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1 | *The Greek Perspective*¹

The *Nefesh HaChaim* (Gate IV: Chapter 1) writes that as the generations continued, the *yetzer hora* devised ways to fight *Klal Yisrael's* study of Torah, and thus the idea formed of learning Torah for the sake of *pilpul* (give-and-take analysis) alone, with no involvement of *yirah* (fear of Hashem).

The *yetzer hora* fights our power of Torah study, and so did the Greek exile fight the Torah. Greek wisdom and philosophy was at war with the wisdom of the Torah.

Our Sages viewed Greek wisdom as being a wisdom that is entirely focused on the physical body and nature, with no trace of spirituality to it. There was also another way of understanding the difference between the Torah's wisdom and Greek wisdom. Greek wisdom is entirely intellectual-based, with no mention of the "heart". Regarding the Torah, "*fear of Hashem is wisdom*", the Torah is a wisdom that requires fear of Hashem, whereas Greek wisdom is intellect alone.

When the *Nefesh HaChaim* says that the *yetzer hora* devised ways to fight against *Klal Yisrael's* study of Torah, it is referring to the evil force of impurity that is "*Yavan*" (the Greek exile and its philosophy). When a person learns Torah, he is definitely not learning a wisdom that is focused on the physical body and nature, but it's possible that he has Greek attitude towards the wisdom of Torah! In fact, he might have the exact thinking of Greek philosophy even as he's learning Torah.

The *yetzer hora* has many different ways of how it fights *Klal Yisrael*. Sometimes it causes some people in *Klal Yisrael* to abandon Torah study by causing them to engage in the study of nature and the body. Another way it fights *Klal Yisrael* is through removing "*yirah*" (fear of Hashem) from the picture, where the fiery love for Torah is extinguished in their hearts.

The depth of this struggle throughout the generations, and in our generation especially, is that the Greek attitude has penetrated into the "tents of *Shem*" (the *beis midrash*), in the sense that a person today can be sitting and learning Torah in the *beis midrash* yet he has a 'Greek perspective' within his very learning. To an onlooker, it would seem that there is no difference between a person learning with a Greek perspective with a person who doesn't. The difference cannot be discerned by the eye.

Those who study other wisdoms outside of the Torah, such as those who study nature and the body, are an obvious example of Greek influence. But even someone who merits to sit and learn in the *beis midrash* might be affected by the same problem: his Torah learning has become exiled by the evil inclination, whose purpose is to fight against the Torah.

When a person does not clarify to himself what his connection to Torah is [as we have begun to explain in the previous chapters], he might find out after 120 years when he goes up to Heaven that all of his Torah learning was with a Greek perspective.

There is a story told by Rav Shalom Shwadron of his grandfather, the *Maharsham*, which can make anyone shudder. The *Maharsham* fell ill, and he dreamt that he ascended to Heaven, where he stood in front of the Heavenly Court. They weighed out his merits and his sins. An announcement went out in praise of the

¹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/nefesh-hachaim-gate-4-004-greek-perspective>

Maharsham's merits of Torah learning and how awesome it was. Then an angel came and declared that all of his Torah is not called "Torah"; it came and blew into his mouth, and all of the words of Torah were removed from him, as if the words had never been there before! It was all removed from him. In the end, the angel returned all the words of Torah to the *Maharsham*, for it said, "In the generation you live in, your words of Torah can be called 'Torah'."

Anyone familiar with the works of the *Maharsham* knows that his Torah is awesome. He was one of the greatest leaders of his generation and you can see his greatness in his *sefarim*. Yet the *Maharsham* testified about himself that in the Heavenly Court, they instantly removed all his Torah.

If someone searches for truth and he hears the above story, how can he not suspect that the same thing can happen to him? Of course, in the end of the story, the angel considered the *Maharsham's* Torah to be Torah. But it is still shuddering to think that there was even such a possibility. How could such a thing be possible? We aren't discussing here a great person such as the *Maharsham*. We are talking about someone on our own spiritual level. How is it possible that a person's Torah is not considered to be real "Torah" in Heaven...?

If a person never clarified his connection to Torah – the external layer of the connection, and certainly the inner layer of the connection – he might think that he has love for Torah and that he learns a lot, but he might have a very mistaken attitude towards learning, for he has never clarified what connects him to Torah.

This is true even if he has learned much Torah both in quantity and quality; with understanding; with clarity; with *chiddushim*; with knowing the *Halachic* conclusions of each *sugya* (each on his own level); if he has not clarified the refined points of what connects him to the Torah he learns, then there is only a minimal connection to Torah he has (based on one of the qualities above), and he is missing much of what is required in a connection to Torah.

A person doesn't know what's missing from his learning, because he never makes this reflection. He thinks that everything's great simply because he is sitting and learning Torah from morning to night; after all, he merits understanding in his learning, he even has *chiddushim*, he has clarity in what he is learning, he is becoming knowledgeable in Torah – each person can say this on his own level.

Yet the story of the *Maharsham* proves that one's Torah learning is considered to be like nothing in Heaven. This is when one doesn't clarify what is connecting him to Torah and he isn't aware of what deeply connects him to it.

One who clarifies what connects him to his Torah learning is aware of what exactly connects him to the Torah and which parts he isn't yet connected to. He is aware of which areas in his learning are weak, which areas need improvement, which parts he needs to decrease and which parts he needs to increase, which parts he needs more connection to. One must honestly examine himself and take apart his connection to Torah and see which parts he is connected to and which parts are missing from his connection.

When a person ascends to Heaven after 120, the first question he is asked is, "Did you set aside times for Torah study?" That will be the first part of the examination. But after this the question will go deeper: During the times he learned Torah, on what level did he learn it on? How deep was his connection to it?

We must know that we can't run away from this examination. Either a person clarifies it as he is here on this world, or it is told to him when he gets to the World of Truth – where it will be too late to do anything.

Obviously, anyone who is sitting and learning Torah all day in the *beis midrash* is someone who wants to make progress in his Torah learning. But one must be aware of which parts are necessary in the connection to Torah learning. Through this, one's connection to Torah will grow deeper and it will have more quality to it.

The evil spiritual force known as ‘*kelipas Yavan*’, the “Greek perspective”, is essentially the attitude that a person can learn Torah in a superficial manner, where he thinks that he is gaining wisdom and that he is understanding it, and the person thinks that everything here is fine. But with this attitude towards learning, a person will come upstairs after 120 and it will be shown to him that his entire way of life was spent incorrectly; that instead of being of those who sat in the *beis midrash*, he was considered to be of those who pursue other places, *chas v’shalom*. Although he did not actually run after frivolous things during his lifetime, he will be shown that his perspective is that not that far from those who do not consider Torah to be the main pursuit of life.

To emphasize again, each person will have to undergo this assessment of his Torah learning. The only question is if it will happen during a person’s lifetime - when he uses his free will to do so - or if it will be made in Heaven, where it will be too late. A person on this world has the free will to choose to make this examination on himself: To see how much he is exerting himself in Torah, how connected he is to Torah, how much clarity he has in his learning, etc.

If a person does not make this reflection, he will simply live a carefree life, thinking that all is well and that he just has to keep increasing his time for learning and that he should simply keep exerting himself more and more. Although this is also true, a person must not think that this is all he needs in his connection to Torah. There is much more to the connection to Torah that a person needs, and every person will have to see it at some point; whether on this world, or on the next.

If a person didn’t assess his connection to Torah on this world, he will be shown in the next world all that he was supposed to reach – which was a simple truth that he could have reached even as he lived on this world. If one realizes as he is on this world that improvement is needed in his connection to Torah learning, then he has a chance of changing, because he still has free will. But if a person waits until the next world to see the truth, there, it is too late to do anything, and there he will remain with his very minimal level of connection to Torah.



The *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that the study of *mussar* began because the great leaders were seeing that much was missing from their Torah learning. The *Nefesh HaChaim* calls them the ‘eyes of the congregation.’ In other words, these great people had the ‘eyes’ to see what was missing. They had a spiritual lens that could see beyond the external layer of things.

When a person sees the world through a superficial lens, he does not see what the problems are. He walks into a *beis midrash* full of people learning Torah, and he might feel, “Ah, “praiseworthy are the eyes that have seen this.” But if he would have more inner vision, he would instantly see what is missing from the *beis midrash*. (To see and fix the problem, though, he would have to be on a very high spiritual level).

The *Nefesh HaChaim* says that the leaders of the generation who founded the study of *mussar* were the ‘eyes of the congregation.’ They had ‘eyes’ that could see things which others couldn’t see. They could see subtleties; they possessed the discerning eye of a Torah scholar, who sees beyond the superficial layer of things.

In recent generations, there has been a great increase of Torah study. But those with inner vision can see that a deep connection to Torah is missing, and they see a whole different reality than how others see it. The leaders of the generation, who are called ‘eyes of the generation’, see this painful reality. But each person on his own level can gain some inner vision and he can sense that there is much that is missing from his connection to Torah.



The *Nefesh HaChaim* continues that those who noticed what was missing from Torah study wrote *sefarim* that explain *yirah* (fear of Hashem) to redirect the hearts of the nation, so that they could rededicate themselves to the study of Torah and to serving Hashem, with pure fear of Heaven.

A superficial reading of these words of the *Nefesh HaChaim* seems to imply that they realized that their Torah learning was causing them to be lacking in *yirah* and in *avodas Hashem*, thus the leaders of the past wrote *sefarim* that explain *yirah*, in order to gain back their *yirah*.

However, that is not what he writes. The *Nefesh HaChaim* is saying [in conjunction with the earlier paragraphs] that because their Torah learning was lacking in *yirah*, because it was lacking with a “burning love for Torah” as he puts it, they felt that their very Torah learning was lacking. [Thus they weren’t just missing *yirah*; they were missing Torah, because they were missing *yirah* in their Torah].

Thus, when they wrote *sefarim* about *yirah*, they didn’t do this just so they could gain *yirah*; they did it so that their Torah learning could become improved in this way. For it is written, “*Fear of G-d is wisdom.*”



They didn’t want to just improve their fear of Heaven; they wanted to gain back a fiery love for Torah which had gone missing from them.

From a superficial perspective, it appears to be that *mussar sefarim* are here to explain to us merely how to better our actions, how to improve our *middos*, how to improve ourselves, etc. This is all true, but there is a much deeper purpose of the *mussar sefarim*. It is because “*Fear of G-d is wisdom.*” When a person learns *mussar* in the true way, not superficially but with in-depth analysis, he reveals a deeper connection to Hashem and to Torah. He gains a clearer perspective on life, thus the way he relates to Hashem and to his Torah learning becomes totally different.

This is apparent from the words of the *Nefesh HaChaim*, that the reason why the leaders wrote *mussar sefarim* was “to straighten out... and fix the breaches” that had been made. They were trying to help us become more precise and exact in our way of living. They were trying to fix the ‘breaches’, reminiscent of the ‘13 breaches’ which the Greeks had made in the *Beis HaMikdash*, which symbolizes the negative Greek influences on our Torah learning. Thus the purpose of the study of *mussar* was essentially so that we would clarify our connection to our Torah learning and form a deep connection to Torah; to get it back to the way it used to be before all the breaches came along.



The *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that any sensible person understands that those who founded the study of *mussar* never intended for people to abandon Torah study and to learn *mussar* all day. Their entire intention was so that people would improve their Torah learning and learn Torah all day; to learn the Written Torah, the Oral Torah, and the many *halachos* of the Torah. They just wanted people to add learn it with fear of Heaven.

How indeed did people then come to make such a mistake? It was because people thought that the study of *mussar*\ *yirah* was solely for the sake of knowing what *yirah* is and what *avodas Hashem* is. That is how they came to neglect Torah study and to instead involve themselves with only *mussar*.

The true perspective is that the *mussar sefarim*, which explain how to have *yirah*, are really coming to explain our connection to Hashem, and precisely through the study of His Torah. The study of *yirah* was not meant to imply that people should stop learning Torah in favor of learning about *yirah*; for the whole purpose of *yirah* was to

deepen our connection to the study of Torah. “*Fear of Hashem is wisdom*” – the purpose of studying about *yirah* was to reconnect us to the subtle and refined wisdom of the Torah.

This explains the difference between those who serve Hashem superficially with those who really serve Him. Those who truly serve Hashem are people who use all of their spirituality to deepen their connection to Torah learning, more and more. By contrast, someone who improves his ‘Avodas Hashem’ without being focused on improving his Torah learning, will slowly drift off from Torah study, preferring instead to spend most of his time in the study of *mussar* and *yirah*. He erroneously thinks that only in that area can he feel a burning love for Torah.

When a person understands what Torah is all about and what *mussar* is about, he understands that *mussar* is coming to explain the subtleties of the Torah’s wisdom, and that this what ultimately connects a person to Hashem and His Torah. When this is the perspective, a person understands that the study of *mussar* is not meant to weaken our study of Torah; it is rather the ingredient that helps our Torah learning thrive. The study of *mussar* comes to analyze the subtleties of the human soul, which in turn helps our connection to Torah to be more precise and exact.



May Hashem give us the strength that *kelipas Yavan* (the Greek perspective) should be erased from the world in general, and on a specific level, from those who sit here in the *beis midrash*; that our Torah learning should not be a mere superficial and purely intellectual kind of study that resembles the study of Greek wisdoms. Rather, we should have a connection to our Torah learning which should stem from both the use of our mind and heart. Our minds should be heavily immersed in Torah, and our hearts need to burn with fiery love for it. Then our Torah learning can resemble the Menorah in its purity, in which the flame would rise on its own after it was lit; our souls should become enflamed with a burning love for Torah and thereby become exalted, going higher and higher.

2 | *The Light of Emunah*²

Chanukah was essentially a war between the *chochmah*\wisdom of the holy Torah (which is called “*Torah Ohr*”, the Torah of light) vs. the wisdom of the Greeks. However, it was a different kind of war than the other wars fought.

It wasn’t just about defeating and getting rid of our enemies. It was about taking their evil and sanctifying it.

The Greek nation (*Yavan*) descended from *Yefes*, the son of *Noach*. *Yefes* was blessed by his father that he would receive beauty; our Sages said that “the beauty of *Yefes* should join the tents of *Shem*”,³ and the Sages also said that “Believe that there is wisdom found among the nations”,⁴ and this is referring in particular to the wisdom of the Greeks, for they are the root of all secular wisdoms.

The depth of the above statement of Chazal is that when we “believe” that the Greeks do contain wisdom, this is how we sanctify the Greek essence; in other words, we are supposed to believe that the secular nations contain wisdom, but we must not go learn their wisdom. The fact that the Sages said that “Wisdom is found among the nations” does not mean, *chas v’shalom*, that we can be permitted to study their wisdom. We can *believe* that they have wisdom, but that does not permit us to go and study their wisdoms. Thus, the Sages were careful to say only that we can *believe* that there is wisdom among the nations; they did not tell us to *learn* of their secular wisdom.⁵

The spiritual light of *chochmah*\wisdom has fallen [into the Side of Evil], and that is why the secular nations possess wisdom. The way we rectify this fallen light is through using our power of *emunah* - in this case, to “believe” – to *believe* that they have wisdom, precisely *without* engaging in the study of their wisdom.

This is how we bring light into the “Greek darkness” [and thus rectify it]. The Greeks are referred to as “darkness”.

It is written, “*Your faith at nights.*”⁶ Darkness is precisely the time in which we are meant to bring in the light of *Emunah*\faith in Hashem.

This is the inner reason behind why the Menorah is lit only after it is dark. The light of the Menorah is a different kind of light – it does not resemble sunlight; rather, it represents the light of Hashem which is present with us even as we are in darkness. As it is written, “*As I sit in darkness, Hashem is a light unto me.*”⁷ The “light of Hashem” is when we have *emunah*\faith in Him; this is also known as the “light of *emunah*.”

It was the spiritual light of the holy Torah that defeated the Greeks, and that light was essentially being empowered by the light of *emunah*.

² <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-000-light-emunah>

Adapted From Introduction to Sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh on Chanukah

³ Megillah 9b

⁴ Eichah Rabbah 2:13

⁵ See Tefillah #042- *What It Means To Have Good Middos and Tefillah #094-Seeking Advice* ; see also the derasha “*Avoiding The Secular Influence*”.

⁶ Tehillim 92:3

⁷ Michah 7:8

The eight lights of the Menorah symbolize the level above seven. *Chochmah*\Wisdom is in the dimension of seven, while *emunah* is the dimension that is higher than *Chochmah*\wisdom, for *emunah* is really the source that all wisdom is drawn from; as it is written, “Wisdom is found in *ayin* (nothingness)” [and *ayin* refers to *emunah*].

The *halachah* is that the Menorah is lit outside and not inside, because the Menorah is an “*Ohr Makif*” (a “surrounding spiritual light”), as opposed to being an *Ohr Penimi* (“internal spiritual light”), because the lights of the Menorah represent the light of *emunah*, and *emunah* is not just a light that radiates inwardly; it shines outward.

For this reason, there are some opinions in our Sages that Chanukah will not cease in the future, based on the concept that “The purpose of knowledge is to know that we do not know” – in other words, *emunah* is the purpose of all *Chochmah*\wisdom. This is also known as the light of the redemption: the light of *emunah*.

The other festivals, by contrast, are all within the dimension of *Chochmah*\wisdom, therefore they will all cease in the future [because in the future there will be no need for *Chochmah*]; whereas Chanukah and Purim are the festivals that are within the higher dimension, *emunah* – which is above all *Chochmah* – and that is why these two festivals will not cease in the future.

3 | Chanukah- Winning The War By Remaining Eternal ⁸

Viewing The Imminent Festival As A Continuation Of Our Avodah

In the previous chapters (of the series of [Reaching Your Essence](#)), we discussed at length the ways of how to reveal the *Yechidah* in the soul.

It is the nature of most of us that when a Jewish holiday approaches, we like to learn about the nature of the upcoming holiday, but we tend to put aside our current *avodah* in favor of learning about the holiday at hand.

But we can compare this to one who owns a horse for 20 years and he wishes to give it as a wedding present to his son. The wedding day of his son arrives, and he gets very busy with the wedding preparations, and what happens? He doesn't watch his horse, and the horse runs away.

The lesson from this parable is very clear. If we leave put our *avodah* on hold because we need to learn about the holiday, then our *avodah* will be ignored in favor of learning about the holiday, and then we lose the previous gains of our *avodah* until now.

However, the other option is not either good: if a person ignores the holiday and only focuses on his *avodah*, then this too is detrimental, because if Hashem gives us a holiday, obviously it is His will that we involve ourselves in it.

When a Jewish holiday comes our way as we are in middle of explaining a certain *avodah*, we thus need to see it as a continuation of our own current *avodah*, rather than just see it as a coincidence that happens to fall out in middle of our *avodah*. Therefore, the current holiday that is approaching [in our case, Chanukah] must be viewed by us as a continuation of our current *avodah* of revealing our “*Yechidah*”.

What, essentially, is a Jewish festival all about? The *Yomim Tovim* (Jewish festivals) are really windows that help us see into the inner world of spirituality. The inner world is covered over, but it is not completely covered over; there are windows which we can use to see into it. Each festival offers us the opportunity to access a new window that gives us new perspectives about the inner world.

