of *emunah*. He achieved all this through a simple review of the *pesukim* about the works of creation, studying them with a deep simplicity.

You should know that this is a very great secret. The soul, deep down, is very simple and uncomplicated. Therefore, when a person wishes to arouse in himself the inner aspect of the soul in all its true purity, he must employ the simplest concepts and strengthen the roots of simple *emunah*. The first area to strengthen is the awareness that there is a Creator, as we mentioned above. He must then focus on the relationship of the Creator and that which He created, until these concepts are alive and clearly present in the soul in a palpable way, and the soul feels them and is in contact with them literally at all times.

We must not make light of this recommendation to adopt the way of the holy sage, the Chafetz Chaim *zt”l*. We must toil to implant within ourselves the most basic principle of all – simple and pure *emunah*. Generally speaking, when we discover problems in our spiritual lives, we notice only the external aspects, which are the branches, but the true root of them all is deep down in the soul.]⁵

⁴ Bereishis 1:1

⁵ An excerpt from *Building a Sanctuary in the Heart Part 1*

But there is more to it. It is because by returning to *maaseh Bereishis*, a person returns to the very beginning point of *emunah*.

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

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

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

Thus, in order to rectify the fantasies of our imagination – via returning from a state of distorted *maaseh merkavah* to pristine *maaseh Bereishis* – we will need to reveal our soul's power of *raishis*, of returning to beginnings. The practical way to use this deep power is that in anything you encounter, think into its original source.⁶

Returning To Beginnings – Through Analyzing Each Thing In Creation

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

If a person is walking in the street and he sees a tree, he should think: “How did this tree get here?” So he will think, “Someone must have planted it here.” Now he can think: “But who did the roots get here?” The answer will be, “Because there were roots here already from before.” But then he can think: “And how did the old roots get here?” He can keep thinking like this, until he concludes that the roots of this tree began with the third day of creation, where Hashem created all trees.

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

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

⁶ For more on how to understand the soul's power of “*raishis*”, refer to the *derasha* of the Rav in *The Weekly Shmuess_03_Raishis – The Power of Beginnings, and Shavuos #011 – Seeing Hashem In Creation*.

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

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

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

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

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

Weakening The Imagination Enables A Deeper Intellect

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

The answer to this is that if the heart has been purified from fantasies, this purity extends into the mind as well, which will uncover a deeper source of wisdom in the mind. The mind’s thinking abilities are rooted in a source called “*ayin*”, as it is written, “*Wisdom, where (m’ayin) is it found?*”⁷ So although a weakened imagination will certainly hamper the mind’s ability to compare together information – a function of the imagination, which has now taken a hit – the mind will not be negatively affected in the long run, for it has acquired an even deeper thinking ability. It will now have greater access to the deeper source of wisdom, “*ayin*”.

⁷ *Iyov 28:12*

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

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

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

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

In a case where one has imagined a kind of person who does not exist, such as imagining a person with three ears, this particular issue can be worked upon more practically, by looking at a picture of a *tzaddik*.⁸ Then a person can imagine what the original prototype of man is supposed to look like, using the picture of the *tzaddik*.

But even this method contains a difficulty to implement. Using a picture of a *tzaddik* is not exactly the same thing as imagining the original form of man at *maaseh Bereishis*, which was man at his holist and purest form. A *tzaddik* definitely bears a closer resemblance to the way man looked like at *maaseh Bereishis*, but it's only a comparison, and it is not the same thing. Also, this method wouldn't be able to work for a person who doesn't think about *maaseh Bereishis* that often, or if there are images that pop up in his imagination which aren't always pure.

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

Returning To The Beginning – Through Torah

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

⁸ *a righteous, holy, G-d fearing, pious religious Jew*

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

How do practically make use of this power?

The Torah is called *raishis*, “beginning”, for it is written, “*Hashem made me as the beginning of His way*”,⁹ thus, the more a person immerses his mind in Torah learning, his imagination is weakened accordingly. This is a fundamental, root solution which can prevent evil imagination from occurring in the first place.

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

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

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

⁹ *Mishlei* 8:22