If we look into a house through many of its windows and we see the same room, we are seeing the same room each time, just through different windows. The festivals are each different windows that look at the same room. Chanukah is one window, and Purim is another window, and Pesach is another window. But they are all windows to the same view. We aren't revealing new realities through each of the festivals – rather, we can keep learning to see the same reality that exists through different angles, with each festival that we go through.

The Lesson of Chanukah – Another Way To Access The View of the Yechidah

⁸ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/reaching-your-essence-010-utilizing-power-peace> Adapted from 010 Da Es Havaysecha

The holiday approaching us now is Chanukah, and if we are currently learning about how to reveal our *Yechidah*, this is not a coincidence. It must be that Chanukah adds on another important dimension to this avodah of trying to uncover our *Yechidah*.

Chanukah is therefore another way for us to learn about how we can view the inner world. Let us reflect, therefore, into how we can reveal our *Yechidah* through understanding about Chanukah.

Real Victory

On Chanukah, there was a war between the Greeks and the *Chashmonaim* (Jews who descended from royalty). This was a miracle that defied nature; the Greek were very mighty, but a handful of Jews slew them all in a miraculous defeat. How did they succeed in overcoming nature? We will try to explain this with an inner perspective.

When we are in war, how can we win? How do we overcome the opposition? A simple war, like we see from the world, is when two sides are warring with each other, and might is pitted against might. There were many such wars in history.

However, the Ramban writes that the ideal situation to fight a war is to first try to make peace with the other side. If peace isn't achieved, the side who is trying to make peace may then go to war with the other side. It sounds simply that the problem of war can be solved with placating the other side, such as if we offer the other side a lot of money. But there is a deeper reason. It is because when there is fighting, we need to access the power of *shalom* (peace) in the soul.

Logic dictates the opposite: logic says that if you remain peaceful and docile, the other side will fight you. How can peace win our wars for us?! Why does the Ramban say that we should first try peace in order to win the war?!

If a person is deeply connected to the power of peace in the soul, that affects his outside as well, so inner peace can cause peace upon the world. That is more understandable. But if one hasn't reached his inner peace, how can behaving with peace be a possible way to win a war?!

The truth is that real peace will only be in the future. It is written of the future, "*The wolf and the lamb shall walk together.*" Then there will be no more wars, because we will all become one unit. It really doesn't make sense that peace should win our wars. Only in the future will this concept make sense, because the future will be the revelation of the innermost point of the soul, the all-inclusive point, which does not allow for any contradictions, oppositions, or war. The fact that there will be peace in the future will not be a coincidence. The future peace will be the revelation of our essence. It will be revealed that there are no oppositions. Thus, it automatically follows that there will be no wars.

War is only possible when there is a concept of separation and disparity in the world; currently, we look at ourselves as having many divided "parts" to our self, which reflects the concept that in the current era, there is disparity. In the future, when the all-inclusive point of the *Yechidah* will be revealed to all, the entire of notion of ever being divided will not exist, thus it will follow that there cannot be war, because there will be no more concept of opposition.

Thus, if we really want to win a war, we need to awaken a point in ourselves which cannot be destroyed. The outer parts of our soul can be destroyed, but the *Yechidah* in us is the all-inclusive point; everything is in it - therefore, it cannot be destroyed.

This is the deep meaning behind the victory of the *Chashmonaim*, the handful of Jews that won against the Greeks. The *Chashmonaim* revealed their own inner power of the soul, the non-destructive point contained deep in the soul - and that was why the Greeks couldn't destroy them.

In the future, it is written, "*Esav will be like straw, and Yosef will be like fire that burns up the straw.*" This will be a deep kind of victory. When fire and water meet, they battle each other, and it takes a long time until one of the elements can overpower the other. But when fire is set upon straw, it takes only a few moments until all of the straw is destroyed; there is no opposition. So too, in the future, there will be no opposition, because it will be revealed how all is one, for Hashem's Name will be one. Oneness will be revealed – the all-inclusive point will be revealed, therefore, there will be no concept of division.

The Depth of Humility

Chanukah was a war of a few Jews against many Greeks. Simply, this was a miracle, but the depth of it was, that "they made themselves small in their eyes", as the Rabbis write.

This sounds simply that they had humility, when one makes himself small in his eyes. People think that humility means to focus on your shortcomings, and that it is arrogance to focus on your qualities. After all, it is true that the power of imagination can cause one to ignore reality, which in turn makes him ignore his shortcomings, while a person who is very aware of reality has humility, because he recognizes his shortcomings. It seems that humility is simply for a person to be aware of reality, thus he is aware of his shortcomings, in the same way that a person has to be realistic when he writes out a check and make sure that he still has money in his bank account.

But there is a deeper understanding of humility: when one recognizes the greater reality, which is the all-inclusive point in the soul, he sees how he is not nothing, for he is part of a greater whole; he is part of a collective essence. And that humbles him as a result.

But how did the small amount of Jews win the Greeks? It is something deeper: that they made themselves "small." Because "they made themselves small in their own eyes" – because they had true humility - by recognizing the all-inclusive reality – that was how they were able to win the Greeks.

Humility is really to see yourself as part of a greater whole. It is to lessen the "I", not by weakening it and ignoring your self-worth, but by realizing how your "I" is part of a greater whole. The *Chashmonaim* nullified their own essence, by having this deep humility, of seeing themselves as part of the greater whole, as part of the reality that is all-inclusive, as opposed to the 'divided' kind of reality.⁹

⁹ In middle of this shiur, with regards to this aspect, the Rav clarified to a questioner that in the current reality we live in, we live in a divided reality, not in the all-inclusive reality; only in the future will we all live in an all-inclusive reality. For this reason, our body is obligated in the mitzvos, and there are different parts of our body which require different mitzvos. Our body represents divisions and disparity, because in the physical dimension, there is no concept of oneness. Only in the spiritual dimension there is oneness. In the future this will be fully revealed, and currently, we can have access to that spiritual dimension of the future when we access the deep part of our soul, the *Yechidah*. The Rav is explaining here how we can access the all-inclusive reality that is contained in our *Yechidah*.

(There are people who don't realize their self-worth. They don't give enough value to their actual self, because they focus on their many shortcomings. They view themselves as lowly, and they see themselves as just scattered parts inside themselves. But this is not the true meaning of humility. Humility is not to dismiss reality – it is really to recognize your true self-worth of a Jew.

The proper outlook for one to have is that although one shouldn't pride himself too much about his qualities, he must never lessen his actual "I". He can be aware of his shortcomings, but he doesn't have to lessen the value of his essence. A person must always remain with his self-worth.)

Thus, the deep way to win a war is not through fighting a war. It is through revealing the power of *netzach*, eternity – to reveal the all-inclusive point in the soul, the non-destructive point of the soul. When one reveals his non-destructive essence, he indeed cannot be destroyed. And if one tries to destroy it, he is destroying himself.

Connecting To The Oneness of Hashem

This power of deep unity with the world, known as "*echad*" (oneness), which will be fully revealed in the future, still exists deep in the soul, and is the deepest power of the soul. Hashem in "One", and when one is connected with Hashem, he is connected to His oneness, and then the disparity in front of him ceases.

How did Dovid *HaMelech* defeat *Golyas*? With one rock. The depth of this is that he defeated him with the power of "one", not simply that he managed to kill him with a small rock.

The war with the Greeks could not be won physically. It wasn't possible. The only way was through revealing *echad* in their souls – they connected to Hashem, to His oneness; thus they had Hashem's protection, and no one can fight Hashem. "*And they will see that the name of Hashem is upon you, and they will fear you.*" (Although Hashem is called "man of war", this is a metaphor).

If two people are having a game with each other, it is not a fight. Although they are against each other, this is not viewed as a fight, but as a game.

When one wins the other, it's not that he has won the fight, because it's just a game; afterwards, they laugh with each other. So too, when one is connected to Hashem, he is protected by Him, and no one can fight Hashem – trying to fight Hashem is a joke.

There is no opposition, because any human who tries to oppose Hashem does not oppose Hashem. If it's not a fight, it can only be a game. When one approaches a fight with the perspective that he is against the other based on his human strengths, this will indeed be an opposition.

Victory Is Not Achieved Through Fighting

Is there anyone who doesn't have any fights with others? It is not possible. The Talmud says that if there is a Rav in a city who is never opposed at all, he is not a real Rav, because he's probably being bribed.

(By the way, even before I came to deliver these *shiurim*, I already prepared myself for opposition. I knew that there were will be those who will fight with me about what I'm saying!)

We all need opposition. There is no person who does not have opposition. For everything good there is, Hashem created something else in evil that can oppose the good. There is only one whom there is no opposition to – Hashem, Who is One.

The war with the Greeks could have just been like any other war, where the two sides oppose each other. We all have wars. We have internal wars as well, inside ourselves, as well as in our homes, small and big fights. But we all have fights. How can we get out of all these fights?

It is by acquiring the deep perspective that winning the war is not through fighting the other side. That was the miracle of Chanukah – you can only win a war with a miracle, and that ‘miracle’ is for one to realize this deep perspective.

Accessing Peace In The Soul: Nullifying Yourself To Hashem

Now we will make this concept more practical in our daily life.

How can we win our daily wars and fights with others that we all have? I am asking a very practical question, not a theoretical one. People fight their fights either with their various physical strengths, or with their intellectual abilities. (There is a saying, “If you can’t fight with *koach* (strength), fight with *moach* (brains).” But there is a third [deeper] way to fight, and it has nothing to do with strength or with brains.

The Kotzker *zt”l* said that if you can’t win with strength, keep telling yourself that you do have strength, until you eventually win. That was one view. Another view was to use your intellectual abilities. A third way to win a war is through the power of prayer.

There is a point in our soul in which there are no wars, challenges, or oppositions. *Chazal* say, “Nullify your will to His will.” In other words, when you have no desires of your own, because you are nullified to Hashem, then the name of Hashem comes upon you, and then all those who think of opposing you won’t be able to oppose you, because you will then be connected to the oneness of Hashem.

It is brought in our *sefarim* that *Moshiach* will come with “weapons of war” and win over the entire world. People interpret this to mean that *Moshiach* will reveal how good prevails over evil. Will he throw a bomb on the world? Iran can do that too. How would that bring peace to the world?! How will he ‘win’ over the entire world?

He will be connected to the oneness of Hashem, thus, he will connect to all of Creation in his enormous love. *Moshiach* will win not through the conventional means of fighting, but because he will be utterly connected to oneness of Hashem, and nothing can oppose the oneness of Hashem.

Avraham *Avinu* was thrown into a fire and was untouched. The depth of this was because he was so connected to the oneness of Hashem that nothing could harm him. It wasn’t just a miracle. It was because he lived in a world where there was no opposition, because he was connected to the oneness of Hashem. Thus, he was totally nullified to Hashem, and therefore nothing could harm him. Of course, people fought him. He had wars. But in his soul, he was at peace with others, and that is why he could not be hurt by anyone.

Access To Your Inner Peace

The *Yechidah* in us can provide us with entirely new feelings/emotions altogether.

Our body and soul are in contradiction with each other. Our soul lives in complete oneness, while our body cannot come to terms with oneness. We cannot live in the state of complete oneness with others, because the peace of the future is not here yet. The view of our soul, this unity with the world, is not yet manifest in the physical world, for the time being. But we can still have some access to the deep peace that is in the soul and make use of it sometimes.

One can learn how to be amongst people who are saying things against him, but in his soul, he is living with inner peace. He hears what they are saying, but it doesn't bother him, because he lives in place of no opposition.

People tend to be either realistic or delusional. Either people are realistic and they do not believe in any inner realities, or they go in the opposite direction and believe in spirituality, but they become delusional and ignore the external, physical dimension of our world. Both perspectives are wrong.

We are really a contradiction; our body tells us one viewpoint, while our soul tells us one viewpoint, and we can't live with one of them alone. We need to fuse them together and handle the contradicting perspectives. There are different layers in us that have different perspectives towards reality. Just as there many opinions amongst people, so are there many opinions within our own selves.

This sounds like we are unstable! But we can be very stable, even though we have different viewpoints going on inside ourselves.¹⁰

Chazal say that one must speak the "truth that is on his heart" (*"doiver emes b'levovo"*) – his mouth and heart should be in line with each other (*piv v'libo shavin*). The level of the heart can change each day, therefore, a person's perspective changes each day. We have five parts in our soul – the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*. There are times when we are on high level and times when we are lower. When we speak out what's on our heart, it changes according to the level we are at.

If someone doesn't speak from his soul, he is talking from his dry intellect. But if one speaks from his heart because he has opened his soul, then he can feel this in himself that he has different opinions towards the same subject, depending on the day, because the level of his soul fluctuates each day.

Thus, the victory over the Greeks was because they revealed their *Yechidah*, the point in the soul where is no oppositions, and that was how they won, because nothing can oppose the all-inclusive point in the soul.

How To Win Over All Oppositions

Let's apply this now to our own lives. We all have oppositions with others – how do we fight properly when those inevitable fights come?

If we just try to win, we won't win. We will just have fights, We won't reach real victory.

¹⁰ On an interesting note, the Rav responded to a questioner in middle of this shiur that often a person will go to a psychologist and try to sort out his contradicting goals he has in his life, and he will be told by the psychologist that he is delusional and a living contradiction. In reality, though, we are all full of contradicting desires – desires of the body and desires of the soul, and there is nothing wrong with this at all, because our soul is structured that way....

I am not saying that peace can win everything and that you can sit back and relax that everything will just work out. This isn't feasible at all, because we do have fights. The Torah speaks about fighting wars, either as an obligation or as a choice, but there are always wars and fights with others in our life.

How should we go about our fights, when those inevitable fights come? We need to fight not from fighting, but from using our power of inner peace, to reveal the point in us which has no wars, which is the *Yechidah*. Of course, you can't see this reality in the physical world; it is an inner reality that is deep within the soul.

You can solve a fight in just half a minute, if you make sure to always access this deep power of the soul [when you yearn for peace]. When one accesses this inner peace in himself, his enemies disappear, and people will not fight him!

I am not saying that this will drive away all people who fight you, because the Greeks were certainly trying to fight the *Chashmonaim* even though the *Chashmonaim* had reached their inner peace, and in addition, we currently live *in* a world in which the 50th Gate of Impurity surrounds us, which is very difficult to send off. But the point is that when you access the inner peace of the soul, the enemies around you won't be able to win against you, because the fight will lose its zenith, for the entire fight is being fueled by the fact that there each of the two side is warring against each other. Once one of the sides reaches a place inside himself in which there is no war, the entire war loses its fuel, and thus the war will cease on its own.

There are two ways to get rid of an enemy. Either you can fight with him and try to drive him away, or you can make peace with him, by uncovering your own ability of inner peace. When you uncover a peace in your own soul, your opposition will feel somewhat that you want peace, and when he feels your wish for peace, he will stop fighting you. There will be no place for a fight. Your opposition might not be aware why he is losing interest in fighting you, but he will still feel somewhat that there is no place now for a fight.

I will repeat and emphasize again that this inner solution does not work 100%. If it would, then our body would cease, and we would only be souls with no body. This is not possible in the current situation in the world, where we are not yet in the future. But if you make use of this point of the soul, it will greatly affect even your physical situation and radiate some of its light.

Living With An Inner Contradiction

When we reveal our *Yechidah* of the soul, we gain a new perspective on reality, and the old reality has no bearing on us anymore. Of Shabbos, *Chazal* say that you should consider it "as if all your work is done". What does that mean? To pretend that your situation at work is fine just because it's Shabbos? We all know good and well that Sundays can be stressful and full of problems we have to deal with. But it's because there is a part in our soul which has the ability to view all our work "as if" it is done. The *Yechidah* is the point inside us which tells us that all is finished and done, that there are no problems,

If a person doesn't want to accept that there can be inside him this deep perspective on reality, then indeed, he will have no way of relating to this concept. He might feel that he is a realistic person who faces the facts of reality and that the view of the *Yechidah* is an escape from reality, so why fool yourself with it. After all, when a person hears about the *Yechidah*'s view on reality and he tells it over to others, what kind of reaction does he usually get from others? He will be told that he is being delusional, that he is trying to run away from life, that he can't deal with reality, that he is too idealistic in his aspirations, that he's not being realistic...

But in the future, it will be a day that is entirely Shabbos, and there will be peace and serenity for the entire world; nowadays, that reality hasn't been realized yet, but we still can have some access to it and touch it. Therefore, while we certainly have to be realistic in our life and not pretend that we have no problems or challenges, there is a point in our soul in which there exists *no challenges*.

Of course, we cannot live entirely in that place in our soul, because that is running away from the external layer of reality. We do not mean at all for one to become delusional and run away into himself and escape reality. Rather, what we mean is to believe that there is such a power in yourself, and when you believe in this feeling, you will feel the reality that is behind that feeling. When you feel that reality, you will discover a contradiction. On one hand, you have a point in yourself which is telling you that there are no problems, but at the same time, you see problems in front of you in the world that you live in. You can learn how to live with contradiction, however.

There are some days in which we feel completely serene and that we have no problems, and the next day, we feel like our entire world has come crashing down. What is the inner reason for this? It is because there are some days in which we live very internally, and our perspective on our life is then coming from our deep place in the soul that feels how there are no problems. So I am not saying that you should run away into yourself all the time. I am merely trying to tell you that there does exist a place in yourself in which you can return to every here and there to draw vitality from, and that will give you the strength to go back into your problems and deal with them with renewed vigor.

If a person only knows of the problems in his life, and he has no inner place of refuge in himself, he will have no vitality at all in his life. He only lives within his problems, and problems do not provide us with vitality. A person has to know how to escape the stress of life to a place in himself where he can draw forth vitality [when he accesses the calmness in his soul], and then when he returns to his problems, he will be able to feel alive even amidst his problems; he will not get drained from his problems and lose his vitality.

When you access your inner peace in the soul, you get used to the concept of a world in which there are no problems, and then when you return to the problems, you will know how to deal with them properly, even as you are amidst a problem. As you are going through the problem, you will be able to be above it.

In Conclusion

The Greeks were defeated because the *Chashmonaim* accessed this deep power, of recognizing that there is only one reality, in which there are no oppositions. They "made themselves small", in other words, they nullified their existence and did not see themselves as apart from others, therefore, they arrived at the deep perspective that there is a place in which there are no wars. Because they reached this place in which there are no wars, nothing could oppose them, and that was how they achieved victory.

May we merit to be granted by Hashem the power to connect deeply into our souls and from that we will be able to escape all our wars, and from that, we will merit the complete revelation of the days of *Moshiach*.

4 | *The Inner Light of Chanukah – A Clear Torah*¹¹

Ohr Penimi: The Original, Inner Light of Torah

Every Yom Tov contains an “*ohr penimi*”, an inner spiritual light. Chanukah, which contains much light, surely contains a certain *ohr penimi* to it.

What is the *ohr penimi* of Chanukah? It was a time in which *ohr* (spiritual light) was revealed on this world. By the Greek exile, the Chashmonaim¹² were a light amidst the darkness of that period. It is a lesson that even when there is so much darkness in the world, a light can be revealed and illuminate the darkness.

The Sages say that the *Yomim Tovim* which will disappear in the future, except for Purim, and some say Chanukah will not either disappear. What is the deep reason behind this? It is because the other *Yomim Tovim* celebrate the past, and the past will no longer be important in the future. But Chanukah and Purim are about the future dimension. They are about the revelation of the future: the future revelation of a perfect Torah. The Greek exile concealed the light of the Torah; when the Chashmonaim appeared on the scene and they succeeded, they essentially removed the evil of the Greek exile, and a new light of Torah was revealed with it.

The Sages state that the Greeks said, “Write for yourselves on the horn of a bull: We have no portion in the G-d of Israel.” The *Maharal* and others explain that this is hinting to the sin of the Golden Calf, which is a bull. The sin with the Calf caused great damage within the Jewish people; in other words, sin is similar to a bull, which gores with intention to damage¹³. The Chashmonaim merited to experience some of the light of the future, in which a light will come and illuminate the darkness. The miracle of Chanukah represents our purified state had we never sinned with the Calf after we received the Torah. Thus the Chashmonaim on Chanukah merited to reveal a bit of the future revelation: returning to our purified state without sin.

The Sages say that when the Greeks invaded the Temple, they made holes when they broke into the Temple. What is the deeper meaning behind this? It was because Greeks intended to break our unity. The Jewish people have a power of *echad*, the power to be “one”, to be unified. We were all “one” when we stood at Har Sinai; we all had “one heart”. The Greeks wanted to break up this unity, and that was what they were trying to show in making the holes in the *Beis HaMikdash*.

The Greek exile is defined by its secular influence on the Jewish people. They wanted their wisdom to replace the wisdom of the Torah. They caused damage to us in doing so, and because of the Greek exile, we are still missing the *ohr penimi* of Torah.

“Ohr Torah” Is Not Yet the “Ohr Penimi” of Torah

In the future, we will get the “*ohr penimi*” back. We still have the “*ohr*” (the light) of Torah, but we are missing the “*ohr penimi*” of Torah.

¹¹ <http://bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-010-inner-light>

¹² *The Hasmoneans*

¹³ *Bava Kamma 2b*

In today's times, we can see that there is much Torah learning taking place. There is definitely a lot of *ohr* of Torah in our present times. But it is rare to find someone who is connected to the *ohr penimi* of Torah. You can have a person who is able to come up with very brilliant *chiddushei Torah*.¹⁴, but that doesn't always mean he's connected in an inner way to the Torah. Of course, it is wonderful that there are *chiddushei Torah. Baruch Hashem*. But we are often missing the *ohr penimi* of Torah within these *chiddushei Torah*...

What is the *ohr penimi* of Torah? It is the true light of Creation, the original light of Creation, which Hashem created already before the first day of Creation. What is it, though? The *Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer* states that before Creation, Hashem was completely One, and His light filled the entire universe. That is describing the *ohr penimi*: state where Hashem's oneness fills all of existence.

We currently live in a state of disparity. "*Sinas chinam* (baseless hatred) still dances among us".¹⁵ We are missing the original light of Torah which unified together all the disparities. The original light of the Torah was the *ohr haganuz* ("the hidden light") which was able to see from one end of the world to the other. What did this mean? It did not mean simply that one was able to use it to see from one country to another country on the other side of the world. It meant that one had the "*ohr penimi*" of Torah – meaning, he had utter clarity through the Torah. There were no questions. Everything was clear.

The *ohr penimi* of Torah was that a person was connected to every part of the Torah with utter clarity. This was the Torah we had before the sin with the Calf. Thus, when a person learns a *sugya* of *Gemara*, and he merits to understand it with clarity, he needs to awaken his yearning for that original clarity we once had in Torah - the Torah of before the sin.

"A Man and His Household"

The *mitzvah* to light the Chanukah menorah is upon "a man and his household." What is the meaning behind this? Does it mean that the man of the house fulfills the *mitzvah* for the rest of his household? Is it just a *mitzvah* upon the house? It is because the *mitzvah* of *ner Chanukah* was given to us so we can return to our very soul: "a man and his household" – the "household" is our soul, our root.

Yearning for Torah Lishmah

We must know that there is more to reveal in the Torah, that there is more to the Torah that we must yearn for. It is not simply that we must yearn to finish more *masechtos*.¹⁶ of *Gemara*; that is wonderful too, but it is not yet the "*ohr penimi*" of Chanukah. The "*ohr penimi*" of Chanukah is accessed when has a yearning to reveal the clarity in the words of Torah that we have already learned. We may have learned much Torah already, but we haven't merited

¹⁴ novel Torah thoughts

¹⁵ Yoma 9b

¹⁶ Tractates of the Talmud

yet to understand it all very clearly, because we are living after the sin. But we must yearn for the utter clarity in the words of Torah, even though we cannot currently get it.

To reach the “*ohr penimi*” of Chanukah, we must get rid of our various desires that we may have, and instead only desire to learn Torah *lishmah* (for its own sake). Torah *lishmah* does not mean that we desire to learn Torah for the purpose of whatever we gain from it. That would be a Torah of disparity. Torah *lishmah* is to learn Torah because we truly want to connect to the Torah.

The *halachah* is that we are not allowed to benefit from the Chanukah lights, and we are only allowed to look at them. This hints to what we must yearn for in Torah: we must only desire to “see” the Torah as it is, and not to use it for various personal benefits. We must desire the Torah simply to see it – and only to see it. The only benefit we may have from the Chanukah lights is that we can look at them; this hints to us how we must yearn for Torah simply so we can “see” it, and not for any other personal benefits.

In Conclusion

This is the “*ohr penimi*” of Torah: to learn Torah not for own personal gain, but to truly yearn to connect to Torah. May we all be merit to prepare ourselves to reach the “*ohr penimi*” of Chanukah, which is the “*ohr penimi*” of Torah.

5 | Experiencing Chanukah¹⁷

The Light of Chanukah: Spiritual Or Physical?

Let us learn here about Chanukah in a way that is not just about something that we go through, but as something that really can affect us, experientially.

All of the festivals contain *ohr*, spiritual light, but Chanukah in particular is the epitome of *ohr*. In the other festivals, the light is purely spiritual, but on Chanukah, although the light is also spiritual, it manifests also as a physical light that we empower, through the eight lights that we light on Chanukah.

The lights of Chanukah seem to be lit through a wick and oil, but the inner way to understand it is that the *light revealed during Chanukah is what is lighting the wick*. The wicks, the oil and the flame that we see are [merely] the physical ‘garments’ that clothe the spiritual light that is Chanukah. Of course, it looks like we are lighting it. But it is really the light [revealed during] Chanukah which is shining through the physical wick.

This is the depth behind the *halachah* that it is forbidden to benefit from the light of Chanukah: we may not use spirituality for This World. When we light [the *menorah*], a spiritual light emerges [from the hidden realm of spiritual light]. Our physical eyes just see a candle, but our soul sees spiritual light in it.

Although our soul sees spirituality in things, one needs to have a revelation of his soul in order for the soul to see spirituality. With our physical eyes, all we see are just candles burning; therefore we need to actually connect our *soul* to the spirituality of the hidden light that is revealed on Chanukah.

Seeing The Lights From Our Soul

The *neshamah* (Jewish soul) is described in the verse, "נֵר ה' נִשְׁמַת אָדָם", "*The flame of Hashem is the soul of man*". A *ner* (flame) is composed of a *kli* (vessel, or container), oil, and the fire. Our *neshamah* is called "*ner*" (flame), and it is also called "*ohr*" (light), whereas the "*kli*" (the vessel or container) that holds the *neshamah* is our physical *guf* (the body).

The *neshamah* is called "*ner*" (flame). Our physical body is created from earth, whereas the soul in us comes from the "breath of Hashem" that was breathed into man by Hashem. Hashem is entirely *ohr*, so to speak. The earth which our body comes from is a dark material, thus our body is of a "dark" substance, whereas our soul is taken from "light". Since man is a combined existence of body and soul, his existence is essentially a mixture of light and darkness.

Every person is essentially a light contained within darkness. There is a statement, "*A little light can push away much darkness.*"¹⁸ We see from the physical world that a small light can light up a dark room, and so too, when our

¹⁷ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-017-experiential-chanukah>

¹⁸ *Chovos HaLevovos: Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh: 5*

soul is concealed from our access, we will feel like we are groping in the dark. When our soul becomes revealed to us, however, there is a great light we experience, which sends away the “darkness” that is the body.

Thus, when a person hasn’t yet revealed his soul, he lives in darkness. He will experience life through a dark lens. When a person begins to merit a revelation of his soul, his soul begins to shine, and he experiences a degree of spiritual light.

These are the two kinds of lenses through which we experience life: either we see through a dark lens, or we see life through a lens of light.

In deeper terms, there is *ayin ra*, a “bad eye”, and *ayin tov*, a “good eye.” The perspective of “*ayin ra*” comes from the view of the body, and the perspective of “*ayin tov*” is the view from the soul.

They are different lenses in a person. It is not simply that there are different personalities of either “*ayin ra*” or “*ayin tov*” that some people have positive personalities and some people have negative personalities. Rather, “*ayin tov*” and “*ayin ra*” are perspectives of how we experience life – either we are viewing life from the prism of the body, or the soul. “*Ayin ra*” represents the body’s viewpoint, a view from “darkness”, which is a perspective that is darkened by materialism of This World. Thus it does not offer a clear view on life. In contrast, “*ayin tov*” is a view of “light”, which is pleasant and calming.

These are root concepts of the soul. The world we are in is a mix of light and darkness, a mix of good and evil. And it is mostly dark. What is the world looking like right now? What is it calling out? It is calling out darkness. The world is conveying to us a message of unhappiness, pain, and difficulty – a life of darkness. It is not a place that is mostly good, pure, holy and happy.

A person sees from the place in himself that he is at now. Therefore, if he has a dark lens on life, if he is living a materialistic kind of life where his body dominates and his soul is unrevealed in his life, then he will see a dark life in front of him. If you view life through dirty glasses, everything will look dirty, even if you are looking at something clean. For this reason, when a person sees others, he usually doesn’t see people as souls whom he can have a connection to. He usually just sees the thick materialism of others, he relates to their superficial shell, and as such, he relates to others as physical bodies, and he does not see them as souls in front of him.

But when a person reveals his soul, he will see others through a clear lens. Then he will see the joy, purity, and cleanliness in front of him. This does not mean that he will be naïve and that he’s not aware of reality. He is well aware of reality on this world, but he has gained a view of others that is pristine, clear, and clean.

For example, when he speaks with others, like when asking someone for directions, he will understand that he is speaking with a *soul*, and not with a body. When he asks questions to others, he is aware that he is asking it from his *soul*. And when a person speaks from his soul, the soul of the other picks up on it, because the soul is receptive to the sound of another soul. Where you speak from is what the other person will hear; if you speak from your body, the other person hears your gruff body talking, and when you speak from your soul, the other’s soul hears words coming from your soul.

The world today doesn’t have that much speech coming from the soul. When a person meets another and greets him, does he really mean it that the other should have a good day? “Good morning” has become more like a mannerism. Contrast this with what was said about the Alter of Slobodka, who would practice saying “Good Morning” to himself, because he held that it was giving a *beracha* (blessing) to others.

This is different view on life - totally.

Speaking and Acting From Within Yourself

When a person is talking, where is he speaking from in himself? A person can talk either from the most external part of himself, or from the most innermost part of himself that he identifies with.

Most natural speech flows from the external part of the soul. The more inner a person's speech is, the more it reflects the statement "*words from the heart enter the heart.*" This should not just be limited to when a person is conveying a deep emotion such as "I love you", or "I feel your pain". It is referring to how a person speaks *all the time*. All of the time, we really need to speak from our innermost place that we currently identify with.

Most people live from their body and speak from their body, and the person hearing him hears the words from his body. But when a person speaks from his soul, it can go into another's soul, and the other person will hear it from his soul, because his soul will pick up on it.

Chanukah is a time of "light", but it is not just a time to light. The light of Chanukah specifically reminds us that the physical is a container for the spiritual – that our body contains a soul. The other festivals are also a spiritual light, but they don't take on physical form. The light of Chanukah takes on a physical form, showing us that spirituality can be clothed by physicality.

These are not mere intellectual definitions, but a practical view of life to have every day of your life. We do many actions throughout the day. A person washes his hands, for example. How does he do it? We understand that this is allowed through the brain, which sends messages to the body and enables it to function. But when a person tells "Good Morning" to his children, does he do so with at least a little bit of feeling, at least a little more than when he washes his hands? Certainly, he puts some feeling into it. But how many times a day, or a week, or a month, or a year, though do we act from an inner place in ourselves? Are we speaking from a deeper place in ourselves on a more regular basis?

Most people do not access the depth that is contained in themselves. A person who is living inwardly is someone who lives with his depth, all the time, on a regular basis. He lives always with the deepest place in himself. Just like we all use the sink many times a day, a person who lives life in an inner way is using the deepest place he knows of in himself - all the time.

A person usually accesses his inner depth only when there are extreme emotions, of either intense joy or grief. A person usually cannot take that depth that he has reached and bring it more into his daily life. He may remember the pain he felt from his sadness or the joy that he felt when he rejoiced, but he will not remember the *depth* of the emotions that he reached.

The depth that we *do* recognize in ourselves, though – how much are we in touch with it on a daily basis?

Recognition of Ourselves

We must recognize who we are. Of course, the purpose of everything is to recognize Hashem. But if we do not recognize ourselves, we can't recognize Hashem. Skipping self-recognition prevents recognition of Hashem. From recognizing ourselves, we can come to recognize Hashem.¹⁹

¹⁹ Raavad (Rabbi Avraham ben David, 10th century scholar); based on the verse, "From my flesh, I see G-d."

Surely, the deepest thing possible is to connect to Hashem, but before we get to that stage, one has to know himself well and identify the deepest place in himself.

How can it be that a person is not in touch with the deepest part of himself? We can memorize many phone numbers. How can it be that we don't recognize our own self?

If we really want to live a true life, we need to know what our deepest point is in ourselves, which can take a long time to know. After that, one needs to ask himself if his depth has deepened from before. The way we identify ourselves has to mature as the years go on.

We can say in general how deep the soul is, but you on your own need to uncover the depth of your own soul, and then you need to know how to live with it all the time. At least once a day, make sure that you are using it. *That* is what Chanukah is all about.

The Deepest Point In Yourself

I will try here to explain what the deepest point of the soul is, but it will be hard to understand it, both intellectually as well as emotionally, because each person is at a different point.

The deepest part of the soul, the deepest experience your soul can know of is **to experience your very existence** (*havayah*). (There is really a higher experience, which is to experience the reality of the Creator, which is reached through *emunah* and *d'veykus* with Hashem. That is an experience above the "I", however. Here we are describing the experience that is within the "I".)

One's very existence is his deepest experience. It is not the will of a person, it is not aspiration, it is not giving, it is not enduring suffering, and it is not joy. Those are all deep experiences, but the deepest experience is to experience one's existence.

A person needs to be able to remove all the external layers covering the soul, and then he can experience himself. It is not a place of any desires, because it is above all desires.

When a person purifies himself through doing the *mitzvos*, through attaining a state of purity, and through correcting his *middos*, then he calms the soul.²⁰ He can then experience the soul. When he experiences his own soul, he can feel his existence then and be able to live it on a daily basis.

All day, people are running around, and this causes people not to be in touch with the soul. This refers to internal running as well, in which people are running all the time with their desires. They are not calm inside, and they never reach their soul. Therefore, people wonder what the deepest experience is. But the deepest experience is: to experience your own self!

You can't live from your depth if you haven't accessed it yet. When you do access it, you need to then live with it all the time – sensibly, of course. This will reveal more and more depth to you as time goes on. In order to get to your own depth, you first need to live daily with the deepest point in yourself – you can think about it and can feel it throughout the day.

These are not ideas or opinions – it is about life. May we merit from Hashem to know our souls and to realize our depths, our existence, and from there, to reach *d'veykus* with Hashem.

²⁰ See the series of *Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus*

6 | Chanukah: Seeing the Beginning²¹

We are now approaching Chanukah. Let us understand the concept of this Yom Tov in a way that can affect our own souls.

We have three *Yomim Tovim* according to the Torah – Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkos. The Sages enacted two more *Yomim Tovim* – Chanukah and Purim. We find that the *Yomim Tovim* of the Torah are each seven days, which end up becoming eight. Sukkos is seven days, and then there is an “eighth day” of Sukkos, which is *Shemini Atzeres*. Pesach is seven days, but from a deeper perspective, it is actually “eight” days, because the Ramban writes that Shavuot is called “the *Shemini Atzeres*” of Pesach. Chanukah, though, is eight days to start with.

What is the difference between the *Yomim Tovim* of the Torah, which are seven days that really add up to eight, and Chanukah, which is eight days to start out with?

Chazal say that when a person smiles at someone, it is better than giving him a cup of milk. Why? This is because when you smile at someone, you radiate a light towards him, and this is more illuminating than even the white color of the milk. This is Chanukah: it is a light that radiates outward. The oil of Chanukah which we light with is that illumination that radiates outwards.

Oil is “*shemen*” in Hebrew, which is similar to the word “*shemoneh*” – the number eight. Chanukah is eight days, hinting to the fact that it is above regular time, which contains seven days in a week. The *Yomim Tovim*, which are each seven days that become eight, are within regular time. The *Yomim Tovim* are a revelation of a concept that we can use the regular times of the year to go above time. But Chanukah is eight days to start with, because it reveals a light that is above time in the first place.

The oil that we light the menorah with on Chanukah, which is lit to commemorate the miracle of Chanukah, is long after the miracle during the time of Chanukah happened many years ago. This is because Chanukah is a light that transcends time. It continues to radiate long after the “time” of the miracle of Chanukah has happened. We aren’t commemorating Chanukah because it was a miracle that happened long ago history; rather, it is a time of light, even now.

Hashem created the world to have a timeframe of seven days, creating the world in “seven” days; the six days of the week, and Shabbos. But if we count the Shabbos that Hashem started out the world with, we get eight days. On a deeper understanding, there are really eight days in Creation – the Shabbos of before Creation [when there was nothing yet in Creation, and there was nothing but the oneness of Hashem]²², the six days of the week, and then Shabbos of after Creation.

The light of Chanukah, which we light for eight days, reveals this “eight-day” concept. Normally, time consists of seven days, but the deeper aspect of Creation is that there is an eighth day – a spiritual light that is above time.

²¹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-018-seeing-beginning>

²² For more on the “Shabbos of before creation”, refer to the Rav’s series on *Shabbos Kodesh*, in particular, the *shiur* of *שבת קודש_01_שלש שבתות* (or in *ספר בלבבי משכן אבנה - שבת קודש*)

We find in *halacha* that if Chanukah begins on Friday night, we light 30 minutes earlier than sundown on Friday. How can this be? How are we able to light for Chanukah when it isn't Chanukah yet? We aren't able to bring the *korbon pesach* early. So why are we able to light for Chanukah earlier than its time? The answer to this mystery is because Chanukah is above time.

What exactly is this special light of Chanukah, which transcends time? It is really the light of *emunah* (faith in Hashem).

Emunah is a power that is not limited to any time. *Emunah* says to us that what you see as the beginning isn't really the beginning, because there was something that came before it. You see seven days of the week, but there was a Shabbos that came before it.

(This also alludes to the "letter *aleph*" which Hashem used to create the world with, before He created the world using the letter *beis*. We only see Creation starting from the letter "*beis*," *Beraishis*, and we do not see what preceded it – the letter *aleph*).

During our regular seven-day time period, we can reach the "letter *aleph*" of before Creation, though utilizing the seven days. But on Chanukah, we start already from that point of the "letter *aleph*" preceding Creation.

Avraham *Avinu* illuminated the world through his *emunah* – how? He radiated that power of *emunah*, which came before Creation, onto the seven days of the world that are after Creation. He used that letter "*aleph*" which was around before Creation – the light of perfect *emunah* in the Creator.

This is why some say that in the future, Chanukah will not cease, while all the other festivals will cease. It is because the power which is Chanukah – the light of the perfect *emunah*, which existed even before Creation – can never cease.

Now that we have seen this concept, let us see how this applies to our very soul. Any light which exists in the world seems to be coming from the sun. But from where is the sun getting its light from? It gets its light from the heavenly spheres above it, which Hashem sustains. The light of our Chanukah *Menorah* seems to be coming from this world, but all light comes from Heaven, so we are really using a spiritual light that is Heavenly.

That is the meaning behind the *halachah* why it is forbidden to benefit from the Chanukah lights. It is really because the light gets its source from Heaven, and thus we are not allowed to use it. Normally, we are allowed to benefit from light. We were also allowed to benefit from the light that shined by the *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah*. But on Chanukah, we are prohibited from benefiting from the lights. Why? There is a special *halachah* that on Chanukah, it has to be recognizable from the street who is lighting the *Menorah*. This hints to how we must recognize the True Source of the Chanukah lights – "Who" is really lighting this *Menorah*....

It is written, **נר ה' נשמת אדם** – the *neshamah* \soul is called *ner*, a flame, a light. Every light is lit by a source. There is a Source that lights the flame of the *neshamah*. By seeing the lights on Chanukah, we can recognize Who lit these lights; Who the beginning of all this is. We can see the Chanukah lights and see Who is the Master that lit it - where the beginning source of these lights are. This represents the power to have complete, perfect *emunah*. That is the real light of Chanukah.

When a person walks into a building and he sees light, it usually doesn't make a difference to him who lit up the building. But Chanukah teaches us that we must see the beginning, the source, of all light – Hashem. We usually only focus on the purpose of everything, but do we ever think about the source of things? That is the lesson of Chanukah: we can see "the beginning" of everything.

“I am the First, and I am the Last.” (אני הראשון ואני האחרון). It is not just enough to know “I am the Last”, the fact that Hashem is the end goal of everything; we have to also be aware that He is also the *beginning* of everything – “I am the First.” We must see how He is *both* the beginning and end of everything. In everything we see, we must attribute its source to Hashem.

Chochmah, wisdom, is also called *ohr*/light. The Torah, which is the revelation of the higher and G-dly *chochmah*, is called “*Torah Ohr*”, “Torah of light.” This is because *ohr* serves to show us what the beginning of everything is.

This is the special ability of the Jewish people: we can see the beginning of things, and not just the goal of whatever everything leads up to. The nations of the world only focus on what something leads up to, but they do not have the power to trace everything back to its beginning. Take a look at the world today. The people in the world today are running wildly after new gadgets and all kinds of innovations. To analyze this deeper, they aren’t interested in the ‘beginnings’ of anything - only in what they can ‘get out’ of something; they are immersed in endpoints, not in beginnings.

The Torah, in contrast, is entirely a revelation of the Beginning where it comes from. Although we also must pursue the end goal of everything, knowing that the purpose of life is to reach closeness with Hashem and that the eventual purpose of all of Creation is when Hashem’s existence will be fully revealed to all, and there will be nothing besides Him (“I am the Last”), we also need to search for the beginning source of everything, attributing the source of everything to Hashem, Who is the Beginning of everything.

Thus, Chanukah is not about the “purpose” of things, which is about the end. It is about the beginning. It shows us that we must search for the **beginning** of everything. The Beginning of everything is Hashem, and so are Torah and the Jewish people called “*raishis*”, the beginning.

That is why the light of Chanukah reveals how the Torah radiates through the light of Chanukah. It reveals “*Torah Ohr*”, the “Torah of light”, the kind of Torah where we see Hashem as the beginning in everything.

There is a *minhag* on Chanukah to eat dairy. We understand why we eat foods with oil in it, because the miracle happened with oil. But why do we eat dairy on Chanukah?

Earlier, we quoted the words of *Chazal*, that smiling at someone is better than giving him a cup of milk. In this we can find the answer to our question. If I smile at someone, I am showing him the white of my teeth - I am radiating a light toward another, I am giving him *he’aras panim* (a radiant countenance). I am bestowing upon another, with my smile, the *chochmah*/wisdom that is found within me – as it is written, “*The wisdom of man radiates on his face.*” With a smiling countenance, I am shining upon another the light of the “beginning” of all wisdom.

This is why we eat dairy on Chanukah, to allude to how we must radiate our “white” teeth toward others, which *Chazal* say is even valuable than giving your friend a cup of milk. On Chanukah, we light the *Menorah* to radiate that spiritual light outwards toward others – the light of the Beginning.

Thus, Chanukah does not come to show us the “purpose” of these days. It rather comes to show us what the beginning of it is. What we learn from Chanukah is that we must make sure to always look for the beginning of something. We shouldn’t only pursue our goals that we are heading towards. What we mainly need to do is to reflect about the beginning of everything. In whatever you do, think about its beginning. The beginning of anything is Hashem. When you think about this, you will find that you will be much more motivated to get to your goal.

It's more important to think about the beginning of each thing than to think about the purpose of each thing. Let's say a person loves a certain thing. Why does he love it? If he reflects, he can discover that all loves are rooted in the Creator, because love is a power which comes from the Creator. He is the source of everything.

We must access our power of seeing the "beginning" in everything. This is really the "*ohr haganuz*", the "hidden light" that Hashem hid away at the beginning of Creation. We can access the "hidden light" when we think into the beginnings of everything, and we discover that Hashem is the source of absolutely everything. It is a "hidden light" because at first this perspective is hidden from a person – until he finds it.

This power can be revealed on Chanukah. By accessing our power to see the beginning of everything, we can truly come to connect to the Creator - Who is the First, and the Last. **אני הראשון ואני האחרון.**

7 | *Chanukah: Having Mesirus Nefesh For Torah*²³

Chanukah: The Light of Torah, Revealed Through Mesirus Nefesh

In Chanukah, we find two important concepts, which are really intertwined [*mesirus nefesh*, and the revelation of the light of the *menorah* \the Torah].

Chanukah was a time in which the Jewish people showed *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice); they went to war even though they were outnumbered. They were willing to get killed. Their efforts resulted in being able to light the *menorah*. As is well-known, the *menorah* represents the Torah.

It is clear that the way the *Chashmonaim* fought the war, and the results of this war that they fought, were interconnected aspects. Their war was fought with *mesirus nefesh*, and the results of the war revealed the light of the Torah. Each of these revealed unique aspects upon Creation.

The *menorah* in the *Beis HaMikdash* had seven branches, while the *menorah* we light on Chanukah has eight lights. The depth of this is because the *mesirus nefesh* that was revealed on Chanukah revealed an even greater level of “light” of the actual *Menorah* in the *Beis HaMikdash* when it was in its full purity. The light of their *mesirus nefesh* revealed the light of Torah, the level of “eight”, which is above “seven”.

What indeed is the connection between *mesirus nefesh* and Torah? Why did their *mesirus nefesh* result in a revelation of the light of Torah?

Mesirus Nefesh: Going Beyond The Normal Abilities of the Soul

The depth of the war with the Greeks was that it was “a few, fighting the majority”. In terms of the soul, this means that it involved fighting a power that is beyond human strength. That is the power in the soul called “*mesirus nefesh*”. Each person has abilities in his soul, but all of these abilities are limited. *Mesirus nefesh*, though, enables a person to go beyond the limits of his own soul. With true *mesirus nefesh*, one can touch upon the unlimited; he touches upon his Root and connects to it.

Mesirus Nefesh In Torah Learning: Connecting To The Higher Source of Torah

“Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”²⁴, and the *Midrash* states that “the Jewish people were the first thoughts of Hashem” to be created. The Jewish people are the “first” of Creation; we were the first to be formed from the Torah. When a Jew serves Hashem according to his various abilities of his soul, he is epitomizing the “first” Creation. But when a person goes beyond his limits, through using *mesirus nefesh*, he is attaching himself to the very Source that he was hewn from. From that place, comes true understanding in Torah.

²³ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-042-mesirus-nefesh-torah>

²⁴ Zohar

It is written, “*Wisdom, from where is it found?*” Chazal say that when one makes himself into “*ayin*” (nothing), meaning, when he nullifies himself to the Source that he comes from, he receives the true wisdom of Torah.

Understanding in Torah doesn’t come from oneself. There is a concept of one who learns Torah from within himself (as the Sages say, “Avraham learned Torah from himself”²⁵), but there is also a source of Torah which comes from higher than the self: when one’s Torah learning is coming from the Source of the self. This higher source of Torah can be accessed by a person through the power of *mesirus nefesh*, which enables one to go above his normal soul abilities and connect to the Source that is above it.

Two Different Sources For Torah: Shavuot and Chanukah

There is our soul, and there is its source. When a person wants Torah, there are two sources he can get it from. One source can be reached on the festival of Shavuot, through the ability of accepting the yoke of learning Torah. The other source can be reached on Chanukah, where one can acquire the power of *mesirus nefesh* in order to understand the Torah.

Thus, Chanukah is an opportunity for us to understand how *mesirus nefesh* is a source to access understanding in our Torah learning.

Uncovering Mesirus Nefesh In Our Torah Learning

When a person merits to penetrate into this place in his soul that is above his actual level of understanding [through having *mesirus nefesh* in his Torah learning and persevering to understand it], he reaches the spiritual light of Chanukah, which enables him to understand the Torah from that higher source.

Understanding the Torah can only come from putting in effort and exertion to understand it, using our normal capabilities, but it also requires one to exert himself a little bit beyond his normal capabilities.

If a person goes his whole life learning Torah using only his natural capabilities, or if he doesn’t try as much as he can (which is usually the case), he won’t be able to see true success in Torah learning. But if someone uncovers his ability of *mesirus nefesh*, he can go above his own abilities, and from there, he can connect to the Source which Torah is derived from.

“The way of the wise is to always think”, as the Ramchal writes. How indeed can a person think all day in learning? What do most people think about all day? Most People think about themselves all day. That is human nature. But when a person uncovers his ability of *mesirus nefesh*, he can go above this nature, and he acquires for himself a new nature - and then he will be able to think all the time about Torah. This is the true kind of connection to one’s Torah learning.

This doesn’t mean to force oneself to think in learning. Forcing oneself to think in learning is perhaps a way to get started, and in addition, it needs to be done sensibly. But when one uncovers his *mesirus nefesh*, he is connected to the source of the Torah, and he will get his understanding from there. Whereas most people are naturally thinking about themselves all day – or about things that are interesting to them – so can a person who uncovers his

²⁵ Midrash Tanchuma, parshas Vayigash

power of *mesirus nefesh* have a natural ability to think all day about the Torah he's learning. On a deeper level, he can think all the time about *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

As long as one has not reached the point where he is *naturally* thinking about what he is learning throughout the day, he hasn't reached his soul's point of *mesirus nefesh* [for Torah]. Our Rabbis wrote that those who reached true understanding in Torah merited that their initial thoughts came from *Ruach HaKodesh*. How? It was because their thoughts naturally thought about the Torah they were learning. Just as the average person naturally thinks about himself all the time, so does a person who reaches *mesirus nefesh* naturally think about Torah all the time (and on a more subtle note, Hashem).

This is the deep place in the soul which one needs to connect to in order to get the light of the Torah. This is what the Rambam describes, that exertion in Torah learning requires one to "kill himself in the tents of Torah" – one has to 'kill' his own essence, his own abilities, by going above them.

Mesirus Nefesh: Reaching The Endless Level of Torah

If one never learns how to go above his "I", then all of his Torah learning is being experienced through his simple "I" [the ego], and then all of his understanding in Torah will be limited to his human comprehension. And since most people are sullied from sin, some more and some less, as well as bad *middos* that inhabit the soul – the understanding in one's Torah learning are negatively affected by these factors. But when one penetrates deep into himself and he uncovers his power of *mesirus nefesh*, he goes above his own soul, and his understanding in Torah will come from a higher source; it will be the kind of Torah that is endless.

The Light That Burned For Eight Days: The Ability To Go Above Nature (In Torah)

The oil of Chanukah which lasted for eight days represented the spiritual light that is above the limits of human wisdom; that is why the oil was not bound to nature. The oil was not bound to the limits of nature. The fact that the oil stopped burning after eight days was actually a novelty, because the fact that the oil lasted for eight days was no novelty! (After eight days, the endlessness of the spiritual light was taken away and clothed by this current limited reality.)

Dedicating Our Entire Life To Torah Learning

If a person connects to Torah only from within his limited abilities, his understanding in Torah will be limited to what he can comprehend, and human comprehension is very limited. Woe to the person whose entire understanding in Torah is limited to his human mind. But when a person is in touch with his power of *mesirus nefesh* and uses it to learn Torah – when he goes above his normal abilities in order to learn Torah – it's not an issue of how much time one learns. It is rather about how one dedicates his entire being to the Torah.

Just as Avraham tied Yitzchok to the altar, so do all of us have the power of *mesirus nefesh* in our own souls; we can all give up our whole being to the Torah.

Imagine if you were given a choice if you would die, or if the Torah will cease instead of you. What would you choose...?

This is not a question a person can answer in one second. But a person can reach the point where he is prepared to completely give himself up for Hashem.

There is a concept of *mesirus nefesh* in which one gives up his body for the Torah; but this is not the *mesirus nefesh* that was revealed on Chanukah. It is rather the light of *Olam HaBa* (the Next World), in which we are divested of our body. The *mesirus nefesh* revealed on Chanukah is: to give up our very being, in order to understand Torah.

If a person decides that he is ready each day to completely give himself up for the Torah, and that is how he approaches his learning, he will be guided to understand the Torah through the light of *mesirus nefesh*, and his connection to his learning will be endless, because he won't be able to ever part from the Torah; he has become nullified to the Torah and integrated with it, because he is ready to have *mesirus nefesh* for it.

In Conclusion

The words here were about something subtle, and deep. The concepts here are far from anyone who doesn't think about these things, and they are closer to someone who seeks the light of truth.

If one reflects about this and he really wants it, and he decides that he is ready all the time to have *mesirus nefesh* – meaning, that each day before he goes to learn, he decides that he is willing to have complete *mesirus nefesh* for the Torah – he is one who will truly merit the “light” of the Torah.

May we merit from the Creator that our bond with the Torah should come from the deepest place in our soul: to be able to go above our own soul and become connected to the Source of all the Torah we learn, where Torah comes from. And though this, may all of us together with the entire Jewish people merit the complete revelation of “Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are one.”

8 | Chanukah: Greek Influence Today²⁶

The Current Exile of “Erev Rav”

In *Al HaNissim*, the Greeks are described as “*zeidim*”, rebellious ones, who came to uproot the Torah.

Our Rabbis teach that we will go through seven exiles: Egypt, Bavel, Persia, Greece, Edom, Yishmael, and the *Erev Rav*.²⁷ Each of the exiles had a specific time that they lasted for. But the last exile, the exile of the *Erev Rav* (these are reincarnations of the “*Erev Rav*” [Mixed Multitude] souls who left Egypt together with the Jewish people, and influenced them to do evil) has no specific time, because it includes all of the exiles together.

Therefore, the current and final exile – the exile of the *Erev Rav* – is not just “the exile of the *Erev Rav*” alone. It includes all of the influences of the nations, together, at once. The exiles of Egypt, Bavel, Persia, Greece, Edom and Yishmael each have their specific natures. But the exile of the *Erev Rav* includes ingredients of all of them at once. This is the depth of our final exile, and this is why it is so hard.

Now we can understand why the final exile is the most difficult. No one knows when the current and final exile will end; it hasn’t been revealed to anyone. But we are definitely in it, as our Rabbis wrote about.

The more subtle definition of explaining it is that we are in the exile of Edom, and within that, the exile of Yishmael, and within that – the exile of the *Erev Rav*. The main part of the exile is the “*Erev Rav*” aspect. It is an exile which includes all exiles; clearly, then, it is the most difficult of all the exiles. It pits us against the nations as never before. From all sides, we are surrounded with the evil influences that seek to ensnare us.

That describes the place and time we are in.

The Unique Nature of The Greek Exile

In a certain sense, the Greek exile was also different than the other exiles. The Egyptian, Babylonian and Persian exiles all took place outside of *Eretz Yisrael*, but the Greek exile took place in *Eretz Yisrael*, and not only that, but with the *Beis HaMikdash* still standing.

The Greeks came to defile the *Beis HaMikdash*. It added a new dimension to exile: that even when we have *Eretz Yisrael* and a *Beis HaMikdash*, we are still susceptible to danger.

Normally, exile is defined by the fact that we are exiled from *Eretz Yisrael* and forced to live outside the land. But the Greek exile was a new kind of exile: that even when we are in *Eretz Yisrael*, and even when we have a *Beis HaMikdash*, we can still be in exile. It wasn’t just a side thing. It defined the whole Greek exile.

²⁶ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-048-greek-influence-today-erev-rav>

²⁷ Although we refer generally to the “four” exiles (Bavel\Babylonia, Yavan\Greece, Persia, and Edom\Rome) the four really subdivide for a total of seven, when we add on Egypt, the root of all exiles; and the last exile, Edom, which breaks up into two additional exiles: the exile of Yishmael\Arabs and the innermost layer of the exile, the exile of the “*Erev Rav*.” For the source on “exile of the *Erev Rav*”, refer to *Gra (the Vilna Gaon) in sefer Even Shelaimah* available at the bilvavi website.

What was the concept of the Greek exile? It is defined by the fact that they came and defiled the *Beis HaMikdash*, contaminating all the oils for the *Menorah*. Their entire purpose was to come and contaminate our holiness. They went straight to the *Heichal* in the *Beis HaMikdash*, so that they could contaminate the oil for the *Menorah*. They came to the holiest site, with specific intentions to ruin the holiness.

It didn't begin with that. It really began with the decrees against certain *mitzvos* such as Shabbos, *Bris Milah*, and Rosh *Chodesh*, as our *Chazal* tell us. But it still didn't look so bad, because everyone thought that they weren't really in exile, because after all, the *Beis HaMikdash* was still around. So although decrees were being made against us, decree after decree, still, people thought it wasn't so bad – because we still had the *Beis HaMikdash*.

What indeed is the difference between the Greek exile with the other exiles? The difference was astounding. During the other exiles, when we were exiled from *Eretz Yisrael* and we had no *Beis HaMikdash*, we knew we were in exile. But during the Greek exile, it did not seem to us that we were in exile, because we were in *Eretz Yisrael*, and we had a *Beis HaMikdash*.

The Greeks came to contaminate the oil – this did not just mean that we had a technical problem in that the Greeks had all the oil. It was all a result of what came before that. Olive oil (*shemen*) is seen by our Sages as a symbol of wisdom (*chochmah*); the Greeks had control over all the oil, both on a physical level as well as on a spiritual level. They succeeded in confusing the wisdom and minds of our nation, with all their secular thinking. When the Greeks affected how we thought - that was how they were able to physically control our oil as well.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was the holiest site, but it was also the place that can contaminate everything [when it becomes contaminated]. If a person thinks that this was just another random detail in the Chanukah story, he is missing the whole point. When the Greeks came to contaminate the oil, their real intentions were that they wanted to destroy the holy power of thought which the Jewish people possess.

The Jewish people were first conceived in Hashem's thoughts, and the Greeks wanted to destroy that too. When the Greeks affected our holy power of thought, they were really damaging the entire holiness of Jewish souls. That was the depth of the matter of how they contaminated all the oils.

The Greek Exile Reappearing In The Current Exile

If we reflect a little, the “exile of the *Erev Rav*” that we are in includes all of the other exiles with it, and that is the depth of the current exile.

When a person reads about the words of our Rabbis concerning the exile, he can know at least on an intellectual level about what kind of problem we find ourselves in, how our minds are being threatened. But even more so, the depth of the exile is that evil can enter even into the holiest places. That was the uniqueness of the Greek exile, and since our current exile includes the Greek exile, our current exile also contains that disturbing kind of evil: our very holiness is being threatened. The evil influences of the nations can spread into even the holy places and contaminate holiness.

In our times as well, it can be said, *rachmana litzlan*, that the nations are coming and contaminating our holy places. Only one jug of oil was found, and it was hidden in the ground. So too, in our times, the Greek exile is here with it. The real evil is that Jewish minds are being contaminated by the secular influences.

Depth of The Current Exile

When these words are absorbed, we can begin to realize what kind of situation we are in. First of all, we are in an all-inclusive kind of exile, which includes aspects of all the exiles, with all of the secular influences. But even more specifically, we are in an exile that resembles the Greek exile, for we live in *Eretz Yisrael*; and the exile that we are in is not only taking places in the streets, and in the buildings of secular people who make decrees against the Torah. Our very holy places are being contaminated by the modern influences, which are disturbingly reminiscent of the nature of the Greek exile.

It is not only the “*Heichal*” of the *Beis HaMikdash* hundreds of years ago which is being contaminated. **Every *shul* and *beis midrash* in this generation is being contaminated by the secular influences!** When a Jew walks into a *shul* or *beis midrash* nowadays, his mind is becoming contaminated from all of the secular ideas he hears about!

In this exile, “*Erev Rav*”, which includes in it the Greek exile, we find ourselves facing Greek influences all over again. But worse still is that the current exile includes all of the exiles – it includes all of the secular influences of every nation. Those influences are coming into every *beis midrash* and *shul*!

A person is learning Torah in a *beis midrash* or davening in *shul*, and thinks that he’s being protected by the fact that *shuls* are called a “*mikdash me’at*” (abode of holiness) he is in, and that all the impurity is the street, while he’s safe and sheltered from it. After all, he is in middle of learning or *davening*, immersed in spirituality...

But the Greeks were able to contaminate the *Heichal*! If they can contaminate the *Heichal*, surely they can come into every *shul* and *beis midrash*. What this causes is the following: **the initial way of thinking of the average Jew who lives in our times is a contaminated kind of thinking.** It is because the whole air around us is impure.

It’s clear to all that there’s impurity outside in the streets. But it’s not clear that the impurity of the streets has entered the *shuls* and *batei midrashim*. The secular *de’os* (ways of thinking) have entered our circles and are ruining the mind of a Jew. The *daas* of the Torah has become exiled to the impure *daas* of the other nations.

We must know that all people, except for a few rare individuals - their minds have been contaminated by secular influences; even if they are found in the *shuls* and *batei midrashim*. One who doesn’t try to find the “jug of oil” in our times – meaning, if he doesn’t search for truth – he will not see the truth.

But the real difficulty is that people don’t even realize that there’s a problem. If we would know that there was an exile, everyone would cry to Hashem and beg Him that we attain a pure mind and have real *daas*. But people think that exile is only in the streets, not in the *shuls* and *batei midrashim*; a person is confident that his *de’os* are truthful. This is the depth of the exile; our *de’os* are being mixed up by the gentile nations, and we don’t even realize.

If we would list all of the untruthful *de’os* that are affecting us nowadays, there would not be enough time. But we must know one thing: In the depth of exile we are in, in the last couple of years (it’s hard to say when exactly it started), **the secular nations have succeeded in uprooting the entire proper Torah perspective** which *frum* people used to have. Not only are they making financial decrees against those who learn Torah; that is just the external part of the decree. They are uprooting all *de’os* of even those who learn Torah, and they are doing so to groups of people here and there; it all adds up.

They are taking away the proper *de’os* which we received as tradition from our forefathers. They have even succeeded in causing us to doubt the most basic fundamentals.

Anyone born into this generation is a “*tinok shenishboh*” (captured child) among the nations, even if he is born into a Torah family, because there are very few *de’os* today which are truthful. In the Chanukah episode, only one jug of oil was found; the message of this is that nowadays, it is rare to find the truth, even in the Torah world.

The actual words of Torah, of course, are never contaminated, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes. But in our souls, the words of Torah can definitely become hidden from the person, when his real mind is ruined by secular thinking.

If one would research all his *de’os* in his mind, he would discover how much he has become influenced by secular thinking.

A Spiritual Holocaust Taking Place In Our Midst

The words here are harsh - but it is the reality which we find ourselves in.

In previous generations, they were in a physical Holocaust. In this generation, we are in middle of a spiritual Holocaust. The spiritual Holocaust is not only affecting those who have gone off the *derech* and taken to the streets; it is affecting even us who are in the *beis hamidrash*! The true *de’os* are being uprooted, and the holiness of the Jew’s soul is being extinguished.

It is all because of what the influence of the *Erev Rav* is doing; because people are connected with “the heads of the *Erev Rav*”. And there is no end to how much damage they can cause when they enter our circles.

When the Torah world becomes connected with the outside world – via the influences of the *Erev Rav* – the “heads of the *Erev Rav*” can mix together *Chareidim* with those who aren’t *Chareidim*. How do they have the power to do this?? The answer is: Because there is no more *Chareidi* society! The *Chareidi* society is already gone! There are only a few G-d fearing individuals left. It’s all gone, it’s all destroyed.

We must understand that their influence upon is a holocaust to us! Someone born into this generation is being born into a spiritual holocaust, no less than someone born into the generation of the Holocaust that was 50 years ago. The Jewish people are being burned; everything is burning! Maybe in our physical situation, there are some who are surviving. But in our spiritual situation, the souls of the Jewish people are being burned! Each individual must realize how much the ways of our fathers are being given up in favor of the secular influences.

The words here are just a brief description of the problems of today’s exile. The depth of the exile is that each day, Jewish souls are being burned. There is no safe place anymore. Even the “*Heichal*” itself is being contaminated. It is not an external kind of impurity going on; it is the kind that enters the Jew’s mind and ruins it.

The Only Hope

Every opinion that enters our minds needs to be carefully researched to see if it’s truthful or not.

The truth must burn in our hearts. We need to daven and cry out to Hashem, from the depths of our hearts: “Save me from this generation that I am in, from all the impurity that is everywhere! Help me get through this lifetime properly!”

One must know the depth of the exile we are in – that there is no more *Chareidi* society anymore, except for a few rare individuals who fear Hashem. The only thing that we can do in this generation is to connect ourselves

truthfully to Hashem, and one who is connected to Hashem, and he makes sure to have *mesirus nefesh*, he resembles the heroic *Chashmonaim* of history.

Although we each have our various ups and downs in our spiritual level, we can still remain all the time connected with Hashem and pray to Him all the time that we remain connected with Him. We must be very afraid of the situation that we are in right now, because of the spiritual danger that surrounds us; that fear is what can protect us.

May Hashem end this exile and bring *Moshiach*, speedily in our days, *Amen V'Amen*.²⁸

²⁸ Refer also to Tefillah #085- Erev Rav Today and Derashos #0103 – Surviving Spiritually. See also Tefillah #093- Media Influence and Tefillah #094- Seeking Advice . Refer also to the Rav's series of Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus Practice and the clip of Eretz Yisrael Today.

9 | Fights of Chanukah²⁹

Fights Are Inevitable

After we ask Hashem in the blessing of *ראה בעניניו* that Hashem should see our suffering, we ask Hashem, *ריבה ריבנו* to “fight our fights.” On Chanukah and Purim as well, we ask Hashem to “fight our fights” for us.

There are generally three kinds of fights (*merivah*) that occur. Man and woman get into fights with each other, because woman is sometimes called *rivah*, strife; therefore, husband and wife encounter fights with each other. Another kind of fight takes place within oneself - our own desires fight and clash with each other [when we are not sure what we want]. Another kind of fight is when we fight our *yetzer hora* (evil inclination).

We all have fights. It is impossible for us to go through life without encountering fights, because our soul has a nature to fight with opposition. The only issue is what kind of fight we will have. When we don't express our need to fight in a healthy way, it will manifest itself in an unhealthy and evil way.

In the future, there will be peace upon the world, and our soul will be at peace as well. But for the time being, there is no revelation of true peace on the world, and therefore, we need to undergo certain fights. That is our current situation; fights are part of our life.

We have the power of *bechira* (free will) to decide if our fights will mainly be with our *yetzer hora* - or if they will be with people. If a person fights his *yetzer hora* a lot, he will fight a lot less with others. If he doesn't fight his own *yetzer hora*, he will end up fighting a lot with other people and with his own family, because his soul demands some kind of fight.

The words of the *Chovos HaLevovos* are well-known – the main fight we have on this world is with our *yetzer hora*.

What does it mean, though, that we are asking Hashem to fight our fights for us, *ריבה ריבנו* ?

When Does Hashem Fight For Us?

The world is full of wars, some bigger and some less. But every day, there are wars. Since the beginning of Creation, there has been war and strife. The first strife in Creation was between Kayin and Hevel – on the first day of Creation, there was already fighting. How many people have died since the beginning of this world due to strife!

If we would have Hashem fight our fights for us, everything would be different. However, in order to merit Hashem's help in our fights, we need to fight in the proper way. If we don't have the proper perspective on fights, we have no right to ask Hashem to fight our wars for us.

The power to fight, *merivah*, is mostly being used in the world for evil. Fights usually stem from bad *middos* – mainly from the traits of jealousy, desire, and seeking honor, which are the three negative traits that “take a person out of the world”.

²⁹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-067-fights-chanukah>

In the war against the Greeks, they discovered a flask of pure olive oil. This hints that their fight emanated from an inner purity; if not for their pure motivations in why they fought, they wouldn't have merited to find the flask of pure oil. They were willing to have *mesirus nefesh*, and from that inner recognition, they fought the Greeks. They fought with purified *middos*. In the times of Mordechai and Esther as well, they fought with pure intentions. The wars fought on Chanukah and Purim represent the true kind of fight: that when we have to fight, we need to do so with pure intentions, and not out of a superficial desire to fight those who challenge us.

But the fights in today's times are mostly stemming from all kinds of selfish interests – either out of jealousy, desire, or to seek honor. When this is the motivation of people when we fight, we don't have the right to ask Hashem to fight our fights for us.

Fighting Along With A Hope For Peace

If a war is all about winning, this is not a true kind of war, and we can't ask Hashem to assist us in such wars. If a person doesn't have a wish that there should be peace in the world, he does not have the correct perspective on wars and fights. He fights for the sake of fighting and winning, and not because he wants to arrive at peace with his challengers.

The inner essence of life is really peace; it is the inner point in the soul. The nature of the soul is to be peaceful. The soul also has the deep ability to pursue the truth – and to fight for the truth - but truth is meant as a vehicle to arrive at peace. When truth is not used as a vehicle to get to peace, then pursuing the truth is destructive to the world, because when peace isn't the goal, the goal is instead about victory over the enemy.

Although the true power of peace will be revealed in the future, that doesn't mean we cannot access the power of peace in our times. We can still access it and reveal it somewhat.

However, to *only* pursue peace is also detrimental. We are living in a world which is a mix of good and evil, and it is mostly evil; if a person only pursues peace, and he does not fight for truth, then he will wish to connect with the entire world, even with those who are totally evil. This is detrimental. A person must not use the deep power of peace to seek peace with the evil in our times. Instead, we must access our power of peace by desiring deep down that there should be peace in the world.

If we do not bear in mind this perspective as we fight for truth, our fights for the truth will be destructive. The world cannot survive on truth alone; we need both truth and peace together. "Truth and peace met." Moshe epitomized truth, and Aharon epitomized peace. We need to fuse both abilities together. In order to really use the power of pursuing truth and to fight for it, we need to have the goal of peace in the equation.³⁰

We must make the following internal clarification. We all fight; that is our nature. However, just because this is true does not mean that we should ignore the goal of peace. Most of the wars and fights in today's times are not being conducted with any peace, and they certainly don't bring peace. But if we can fight in a holy manner, like the wars we fought on Chanukah and Purim – and this can only be done when it is together with the understanding of peace.

If a person doesn't have a yearning for peace in the world, his power to fight will be turned to evil uses. His fights will stem from bad *middos*, and he resembles Korach's fight, which was for evil motives.

How To Deal With A Fight

We all have fights as we go through life. Sometimes we choose to fight, and sometimes we are dragged into a fight against our will – whether it comes to fights with our family members, or with our neighbors, etc. There is no way to go through life scot-free from any fights, because all of us will inevitably end up in some kind of fight.

In whatever fight we find ourselves in, though, we should always make sure that we have a desire that there should be eventual peace, even as we are in middle of going through the fight.

Chazal say that the *yetzer hora* gets stronger every day, and if not for Hashem's help it is impossible to defeat.³¹ The depth behind this is that Hashem's peace is the most powerful weapon against all our fights. The way to merit it is when we have a desire for peace, even as we are fighting the opposition.

We must try to avoid fights and strife as much as we can, but all of us inevitably will get into fights. Even Moshe *Rabbeinu* was placed into a fight, with Korach. Even Aharon, the paradigm of peace, did not always have peace; he gave the idea to make the Golden Calf because all of the fighting that was going on. And they were fighting with him too in the process. So inevitably, all of us encounter fights. However, although this is true, we need to make sure that we have a deep desire for peace. When we find ourselves in a fight, we must desire peace at the same time. This is the true way to fight, which the *tzaddikim* all fought with.

This is a matter that requires deep reflection. This was always a point that needed to be considered, but in our generation especially, where there is much war and strife going on, this matter needs tremendous attention. If a person doesn't make this reflection, he will lose both this world and the Next World, in his ignorance towards this concept.

The sensible way is to seek both truth and peace together. As we fight, we must wish there could be peace too.

Even when we had to fight the Greeks, who created the Greeks? Hashem created them. We were only to win over them because we realized that they were *Hashem's creations*....

May we merit that Hashem should fight our fights, and that He should reveal onto the world “the vessel which holds all blessing – the power of peace”.³²

³¹ *Sukkah 52a*

³² For more on this concept, see *Getting To Know Your Soul: Part II: Chapter 10: Netzach: Lasting Victory*.

10 | *Light and Darkness Together* ³³

When The Darkness Is Total, The Light of the Menorah Begins

The days of Chanukah are described as days of “light.” The *halachah* is that we light the *menorah* only after it is confirmed dark, after sundown³⁴, precisely so that the light of the *menorah* can light up the darkness.

The lighting of the *menorah* reveals a new kind of illumination, which it is not simply to be understood in the same way that the light of the sun “lights up” the day. We light the lights of Chanukah when the light of the sun has gone, in order to reveal a **new, unique** light in its place.

The Light of The Menorah On Chanukah Counters The Greek Darkness

The Greek exile is referred to as “darkness.” At the beginning of Creation, the *Torah* states that there was “nothing but darkness upon the waters of the earth”. The Midrash³⁵ says that this darkness represents the Greek exile, who “darkened” the eyes of the Jewish people with their decrees, for they said, “*Write on the horn of a bull that we have no portion in G-d of Israel.*” In another place, the Sages refer to the Greeks as a “great darkness”³⁶.

Through the *menorah* lights, a “great light” can come and conquer the great darkness of the Greeks. This is not just in the same way that light of the sun can penetrate darkness; rather, it is a light that is above the regular light.

Greek Wisdom: The “Beauty of Yefes in The Tents of Shem”

The source of the Greeks’ power stems from their ancestor *Yefes* [oldest son of *Noach*].

When *Yefes* and *Shem* covered their father’s nakedness, *Yefes* was rewarded with beauty, and *Shem* was rewarded with the *Torah* that would come from his descendants. The Sages said, “*The beauty of Yefes shall dwell in the tents of Shem.*”³⁷ In other words, at some point, there is a connection of *Yefes* with *Shem*, which is why their influence is such a challenge to us today.

If *Yefes* would have been totally alienated from our life, we wouldn’t have to fight their influences. But the fact is that *Yefes* is here with us today- right now. *Yefes* is allowed to dwell in the tents of *Shem*, and for this reason, we have an *avodah* to sift out the good from the bad in all of the influences that we receive. At the same time, it is

³³ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-007-light-darkness-together>

This is a very deep drasha built on a multitude of deep concepts

³⁴ *Shabbos 21b*

³⁵ *Beraishis Rabbah 2:4*

³⁶ *Shemos Rabbah 51:7*

³⁷ *Megillah 9b*

forbidden for us to learn Greek wisdom, and in this aspect, we have to fight their influences totally. Thus, there is a part of *Yefes* that can be accepted by us, but there is another part of *Yefes* that is forbidden.³⁸

What The Greeks Inherited From Their Ancestor Yefes

The parts of *Yefes* which may be accepted into the Jewish people stem from the fact that *Yefes* did a noble act in covering his father *Noach*. The entire praise of *Yefes* was that he covered his father. On a deeper level, the Greek nation that descends from *Yefes* received this power to “cover.” *Yefes* used this power for holiness, but his descendants, the Greeks, use this power for evil.

The Sages describe the Greeks as being a “darkness”, and darkness is the power to cover and conceal. Clearly, the Greek darkness means that their power to “cover” is used for evil, for purposes of concealing holiness. On the other hand, *Yefes* is praised for covering his father. This was the same power to “cover”, but *Yefes* used it for holiness, which his descendants took this power and used for evil.

Yefes covered his father’s nakedness; the entire concept of nakedness only came after the sin, for only after the sin did Adam and Chavah become ashamed of their nakedness. Modesty was a concept that was introduced as a result of the sin, because before the sin, there was no concept of nakedness.

There are two concepts of coverings: before the sin, and after the sin. After the sin, Adam and Chavah covered themselves with fig leaves. When *Yefes* covered his father’s nakedness, this was a kind of modesty that came after the sin of Adam; when a covering is used to cover nakedness.

At the giving of the Torah, we returned to the level of before the sin, but with the sin of the Golden Calf, we fell back to the level of after the sin, and the concept of being ashamed over nakedness returned. Thus, the Greek concept of covering nakedness came back with the sin of the Golden Calf; it enabled the Greek nation to nurture their power to “cover”. When the *Chashmonaim* defeated them, they essentially defeated this “Greek darkness”.

Modesty Before and After The Sin

There are a few ways how the “Greek darkness” can be vanquished.

The simple approach is: “*A little bit of light can push away a lot of darkness.*”³⁹ This is one approach, and it is true. This is the simple idea of Chanukah: to illuminate darkness.

But the deeper understanding is as follows. There was a kind of darkness that existed before the sin⁴⁰, and there was a darkness that came after the sin [which we are currently in]. Darkness, in essence, is a power to conceal and hide something.

This entire concept of “covering” is really the concept of modesty, which only came into Creation after the sin. Modesty is needed when something is proper to be kept hidden. For example, “The Jewish nation are a holy people,

³⁸ See Tefillah #090 – Purpose of Our Exile – Understanding Others

³⁹ *Chovos HaLevovos: Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh: 5; and also in Rabbeinu Bachye: Beraishis 4:7*

⁴⁰ For more on the “original darkness” of Creation and how it pertains to the soul, see also *Getting To Know Your Torah #06 – Difficulty In Learning.*

and therefore they do not have marital relations during the daytime”.⁴¹ The time when marital relations are proper is nighttime – a time in which there is darkness, covering, concealment, privacy, modesty. But the entire nature of concealment, which is the idea behind modesty, is an idea that only came into Creation as a result of the sin.

But where do we find the holy roots of concealment/covering/darkness, which existed before the sin? Hashem made a separation between light and darkness. Rashi explains that Hashem saw that it won't be good if light and darkness are allowed to be mixed together, and therefore He separated them. But before the separation, light and darkness were mixed together. Darkness, in its original form, was mixed with light, and this is the original and pure kind of darkness. It was not a kind of darkness that existed for the purpose of covering; thus, it is not a kind of darkness which needs to be fought. *Gehinnom* and strife were only created on the second day, but on the first day of Creation, there was no strife yet, even though darkness existed on the first day. Therefore, we see that the original state of darkness, on the first day of Creation, was not a darkness of strife. It was a higher kind of darkness.

On the second day of Creation, strife was created when the Lower Waters sought to overpower the Upper Waters. When strife entered Creation, the idea of disparity entered, resulting in Hashem separating light and darkness from each other. It was then that the idea of opposition between the Jewish people and the Greek nation began conceptually. But before the second day of Creation, light and darkness were together, and there was no concept yet to disassociate yet from darkness. The first day of Creation thus contained a kind of darkness which did not have to be fought, in which darkness can be together with light and there is no opposition between them.

The Victory of The Chashmonaim: Returning To The Original Darkness

Now we can understand the depth behind the victory of the *Chashmonaim* over the Greeks. It wasn't simply because “a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness.” In waging war with the Greeks, the *Chashmonaim* were able to reveal the original darkness of Creation, the root darkness, in which darkness and light were together. When the root of darkness is returned to its root, revealed is a point which is above war which is the ultimate victory.

The superficial viewpoint is that there was a war between light and darkness, a war between the Jewish people and the Greek nation, a war between the light of the Jewish people with the Greek darkness. But the inner perspective of the war was that it returned to darkness to its root, to its upper source, to the original way it looked on the first day of Creation. And since this original darkness became revealed – the kind that was originally mixed with light – it followed that there could be no more war. The power of the Greeks who tried to uproot our holiness was eliminated.

The Power of Mesirus Nefesh

The power of darkness/concealment which came **after** the sin is the kind of darkness of Yitzchok *Avinu*, who was blind. Because Yitzchok was blind, his vision was covered, so he was affected by the darkness that came after the sin. Yaakov *Avinu*, however, did not become blind in old age; rather, his vision became heavy upon him, but he was still able to see.

⁴¹ *Kesubos 65b*

The depth behind this was because Yitzchok represents *gevurah*/strength, which implies war, thus, he was affected by the darkness which came after the sin, which is the kind of darkness that needs to be fought. But Yaakov *Avinu* represents the middle point between Avraham and Yitzchok, therefore, he did not suffer the blindness of Yitzchok that came from his blindness/darkness.

The *Midrash* states that when Yitzchok was on the Altar, the angels were crying, and their tears went into his eyes, which blinded him. The *Midrash* also brings that because he gazed at the *Shechinah* when he was on the Altar he was punished with blindness.

This was really the deep rectification of the blindness. The test of the *Akeidah* was a revelation of *mesirus nefesh* of Yitzchok *Avinu* – he was ready to die for Hashem. The Sages state that a person merits to see Hashem in death.⁴² When Yitzchok was ready to die for Hashem, it was as if he saw the *Shechinah*. This was a kind of seeing, and it resulted in his blindness. This was a kind of “darkness” that was mixed with light.

Holiness Is To Be Separate

What exactly does it mean that light and darkness are mixed together? What does it mean that the *Chashmonaim* returned the darkness of the Greeks to the original state of darkness, in which light and darkness were mixed together, and thus there was no more point of war? Before we bring the answer, we need the following introduction.

The *halachah* states that the lights of the *Menorah* have holiness and, therefore, we have no permission to benefit from them – we may only look at them⁴³. Even though, there is an argument in the *Gemara* concerning this⁴⁴, the *halachah* is that we are not allowed to benefit from them. We are only allowed to see them.

What is the concept of holiness? Rashi and Ramban (in *Parshas Kedoshim*) describe holiness as a concept of being “separate”. The same can be said of the holiness of the *Menorah* lights – they are above our level of understanding, therefore, we have no permission to benefit from them.

There are two kinds of seeing: (1) One kind of seeing is when we use light to see with, like when we read next to the light. In this scenario, using the *Menorah's* light for his own personal benefit, is forbidden. (2) Another kind of seeing is when you see it as holy, when you see it as something that is above your comprehension, and you are aware that it is more exalted than you. We are allowed to see the Chanukah lights with the second kind of vision: to just see it, and no more.

This alludes to how the *Chashmonaim* rectified the Greeks whose wisdom is a kind of wisdom that we can comprehend with human understanding. The wisdom of the Torah, by contrast, is not able to be comprehended through human wisdom alone. It is like the original darkness of Creation, which was mixed together with light.

Greek Wisdom Is Tangible Wisdom, Torah Is Inner Wisdom

How can it be that the original form of light and darkness were able to co-exist together? Why don't the light and darkness cancel each other out?

⁴² *Toras Kohanim Vayikra 1; Kallah Rabbasi 3*

⁴³ *Orach Chaim 673:1*

⁴⁴ *Shabbos 21a*

When a person sees something and he knows he can't reach it, he cannot use it, even though he is aware of it. This is like light and darkness together; the light is here, because he can see it, but the fact that he can't reach it is a degree of darkness. When one can see something but he can't understand it or reach it, that means he is really missing the inner view of what he is seeing; he sees the external layer of what he's seeing, but he can't see the internal layer of what he's seeing.

When we see the lights of the *menorah*, all we can do is see them on a physical level. We can see them, but we cannot benefit from them – meaning, we can see them on a physical level, but we cannot see the inner essence of the light.

This describes the difference between the wisdom of the Greeks and the wisdom of the holy Torah. Greek wisdom is a kind of wisdom that is tangible. The Ramban⁴⁵ wrote that the wisest of all the Greek philosophers (Aristotle) was skeptical about spirituality, because he didn't see it. By contrast, the wisdom of the Torah, when we learn it, we know that we are barely scratching the surface; all that one knows about the Torah is only about the external layer of the Torah, but the inner essence of the Torah's wisdom cannot actually be comprehended.

This is the deep meaning of “light and dark mixed together.” Whatever we do know about the Torah's wisdom is what we see, but we know that there is always more depth to it, for it is written, “*It is vastly deep, who will find it?*”⁴⁶

This is darkness at its holy root.

Darkness “After” The Sin

When a person falls to a sin, *chas v'shalom*, it is upon him to understand that he is in a darkness which conceals him. The *Gemara* says that if one cannot overpower his evil inclination to sin, he should go to a place where no one recognizes him, don sackcloth and cover himself with black garments.⁴⁷ In other words, sin must be covered.

The sin of Adam is what produced the need for modesty, which is the power to conceal; when a person sins, it is a revelation of the covering and concealment that the first sin produced.

But concealment at its root is good and holy. The holy kind of concealment, which was around before the sin, has nothing to do with sin.

Holy concealment is the mere fact that a person cannot comprehend the essence of Hashem – a person cannot get to the depths of the Torah, for “Hashem and His wisdom are one.” Shlomo *HaMelech* declared, “*I said I would try to understand it, [but] it is far from me.*”⁴⁸ When a person tries to learn the Torah's wisdom, he is viewing its light, but he sees that he cannot understand the depths of the Torah's wisdom, and this is darkness to him. This is the “light and darkness mixed together.”

This does not mean to imply that one should give up on trying to understand the Torah, *chas v'shalom*. The Torah is not only a darkness – it is light together with darkness. Thus, we have a *mitzvah* to delve in it all day and try to understand it, but at the same time, we must know that its depths are far from us. It is both light and darkness together.

⁴⁵ *Kisvei HaRamban: “Derashas Toras Hashem Temimah”*

⁴⁶ *Koheles 7:24*

⁴⁷ *Kiddushin 40a*

⁴⁸ *Koheles 7:23*

The Sage Who Wanted To Learn Greek Wisdom

The *Gemara*⁴⁹ brings that one of the Sages knew the entire Torah, and he asked his teacher if he can learn Greek wisdom. His teacher showed him the *possuk*, “*And you shall immerse yourself in it [the Torah], day and night.*” He said to him, “Find a time which is not day and not night, and then you can learn Greek wisdom.” Rashi explains that since there is no time which is not day and not night, therefore, there is no permission granted to learn Greek wisdom.

We can ask: Why didn’t his teacher just tell him that it’s forbidden? The response of the teacher implies that there is such a time in which it is not day and not night; what is the meaning of this?

The deep understanding is as follows. The *mitzvah* to light *Menorah* is after sundown, and the time of lighting lasts preferably [*l’chatchilah*] until passerby’s are no longer walking in the marketplace. It is really the time in which darkness and light are mixed together, because it is the time of twilight (*bein hashemashos*) – the time in between day and night. It is complicated to discuss the status of the time of *bein hashemashos*⁵⁰, but with regards to our discussion here, it is a time in which the sun has already gone down, yet it is not totally night time. The time in between day and night is the time to light the *menorah*.

Thus, when the teacher said to go find a time which is not day and not night, he was really referring to the time of lighting the *menorah*. That is the time in which one can draw forth the strength to defeat the influence of Greek wisdom, through “darkness and light mixed together”, which is darkness at its root – which can rectify the nature of Greek wisdom. When the holy root of darkness is revealed, the darkness of the Greeks has returned to its root, and that will enable a person to learn Greek wisdom; meaning, Greek wisdom is like a branch cut off from its root – it is darkness without any light in it.

The Elements Which Conceal: Earth and Fire

From the words of our Rabbis we can see that there are two elements which bring darkness. There are four elements – fire, wind, water, and earth. Water is naturally clear, so it does not conceal. Unless you make water dirty, the water itself remains clear, and it does not conceal things. Wind does not either conceal, because we can see clearly through the air.

The elements of fire and earth, however, are both elements which conceal. The earth covers the dead in burial, and fire turns things into coal, which is dark. So each earth and fire can cause concealment. But there is a difference between them. When earth covers something, it covers it totally blotting out any light from entering. But when fire causes concealment, at least the light of the fire doesn’t allow for a total darkness. So fire resembles light and darkness mixed together.

When you think about it, the study of the nature of the world, which is Greek wisdom, is really the study of the earth. Thus, studying nature is a kind of darkness which is total, because studying nature is really involving oneself in “earth”, and this prevents a person from knowing about inner and spiritual wisdom.

⁴⁹ *Menachos* 99b

⁵⁰ See *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim*: 672

On the other hand, the element of earth reveals the potential of the other elements⁵¹, so earth can both conceal as well as reveal. The Greek darkness resembles the element of earth, for it is a total darkness that causes total concealment. It is rectified through the higher kind of darkness, which comes from the element of fire, in which light and darkness are mixed together. The Torah is likened to a fire⁵², and it is also called “black fire on white fire”⁵³, because the light and darkness mixed together that is the Torah is what can rectify the darkness of the Greeks.

The Eighth Light of Chanukah

The miracle of Chanukah was that the oil of the *menorah* lasted for eight nights. In the *Menorah* of the *Beis HaMikdash*, there were seven lights, while on Chanukah we light eight lights, in the *menorah*. What is the source for lighting the eighth light?

How can it be that we light eight lights, when the *Menorah* in the *Beis HaMikdash* had only seven? The *Menorah*'s light represents the source of all light in Creation – so if all light is modeled after the *Menorah*, how can it be that we light more than what the actual *Menorah* in the *Beis HaMikdash* was?

Rashi⁵⁴ states that in the evening, the wicks from the Western Light were removed, placed in the Kohen's hand or in a vessel, and the wick would continue to burn from the oil that was absorbed in it; as this was going on, a new wick and oil replaced the old one, and then they would relight the new wick from the old wick, and from the new wick they would proceed to light all of the other lights of the *Menorah*.⁵⁵

From these words of Rashi we can find a hint to the concept of the eighth light. The Western Light was split into two different lights as it was being replaced – there was a new one and an old one burning at the same time. The old wick, as it continued to burn after being taken out of the *Menorah*, is really the root of the concept of the eighth light in the *Menorah*.

The Maharal⁵⁶ though finds a different source for the eighth light in the *Menorah*: there was a light coming from the Aron in the Holy of Holies (*Kodesh Kodashim*), and there was a light coming from the *Menorah* in the Sanctuary (*Heichal*). The *Aron* is from the word *ohr* (light), because the *Aron* contained its own light.

This was like an eighth light – it was a level of light above the seven lights of the *Menorah*.

Inner Modesty – The Root of Understanding Torah

The source of *ohr*/light is called “*Torah Ohr*”, and Torah is light and darkness mixed together. Hashem is concealed yet revealed, and so is His Torah concealed yet revealed.⁵⁷ There is an aspect of revelation in the Torah, as well as an aspect of concealment in it [as it was explained here].

⁵¹ as the Maharitz writes in the glosses of *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*

⁵² *Yirmiyahu* 23:29

⁵³ *Rashi Devarim* 33:2, *Midrash Tanchuma: Beraishis: 1*

⁵⁴ *Shabbos* 22b

⁵⁵ This follows the view of Rashi, but *Tosafos* concludes differently.

⁵⁶ *Ner Mitzvah* p.23

⁵⁷ *Zohar Achrei Mos* 71b

The days of Chanukah, the war between the *Chashmonaim* and the Greeks, is a war of how to define darkness. {Do we want} to have the darkness that came after the sin (Greek darkness), or the darkness which came before the sin (light and dark mixed together). When the *Chashmonaim* won, they revealed that concealment is not only used for modesty, which comes to conceal that which should be covered. They revealed that there is more to darkness than just covering.

The root of modesty is contained in these words of *Chazal*: “The holy names [of Hashem] are not revealed except to one who is modest and humble.”⁵⁸ Modesty is the tool to understand the hidden.⁵⁹ Modesty, which is really the power of darkness/concealment, at its root, is to reveal the hidden. In order for the hidden to become revealed, it needs a container that is hidden; thus, modesty is the hidden container that can contain revelation.

Chazal say that nighttime was created for sleep, (and this refers to the kind of darkness which came after the sin), and *Chazal* also say that daytime was only created for learning Torah.⁶⁰ Now that we are after the sin, darkness is used for sleep, but at its root, the nighttime/the darkness is the time in which a person can reach into his innermost depths, and this is the holy kind of darkness.

Modesty And Women

The *mitzvah* to light *Menorah* is on “a man and his household”.⁶¹ A person without a home is exempt from the *mitzvah*.⁶² Thus, lighting *Menorah* includes the whole family, not just the person himself.

Women do not light, unless the husband is not home⁶³; the reason why women are exempt is because “a wife is like his body⁶⁴”, therefore, a married woman is included with her husband when he lights.⁶⁵ Another reason brought⁶⁶ is because “*the entire honor of a daughter of the king is on her inside*”, [so it is not modest if she lights]. The *Vilna Gaon*.⁶⁷ says that the nature of a woman is to be modest; the level of a woman’s spirituality is determined by how modest she is, because the inner depth of something is what defines it.

The Light of Chanukah: The Depth of Increasing Shalom Bayis

The *mitzvah* of lighting *menorah* is on “man and his household”, and the wife is called the “home” of her husband⁶⁸. The depth of this is because the light of the *menorah* is light and darkness mixed together; it is not simply a light that comes to dispel the darkness, because if that would be the purpose, then the obligation would be separately upon man and woman. But lighting *menorah* is the light of “light and darkness mixed together”, which was the light of the first day of Creation, and on the first day of Creation it was “one day”; husband and wife are

58 *Kiddushin* 71a

59 For more on modesty, see *Understanding Your Middos #013 – Modesty In-Depth*

60 *Eruvin* 65a

61 *Shabbos* 21b

62 *Shabbos* 23a

63 *Mishna Berurah* 671:9

64 *ibid*

65 *ibid*

66 *Chasam Sofer to Shabbos* 21b

67 *Igeres HaGra*

68 *Yoma* 2a

commanded to become “one flesh”, which reflects the oneness of the first day of Creation, in which light and darkness were together as one.

In other words, the concept of lighting the *menorah* symbolizes the connection between “man and his household”. The *Gemara*⁶⁹ discusses, which takes precedence - Shabbos lights, or Chanukah lights (if one only has enough money to purchase one of them)? The *Gemara* answers that Shabbos lights take precedence, because Shabbos lights were established by *Chazal* to bring *shalom bayis* (marital peace) to the home, and *shalom bayis* is more important than Chanukah.

This needs understanding: Does *shalom bayis* push away all other *mitzvos* as well? It cannot push away a Biblical *mitzvah*, but there are times when it can push away a Rabbinical *mitzvah*. But the deeper reason why *shalom bayis* is more important than Chanukah is because the entire purpose of lighting *menorah* on Chanukah is “man and his household”, that there should be marital peace; lighting the *menorah* is all about *shalom bayis*.

The Two Purposes of Lighting The Menorah

There are really two aspects to lighting the *menorah*. It is lit to spread the miracle of Chanukah (*pirumei nisa*), and in this sense, it can be understood as “a little bit of light that pushes away a lot of darkness”. The light of the *menorah* spreads outward into the night and illuminates it.

But in a deeper sense, the *menorah* is lit inside the home, which implies that it is also meant to light up the home from within. This is the exact idea behind lighting the *menorah* of Chanukah, which is an obligation of “man and his household” – a *mitzvah* about *shalom bayis* – in which light and darkness can be mixed together yet be harmonized.

May we merit from Hashem to return to the source of darkness, the holy and original kind of darkness, in which light and darkness were mixed together – to the “one day” of Creation which come [once again] with help from Heaven, and reveal the only One of the universe.

⁶⁹ *Shabbos 23b*

11 | Miracles Within⁷⁰

Miracles – When Nature Is Overcome

On Chanukah, we make a blessing of *שעשה ניסים לאבותינו*, expressing our thanks to Hashem for this time where He performed miracles for us. Although we also experienced miracles on Pesach, only the Rabbinical festivals of Chanukah and Purim contain a blessing where we thank Hashem for the miracles performed, which we express in the prayer of *Al HaNissim* in *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Hashem runs the world through a system of laws He created which we know as “nature” (*teva*), and He also built into this a system that works above the normal laws of “nature”: miracles (*nisim*). Hashem has allowed the laws of “nature” that He created to be the system of the normal “laws” (*chukim*) which He runs the world with.

When we analyze Creation deeper, there are actually different kinds of “nature” in creation. There are four classifications in Creation: the non-living objects (*doimem*), plants (*tzomeiach*), animals (*chai*), and people (*medaber*). Each of these has their own specific natures. Human beings, animals, plants, and inanimate objects each have their own specific kind of “nature”.

Each of the creations has their limitations. If Hashem enables a rock to grow and have life to it, it would be a miracle for the rock, because the nature of a rock is that it cannot grow. If Hashem were to allow a plant to move from place to place like an animal can, this would be a miracle for the plant, because a plant’s nature is that it does not grow. If an animal is allowed by Hashem to talk, such as the donkey of Bilaam who was allowed to talk, this is a miracle for the animal, because an animal’s nature is that it cannot talk.

Thus, what is the depth of a miracle (*nes*)? It is when a different “nature” is revealed in something. A miracle is not simply that Hashem changes the rules. Rather, as the Ramban and others explained, the definition of a “miracle” is when a lower level creation is allowed to function on a level that is normally above its natural level. When a rock can grow, when a plant can walk, when an animal can talk, these are all miracles, because they would be functioning on a higher level than they are normally on. Thus, in the days of Chanukah, we experienced “miracles” in the sense that a higher level of creation was revealed within this lower realm that we dwell on.

Becoming Uplifted To A Higher Level

When one has a difficulty (*nisayon* נִסְיוֹן), either his *avodah* is to find a way to run away from it (וַיָּנוּס), such as what happened with Yosef when he had to run away from the wife of Potiphar; and sometimes the *avodah* of going through a *nisayon* is to bear through it and thereby become uplifted from it (לְהִתְנוֹסֵס).

When the family of the *Chashmonaim* had to go to war with the Greeks, it was a *nisayon* for them, and they passed the test, becoming uplifted from it and rising to a higher level than before. That was the miracle. The *Chashmonaim* faced some difficulty in their *avodah* in their own individual souls, and because they passed the difficulty, they were elevated to a higher level, where miracles were performed for them.

⁷⁰ <http://bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-055-miracles-within>

In clearer terms, as mentioned earlier, a miracle is when a lower level creation is allowed by Hashem to function on a higher level. This can apply within human beings as well: what is considered nature for one person might be considered a miracle for another person, and vice versa. If Shimon is on a lower spiritual level than Reuven, and Shimon rises to the level of Reuven (which is a natural level for Reuven to be on), this is a miracle for Shimon.

Thus, every year when Chanukah returns, where the spiritual light of “miracles” is revealed, this does not simply mean that the miracles of Chanukah are revealed to us in the very same way it was revealed to us last year. Rather, the definition is that if we have risen to higher levels since a year ago, last year’s miracle isn’t considered a miracle anymore for us, because it has now become our natural level.

The spiritual light of the miracles are shined upon us during this time of the year, as our Sages explain, but the depth of this concept is that it depends on the level we have reached since last year. If one has passed more *nisyonos* (difficulties) since last year, he merits a greater level of “miracle” this year, because now that he has become more elevated since last year’s level, the miracle of last year is now his natural level, and he is now ready to receive greater miracles than the year before.

Overcoming Our Own Personal Natures

Applying this to us on a personal level, every person has his own “natures” which Hashem has implanted into his soul. There are four elements contained in our various “natures”: fire, wind, water, and earth. These are the roots of our negative *middos* (character traits). Fire is the root of conceit and anger, wind is the root of idle speech, water is the root of seeking hedonistic pleasure, and earth is the root of sadness and laziness, with their branching traits.⁷¹ These are the natures of our *middos*. When one works to improve his *middos*, he is really working to uproot the various natures that Hashem has implanted in him.

The *nisayon*, the difficulty of man, is to rise above his nature contained in the animalistic layer of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*).⁷² - which will not improve on its own; just as an animal dies with the natures that it is born with.

The Vilna Gaon says that if a person does not break his negative *middos*, there is no point of living. In other words, a person must work on himself to uproot the nature of his negative *middos*. In other writings of our sages, working on one’s *middos* means to acquire a “second nature”. But the depth of it is for one to break his very nature and to subflaskate it, so that it slowly changes, and eventually the “second nature” that one acquires becomes his “first” nature.

Thus, it can be said that the *avodah* of a person is to rise above his own nature that he was born with and to elevate himself to a more “miraculous” level than before. When one changes his natural level, this is a *nes* miracle, just as Hashem performed a *nes* when He redeemed us from Egypt, where He changed nature for us. Just as Hashem runs the world through nature and also through miracles, so does our soul contain nature and miracles. Everything that exists in the world and in time exists as well in our own souls⁷³, so if there can be miracles in the world, there can be miracles in our own soul as well.

⁷¹ *Shaarei Kedushah* (Rav Chaim Vital), 1:1

⁷² as explained extensively in *Tanya*, *Nefesh HaChaim*, *Derech Hashem*, and *Maharal*

⁷³ *Sefer Yetzirah* 3:1

This is referring specifically to our *avodah* of working on our *middos*. We have certain natures we are born with, which manifest in our negative *middos*, and when we deal with our *middos* and we deal with this *nisayon* – instead of running away from it, we deal with it and face it, by changing our nature – this elevates us from nature to miracles.

After that, what used to be considered a “miracle” for one’s personal level will now become “second nature” to him.

Changing A Personal Nature

To give a clear example of this concept, the nature of a person is that he is concerned for his own gain, and he feels competition with others who are getting in his way. “A craftsman hates those who are in his craft.” A person in the business will naturally feel competition with his competitor and he won’t love him. A person loves himself more than others and he will naturally put himself before others. His attitude will always be, “*Chayecha Kodmin*” – “Your own life comes first.” But when one works on his *middos*, on changing his nature, he will become more at peace with others who compete with him, and his love for others will grow, replacing the hatred he once had for them.

What used to be his “nature” has now changed for him, if he has worked on changing his natural *middos*; he has now risen to a “miraculous” level.

And vice versa: what used to be considered a “miraculous” level for him to access (in this case, to be able to love even his competitor) has now become “second nature” to him. As his love slowly grows for his competitor, he rises to a more “miraculous” level than before; it is a miracle for him, for a miracle is anything that goes above one’s natural level.

Harmonizing The Opposite Forces Within The Soul

When one reaches a more elevated, “miraculous” kind of existence, he is able to harmonize together contradictory forces within himself.

To give a simple example of this, the earth and the heavens are opposite realms of each other. On this earth we live in, fire and water cannot exist together. When fire and water meet, there is a clash of the elements, and one of them will overpower the other. But in the upper realms that extend beyond this earth, fire and water are united. The Gemara says that the word “*shomayim*” (heaven) is a combination of the words *ish* (fire) and *mayim*.⁷⁴ (water), which hints to how fire and water can co-exist in the heavens. It would be a miracle on this earth if water and fire can co-exist together. By the story of Eliyahu HaNavi at Mount Carmel, fire and water came down together from heaven, and that was a miracle on this earth. In the heavens, though, it is natural for fire and water to be together.

Thus, what is a “miracle” on one level can be “nature” on another level, and what is “nature” for one level can be a “miracle” for another level.

A person, within himself, also has the ability to harmonize together his opposing, contradictory forces. That is a revelation of a “miracle” for the soul, and then this miracle can become second nature to him, where it is no longer miraculous. In the example we brought of one who was used to hating his competitors, he is able to develop a love

⁷⁴שמים = אש ומים

for them, and he is able to transform his character traits of hatred, jealousy, and competition into their opposite: love. This is but one example of a miracle that can take place in the soul, and there are many more examples as well, of this concept.

The Depth of The Victory of the Chashmonaim

By the miracle with the family of the *Chashmonaim*, where the “few overcome the majority, the impure were defeated by the pure, the wicked were defeated by the righteous” – the depth of the Chanukah miracle was because the *Chashmonaim* must have overcome their own nature, and that was precisely how they merited miracles.

How do we see that the *Chashmonaim* overcame their nature? They were “few against many”. When a person sees that he is outnumbered, his nature is to feel incapable of winning. When going out to war against our enemies, the Torah commands those who are afraid to return home, because they will not be able to fight in the war when they are afraid. Human nature is to be afraid when we were outnumbered by enemies. But the *Chashmonaim* went to war with the Greek army even though the odds were against them; they went against the human nature to be afraid.

Simply speaking, they received *siyata d’shmaya* (assistance from Heaven), and that was how they succeeded. But there is really a deeper reason. They realized their natural limitations, and indeed they were afraid, but they were able to penetrate into a deeper part of their souls, which felt *emunah* in Hashem, and they felt the belief that Hashem is in charge and that He can fight our wars for us and defeat our enemies.

They knew that they could not naturally win. But the light of *emunah* was shining in their souls, and it penetrated into even the physical, animalistic layers of their soul. When a person’s *emunah* is strong enough, it can uplift even the *nefesh habehaimis* and elevate it to a higher level, filling it with confidence that it can defy one’s natural limitations.

When there is such a “miracle” within one’s own soul, it is only “natural” that there will be miraculous results. The miracle that happens afterwards in the physical realm is a result of the *inward* miracle which has just taken place in one’s *soul*.

That was what happened with the *Chashmonaim* – because they reached a miracle within themselves, by elevating their *nefesh habehaimis* to have firm *emunah* that Hashem can save them, they merited miracles in the physical realm, because they had now become elevated to the level of miracles.

The Depth of The Miracle With Finding The One Pure Flask of Oil

Now we can understand the following deep point.

The *Chashmonaim* found the flask of pure olive oil sealed by the *Kohen Gadol*, amongst all the many oils that were contaminated by the Greeks. Besides for the simple understanding of why this was a miracle – the fact that they found one flask of oil that was still pure – there is also a deeper meaning to this miracle.

There are many layers to a person’s soul. When a person works on his character and he uproots his own natures, he uncovers deeper parts of his soul, which shed light onto the external layers of the soul and raises them to higher levels. The external layers of the soul can be improved by the inner layers of the soul that a person reveals. The inner

layers of the soul are really a person's inner nature, which has been concealed all along until he improves himself and he uncovers it. In the inner layers of the soul, there is a more inner nature of a person, which contains vast strength. This is also referred to as the "*Aisan*" (giant) of the soul, the true inner strength of the soul, which has no fears and is fully reliant on Hashem's help.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that when a person firmly establishes in his mind the knowledge that there is nothing besides for Hashem and that only He is running the world (*Ain Od Milvado*), he receives Hashem's protection. When one truly reaches this deep place in the soul, the external layers of his soul are removed, and are replaced with the inner layers of the soul.

This was the depth behind the one flask of oil that was found by the *Chashmonaim*. The "one flask of oil" they found represents the inner essence of the soul, which was revealed to the *Chashmonaim* then, where they overcame the external reality and they revealed the inner reality, within themselves. What was at first concealed from them now became revealed to them. They found their own inner essence, which is above nature, above the power of the Greeks who were operating within nature.

On a more inner level, the war of the Jews against the Greeks represented the war of Greek *chochmah*, their wisdoms and ideologies, versus the holy *chochmah* of the Torah. The Greeks were on an agenda to make the Jews forget the Torah, and when the *Chashmonaim* found the inner essence of their own souls, they merited an elevated existence, of miracles, and this is what is represented by the flask of oil that they found.

The Inner "Flask Of Oil" In The Soul

Such a flask of oil could never be "found" by the Greeks – and that is the depth of why they weren't able to find it and contaminate it. It wasn't simply because the Greeks overlooked that flask and that the Divine Providence of Hashem arranged for this to happen. It is true that it was all Divine Providence, but the Divine Providence was only activated because the *Chashmonaim* revealed a deep *emunah* in their own souls.

The *Chashmonaim* removed their own nature contained in their *nefesh habehaimis*, and they revealed the purity of the *neshamah*, which can never be touched by impurity. This deep place in the soul of the *neshamah* is the "oil" which the Greeks can never "find". The Greeks would never be able to "see" it in the first place. Even if this one "flask of oil" would be sitting in front of the Greeks when they pass by it, it would be invisible from them. This is because the inner essence of the Jew's soul cannot be "seen" by any forces of impurity.

The same would be true for a Jew who hasn't yet uncovered his own inner essence, and he is still living life on the level of the Greeks. He would also not be able to find this one "flask of oil" in the *Beis HaMikdash*, even if it would be right in front of him....

The only one who can find this one "flask of oil" is one who has uncovered his own inner essence. He has already found it within him, so he wouldn't have to go looking for it anywhere.

This "flask of oil" within a person is the true "oil" of these days of Chanukah. But it is only revealed to one who connects himself to the level of the *Chashmonaim* throughout the rest of the year, when he works to overcome his own nature. When one overcomes his nature and he rises to the next level in character improvement, he finds a true "flask of oil" there. It is not the oil you see in the physical world; it is an inner purity found in the depths of the soul. It is hidden and concealed deep in the soul of a Jew. The more one has uncovered his own inner essence during the rest of the year, the more it is revealed to him the inner "flask of oil".

This “oil” is essentially the fact that the Jewish people were “the first thoughts of Hashem” before Creation, as the Sages state. A gentile therefore can never know of this pure, untouched “oil” in the Jew’s soul. The wisdom of the Greeks was at war with the wisdom of the Torah, but this war only exists on an external plane, where wisdom is pitted against wisdom; the Torah’s wisdom is but its external layer. The inner layer of the Torah, the actual essence of the Torah, cannot be attacked by any outer forces. The inner layer of the Torah is the intrinsic essence of the Jewish people, who were the first thoughts of Hashem before creation. Nothing can attack that point.

In the external dimension of Creation, in the external layers of the soul, there is a war between good and evil. There is a rule of “The shell comes before the fruit” (*kelipah kodemes l’pri*), and similarly, “there is no light unless it is preceded by darkness”, but this is true only in the external dimension. When one reaches the inner essence of his soul, there is no longer a battle between the forces of light and darkness in the soul; of that point it is said, “*Even as I sit in darkness, Hashem is a light to me.*” The “beginning point” of Creation, the fact that the Jewish people are Hashem’s first thoughts that preceded creation, is above all the concealment and darkness.

Two Facets To Chanukah

This is a deeper understanding of Chanukah than what we explained earlier.

One facet of Chanukah, as we explained until now, is that if one has worked during the rest of the year to uproot his own natures and to reveal his inner essence, he merits more revelation of miracles during these days of Chanukah. He finds the “one flask of oil” within.

But even more so, it brings a Jew into his “beginning point” of the soul, the fact that he was part of Hashem’s first thoughts before creation, and then he reveals a new beginning for himself. His own first thoughts, and his own will, will then become aligned with Hashem’s thoughts and Hashem’s will.

Reaching The Depth of the Soul

When one reaches that place of his soul, there are no outer, impure forces that can attack him there. Evil cannot take hold there.

To reach that place in oneself, we explained that one needs to work on uprooting his own natures, and to reveal more and more inner layers of his soul. How far, indeed, will one have to go into his soul, in order to get there?

The first step, trying to uproot one’s nature, is a concept that anyone can work on, as long as he desires true life. It can be worked on by anyone who wishes to change, on any level he is on. At any level that a person is on, he can work on uprooting his nature and to reveal more depth of his soul.

But what is the end point that one should strive for? That is a higher level, which not everyone can reach. It is a lofty place in the soul for one to reach, where one truly realizes the “beginning point” of his soul, realizing that he is the first thoughts of Hashem and that his own first thoughts are aligned with Hashem’s will, where he is not even struggling with the evil influences. That is a very high level to reach, a place of *peshitus* (simplicity) in the soul, where one’s entire *ratzon* (will) in life is to do Hashem’s will, and he does not even entertain any thought otherwise.

The Inner Point Is Above Oppositions

On the outer layers of our existence, we are at war with the evil in Creation, and it is there that it is said, “There is no light that is not preceded by darkness.” There we have to contend with the forces that seek to bring us down spiritually. This is also the depth behind why we begin to light the Menorah specifically at sundown, until the time where passerby are no longer walking in the streets; to fight the darkness with light.

But when we reach the deeper dimension of the Menorah and the oil, there our thoughts and desires are aligned with Hashem’s thoughts and will; our “first thoughts” that enter our mind will then be aligned with Torah (this is also called *Ruach HaKodesh*).

That is the depth of the spiritual illumination that is contained in the days of Chanukah. But as we have explained, this is a very lofty level, and it is the end goal of all our *avodah*. Yet, in spite of this, we must try to realize it somewhat even in the beginning of our *avodah* – for we need to have the aspiration of “*sof maaseh, b’machshavah techilah*” (“the end of action is first in the thoughts”).

Practically Speaking

Applying this concept on a practical level: What should be the order of steps a person should take when it comes to this? The order is as we explained until now. The first step is that a person must work on himself to uproot his nature, and then what used to be a “miraculous” level for him becomes nature.

As an example, at first when a person begins to exert his mind in Torah, he has a hard time grasping it, and his comprehension in Torah is weaker. But as he perseveres, the “gates of wisdom” become opened to him⁷⁵ and he begins to understand his learning better. The miraculous levels then become more natural to him, and they are no longer miracles. It becomes easier for him to learn Torah with understanding, and it is not as difficult for him anymore. This is just an example of the concept, but it has more general applications in one’s *avodah*.

As a person works on himself and he merits uproot his natural *middos*, he uncovers more of his inner essence, on a more continual basis. His growth is more permanent and it is not just temporary where it feels like a miracle; it has rather become more natural and permanent in his life.

This is the depth of *הזה בזמן הזה שיעשה ניסים לאבותינו בימים ההם*, where the “miracles” have more permanence in his life. When one changes his nature and he reveals his inner essence, what used to be a “miraculous” level for him now becomes “natural” to him.

When Miracles Become Nature

The more a person merits, with help from Heaven, to overcome his nature, to change the natural bad habits he was born with, the more it becomes natural for him to live a more miraculous kind of existence, where the miracles within his inner character are no longer miracles, but nature.

It then becomes a natural part of his life, and he reaches deeper and deeper kinds of miracles within his inner character – until he eventually reaches the deepest place of the soul, where one truly believes that it is only Hashem

⁷⁵ As written in a letter of the Chazon Ish, in *Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish (vol.I)*

Who runs everything, where His light fills all of existence. That is the goal of all our *avodah*, and it will be fully realized in the times of Mashiach, when Hashem's light will fill all of existence and bring equilibrium to all of Creation.

This is the depth of the statement of the Sages, "All the festivals will cease in the future, except for Purim", and some of the opinions in the Sages included Chanukah as well in this statement. In other words, the fact that miracles can become nature to us is a revelation of the light of the future, which will never cease. That is the depth of why Chanukah will never cease (according to these opinions of the Sages).

The parts of Chanukah that will cease in the future are the parts of our inner journey which we must traverse for the time being, which is but the external dimension of Chanukah. The deeper dimension of Chanukah, where it is realized how miracles can become nature, is the part of Chanukah that will never cease.

In Conclusion

May it be the will of Hashem that it be fulfilled in our times the time where miracles fill all of the world, where it will be revealed the deep, simple nature of the Jew's soul, which desires to do Hashem's will.

12 | *The Fire of Chanukah*⁷⁶

Three Kinds of Inauguration – The Altar, The Temple, and The Wall of Jerusalem

“Chanukah” gets its name from the term חנוכה, “*Chanu koi*”, which means “they rested on the 25th” [of the month], but there are many facets of understanding as to what the root of Chanukah is.

The word “*chanukah*” means to “inaugurate”. There are different kinds of *chanukah* inauguration that we find. There was the *chanukas mizbeiach*, a new inauguration of the *mizbeiach* (the Altar), which took place both in the times of Moshe, by the *Mishkan*, and in the time of Shlomo HaMelech, in the *Beis HaMikdash*. There was also a *chanukas habayis*, a rededication of the *Beis HaMikdash*, which took place in the second *Beis HaMikdash*. There is also a bigger kind of “*chanukah*”, which was the dedication of the *chomah* (the wall) that surrounded Jerusalem. In the book of Nehemiah, it is recorded the event where there was a dedication of the wall of Jerusalem.

Those are three kinds of *chanukah* (inauguration) which we find when it came to something holy: the *chanukas hamizbeiach* (the dedication of the Altar), the *chanukas habayis* (the dedication of the Temple), and the *chanukah hachomah* (the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem). We also find this concept in the side of evil. In the book of Daniel, it is described that when Nevuchadnezzar made an engraved image, he made a *chanukah* inauguration to celebrate it. But the root of all inaugurations began with the inaugurations of the altar, the Temple, and the wall of Jerusalem.

The Greeks damaged the Altar when they invaded the *Beis HaMikdash*, and this was one of the main damages that they caused. They made holes in the *Heichal*, and they also vandalized the Altar by damaging it. Even later when there was a *chanukas habayis* of the second *Beis HaMikdash* on Chanukah, the *chanukas habayis* was damaged from the start, due to the damage that the Greeks had done to the Altar. And the *chanukas hachomah* also received damage, for the wall of Jerusalem was broken later by our enemies.

The broken *chomah* (wall of Jerusalem) is in need of rectification, no less than how the *Heichal* needed to be fixed after it was vandalized by the Greeks.

Remembering The Wall of Jerusalem – Through Lighting Menorah

When we light Menorah, clearly, it is not the same as the lighting of the Menorah that was in the *Beis HaMikdash*. The Sages did not enact that we should light menorah in Jerusalem by the entranceway to the *Beis HaMikdash*; they enacted that we light it on the entranceway, outside of the house.⁷⁷ What is the reason for this? The simple reason is “to make known the miracle” (*pirumei nisa*). But the deeper reason is so that we can create a *chomah*, a spiritual “wall”, to surround our house.

Similarly, the depth behind why we light the Menorah at the entrance to the doorway is, as the Gemara says, so that there should be a “*mezuzah* on the right and the *menorah* on the left, so that we should be surrounded by

⁷⁶ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-053-fire-chanukah>

⁷⁷ Editor’s Note: There are differing customs today in halachah as to where we light the menorah; on the outside of the entranceway, on the inside of the house by the entrance, or by the window.

mitzvos". In other words, lighting the *menorah* is about creating a spiritual light that will surround the home [like a wall].

Being "surrounded by *mitzvos*" doesn't just mean to be engaged in *mitzvos*; it means that the home be enveloped in a spiritual light formed by the *mitzvos*. The obligation of *mezuzah* is on the home, whereas the obligation of lighting *menorah* is upon "man and his household". The light of the menorah doesn't just "surround" the person who lights it; it surrounds the home, by lighting it at the entranceway. It forms a "wall" to surround the home.

The opening of the home requires protection, because that is where things can enter. One way to protect the home is through *mezuzah*, and another way of how the home is protected is through the wall that would guard the city. Nowadays we do not have that wall, but we have a remembrance of it, through the *menorah*, which celebrates the *chanukas hachomah* (inauguration of the wall of Jerusalem), as we explained.

The Wall of Fire In The Future, Manifested In Our Own Times

It is written, "*With fire I destroyed it and with fire I will build it in the future, and I will be a wall of fire surrounding it*". The light of the *menorah* on Chanukah will not cease - according to the opinion in the Sages that "All of the festivals will cease, except for Purim; and some say Chanukah as well". The fact that Hashem will be a "wall of fire" in the future refers to the light of the menorah of Chanukah, which will not cease in the future.

Thus, lighting the menorah creates a "wall" of light, of fire. Just as *mezuzah* protects the home from harm, so does the light of the menorah protect the home, acting as a wall of fire that cannot be penetrated.

Our holy *sefarim* explain that the "light" of Chanukah is a light that comes from the future which is allowed to shine within our own current dimension. The three Biblical festivals that we have (Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos) are about commemorating the past; to remember the exodus from Egypt. But Chanukah and Purim are celebrating the future. The light of the future revealed on Chanukah is the light of the future protection we will merit from Hashem, where Hashem will be a "wall of fire" for us.

The miracle of the *Chashmonaim* was that they were "few against many", and in addition, "the impure were given over to the pure". It is understandable that it is a miracle where the few overcame the majority, but the fact that the impure were given over to the pure was an altogether different kind of miracle, which was of an entirely otherworldly nature. In the World To Come, all impurity will be removed, as the prophet says of the future, "*And I will remove the spirit of impurity from the earth.*" Thus in the victory of the *Chashmonaim*, where the impure were given over to the pure, it was a miracle that reflected the light of the future, where there is no impurity. That light of the future was shining in the present, during that miracle.

Chanukah is a light of the future which reveals to us Heavenly protection from Hashem. This is also the depth of how the one flask of pure oil was found. The Greeks didn't defile it, because they couldn't. It was protected, as if there was a wall of fire protecting it. The light of the future protects our purity even in the present. It wasn't simply that one flask of oil wasn't touched - rather, that one flask of oil was protecting us. The "wall of fire" of the future is not like fire that we see today. It will be like the burning bush which Moshe saw, where the fire did not singe the bush. That was the same fire and light of the one flask of oil that lasted for eight days, when it should have only lasted for one day. There are many ways to understand how it lit for eight days, as is well-known; but the depth of the matter is that it wasn't a normal fire which burns whatever it touches. It is a "fire that does not eat fire" as the *Gemara* in Tractate *Yoma* describes. This is the fire which burned on Chanukah for eight days, and it was from the

fire of the future, the “wall of fire” of Hashem that will protect us, which does not destroy, but serves only to protect.

Thus, the question is not how the oil could last for eight days - rather, the question should be how it didn't burn for more than that (since it was eternal). It lasted for eight days because that is the natural characteristic of the fire of the future.

If so, why indeed did it stop after eight days? It is because the light of the future can only be allowed to shine in our current era on a temporary basis. The light of the future was allowed to be clothed under the guise of our current times. But the fire itself which shone was not bound to any time; it came from a different dimension, which is not bound to the normal rules of time from our own dimension. It was above time. That was the light of the Chanukah which was allowed temporarily to shine in our own times. The fire of the future belongs to the future, that is where its light is, but it can be shined into our own times, where we can enjoy some of its illumination.

The Fire In Our Soul – The Light of Torah Learning

When it comes to our own personal soul, we also have our own, inner “fire” – the element of fire that is in the soul.⁷⁸

The nature of fire is that it rises. A Torah scholar is compared to fire, and the Torah itself is compared to fire. “*Are My words not like fire, so says Hashem.*” The Greeks tried to make us forget the Torah, and when the *Chashmonaim* won the war, the Torah was restored to its glory, where it is known as the “fire” of Hashem. That was the light/fire that was revealed on Chanukah.

The Torah itself was shining during that time, and that was the light of Chanukah which was shining then, which helped them destroy the Greek evil and be returned to the Torah. From that victory, the true light of the *menorah* was allowed to shine, where we could then receive its light.

The *Aron* (the Ark) which held the tablets of the Torah, is called so from the word *ohr* (light). The *ohr* that was in the *Aron* was what allowed the light of the Menorah to be lit. The Menorah cannot survive by itself; it gets its light only if there is an *Aron*. When there was a miracle where the oil in the Menorah lasted for eight days, it was really the light of the future that was being allowed to shine, the fire of the future, and it was really coming from the Torah of the future, which was allowed to being allowed to shine then (and it will soon be revealed in our times as well). “*A new Torah shall come forth from me*” – that is the light of Chanukah. It is the Torah which protects. In the future when there will be true and complete Torah in the world, that is what will serve as a “wall of fire” for us to protect us.

Thus, the light of the menorah which we light in our times, which is getting its power from the future, is dependent on the level of Torah that we reach from the rest of the year. With the more a person has connected to his Torah learning on a deeper level, the more he will accordingly merit the light of the Torah of the future that is “Hashem’s fire”, and that in turn will empower his own light of the menorah to be a truer light.

⁷⁸ The soul contains four elements – earth (*sadness and laziness*), water (*lusts and desires*), wind (*idle speech, falsity, mockery*) and fire (*conceit and anger*). Here the Rav is explaining a more esoteric and spiritual use of the soul's inner fire. To learn more about the basic aspects of the element of fire, refer to the Rav's series *Fixing Your Fire: Conceit and Fixing Your Fire: Anger*.

Thus, the light of the menorah is being empowered by the light of Torah which is coming from the future, which is “shining” even now. The beginning of the menorah’s light is the Torah’s light. Although the light of the future is not yet here, at times it radiates into our own dimension, and we can receive its rays and enjoy some of the illumination.

It is this kind of Torah that can protect a person. This is a light from the future, it is not yet here, but it can be shined into our own dimension. It is that fire which is activated when we light the Menorah. The lighting of the menorah is but a result of this previous light; the menorah’s light is not the beginning point of the light. The source of the menorah’s light is empowered by the light of Torah that one has merited thus far.

We can see from the physical world that in order to light anything, you need to light it from something else. Every light or fire has an earlier source. When rocks are rubbed together, there can be a spark of fire. The Ramban says that Hashem created fire before the world, and the world was created from that fire; this original fire is unlike the fire that is created from rubbing together two rocks. It is that original fire which is contained in the words of Torah itself.

Applying this concept to ourselves practically, every person has an endpoint and a beginning point. The action that we do on Chanukah is to light the menorah, but that is just the endpoint; it is not the beginning of the light. It is a result of something that came before it. We need to get in touch with the root of the light - the light of the Torah.

It will be received differently with each person, depending on the particular quality of Torah learning that he has reached; for as we have explained, it is essentially the light of Torah which is the source of the menorah’s light.

Peaceful Fire – Returning To Our Root By Leaving Our Private Self

We explained that the lighting of the Menorah is not a light that comes from this world, but from the light of the future. Now we can understand as follows.

Fire was discovered by Adam *HaRishon*, on *Motzei Shabbos*, when he needed a fire to illuminate the dark, so he rubbed together two rocks. Such fire represents the fire of dissension, where forces collide with each other. It is like the fire of Gehinnom that was created on the second day of Creation, a fire of *machlokes*, strife. But the fire of the future is not a fire of dissension; it is a peaceful kind of fire. When the *Chashmonaim* won, it wasn’t from using a fire of strife, but a fire of peace (*shalom*). When a person has attained more peace, he merits the true fire contained in Chanukah.

The fire we recognize in our times is a fire of dissension, strife, and disparity – the fire of Gehinnom, the fire which Adam discovered on *Motzei Shabbos*, when it was after the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas* and the holiness of Shabbos had left him. The true fire of Chanukah is attained on a personal level when one attains the true fire, which is the power of *shalom* (peace).

In clearer language, fire in the soul is the nature to ascend. There is both holy and evil ascension. Evil ascension is when a person wants to rise to higher levels for his own self-serving purposes. This is a fire of dissension. A holy kind of ascension is when a person wants to leave all elements of disparity and to return to his root. This is holy fire, the fire of the future, which the soul yearns for.

There are seven days of Creation which are parallel to seven branches that branch out from one root. The root of the seven, which is the “eighth”, is essentially the oneness (*echad*) that binds together all seven days of Creation. The days of Chanukah are eight, which represent the oneness that binds together all seven days of Creation. That is the fire that is revealed on Chanukah. In terms of our personal soul, it is the yearning in the soul to ascend spiritually, to return to its root, where everything is united.

The fire of our current times, the kind of spiritual ascension that we often recognize, is a self-focused kind of fire\ascension. It is growth that is focused on one’s own “I”: when “I” want to grow spiritually, for “my” own purposes, etc. But the fire on Chanukah, which is the fire of the future, is a deeper wish for ascension. It is about ascending higher in order to connect to our root. And it is hidden, like the one flask of oil that was found, which was hidden.

It is the inner point in the soul where the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) cannot reach, where there is no war between good and evil inclinations, where there is no room for any disparity or dissension in any way; thus evil cannot take hold there. There is only *shalom* (peace) there; there is only *achdus* (unity) there, and it is entirely the soul’s yearning to connect to its upper root, where every Jew’s soul wants to unite to.

When one reveals this inner fire in the soul, he receives a light on Chanukah which is the light of the future. But, if the fire in one’s soul is being used for his own “I”, and surely if it is being used for purposes of dissension with others, his fire on Chanukah is not the future fire, and it is rather a fire that is immersed in the past, and it is not of the future.

Leaving The Disparity and Entering Into Oneness

Thus, Chanukah is really about living on a level of the future.

In clearer terms, in terms of time, we refer to “future” as something that did not happen yet in time. In the soul, the “future” is something that is above our current level. If we can rise to it, that is called the “future” in the soul. That is the “fire” of Chanukah.

The nature of fire is that it rises. In the soul, fire elevates a person to a higher level that he is not currently at. He is not on that level, but through the fire in the soul one can be raised to higher levels. It is to leave the “*alma d’piruda*” (the “world of disparity”) and rise to the place of *achdus* (unity) in the soul. Chanukah shows a person that he can temporarily access the light of the future, where he can temporarily be above all the disparity and be instead in the higher dimension, where all is unified - *achdus*.⁷⁹

Thus, the *menorah* is lit in the entranceway to be as a “wall of fire” that surrounds the home. The depth of this is that it unites all of the Jews in the city under one unit. That was the point of a city’s wall which we used to have – it unifies everyone into one unit. It is outside the home, it is outside of one’s current level, but it can surround him and connect him with all others, under one unit - under one “wall of fire”.

Thus, Chanukah is a time where a person can temporarily leave all the disparity of this world and enter into *achdus* (unity), ascending to his higher root where all is unified, riding the inner fire that is in his own soul.

⁷⁹ See also *Tefillah_0166_Leaving The Disparate View*

The Flask Of Oil That Lasted For Eight Days – The Light of Oneness

This is the deep understanding of how the “one” flask of oil could last for eight days. It is one light, but it can light for eight days – in other words, all eight days were lit from this oneness. Thus, lighting the menorah on Chanukah is about remembering and revealing this light of oneness.

When only one flask of pure oil was found, it was due to the protection of the fire of the future which was protecting that flask, as we explained. And what was that protection? *Klal Yisrael* as a whole has a guarantee of protection from Hashem. In the days of Chanukah, we received that protection. A person by himself cannot be guaranteed protection, but when he joins with the collective unit of the Jewish people, he receives the protection that is granted to the whole of *Klal Yisrael*.

Thus the victory of the *Chashmonaim*, on a deep level, was because they received this protection upon *Klal Yisrael*; they connected themselves to the unit of *Klal Yisrael* and that was how they were saved.

During Chanukah, there is a custom to give more *tzedakah* and giving to others. This is in connection with the deep unity that was revealed during Chanukah, for we became connected on Chanukah to the unit of *Klal Yisrael*.

If someone can be on that level during the rest of the year, that is wonderful; but even if one isn't on that level during the rest of the year, he has the opportunity on Chanukah to use its spiritual light and leave his own private existence and enter his root - which is the collective unit of *Klal Yisrael* – and to go beyond his own private self.

On Chanukah a person lights menorah and people can see into his window. Normally we may not look into another else's window; it is a breach in another's privacy and it is forbidden. But on Chanukah, there is a *mitzvah* precisely to see the lights in another's window. This is because on Chanukah, there is a revealed level of *achdus* (unity) in *Klal Yisrael*. If a person can touch upon this level even for a few moments, he is accessing the fire of the future, which can protect us now in our own times and which unites us all together.

This is the depth behind the flask of oil that burned for eight days. It was a manifestation of oneness, of the future unity, and that was how it could keep going [until Hashem restricted this light after eight days, as mentioned earlier].

This is the depth behind the spiritual illumination that is available on Chanukah.

13 | *Leaving The Greek Exile of Imagination*⁸⁰

Understanding Dreams

In *Parshas Mikeitz*, there is much about dreams. There are several dreams of Pharaoh, and in the previous *parshiyos*, the Torah describes the dreams of Yosef, the dreams of the *sar hamashkim* (the butler of Pharaoh) and the *sar ha'ofeh* (the baker of Pharaoh). What are dreams all about?

We have our intellect, which can see reality as it is, and we also have a power of imagination, which sees fantasies.

At night, when people go to sleep (as the *Gemara* says, that “The night was not created except for sleep”), the imagination becomes dominant, in their dreams. The Vilna Gaon says that during a dream, a person’s intellect is weakened, and his imagination becomes dominant.

Imagination is not an absolute reality. It is merely an imagined reality. Therefore it has no substantial value on this world. However, the Sages state that “there is no dream which does not contain meaningless things.” Where do such dreams come from?

We know that there are also dreams which do contain meaning, such as our own dreams, which can contain meaning to them. Dreams can reveal things to us, and on a deeper and spiritual level, dreams were the vehicle by which Hashem would communicate with the prophets.

There is intellect\thought, which is countered by imagination. Imagination has no substantial bearing on the reality on this world, but when a person goes to sleep, although his intellect is weakened and his imagination is dominant, some of his intellect still remains. This imprint of the intellect that is still left in him can fuse together with the imagination. The intellect then becomes subservient to the imagination.

Thus, there is no dream which does not contain meaningless things – but there are also truthful points contained in the dream. This is because the intellect fuses together with the imagination, and therefore in every dream there will be some truthful points that a person can see, via his intellect.

The more a person has purified his spiritual level, his intellect becomes even clearer when he sleeps, and the more truthful his dreams will be. The stronger a person’s ability of thought is, although the imagination will overtake his intellect when he sleeps, he will still be able to see truthful things in his dreams, because his intellect will still play a very active role even as he sleeps, since it is strong from during the day.

Purifying The Imagination – Through Strengthening The Intellect

On a subtler level, when a person has a strongly developed intellect, his dreams will show him revelations from Heaven, through the imagination. Where the intellect ends and cannot perceive, that is where the imagination can jump past all the limitations of the intellect, and perceive higher things that the intellect cannot.

⁸⁰ שיחת השבוע (תשע"ח) 047 – מקץ-חנוכה

This is only true when one has a strongly developed intellect, which purifies the imagination and turns it holy. But when one hasn't yet purified his intellect, his imagination will not either be holy, and it will fantasize about things which aren't connected to reality.

The more one purifies the imagination, although his dreams will still contain meaningless things due to the lower parts of the imagination which will always be unfixed, the higher parts of his imagination which are pure will be able to break past the limitations of the intellect and receive Heavenly revelation and understanding. This can only happen through a strongly developed intellect, which can see reality as it is. This is the depth of dreams.

Thus, in a dream, there is a combination of three factors: evil imagination, intellect, and purified imagination. When one hasn't yet merited it, he is only dominated by the lower parts of the imagination, which are unfixed, and he doesn't have a strongly developed intellect to aid him. His dreams will mainly be dominated by an unfixed kind of imagination. This is the level that most people experience, regarding the dreams that they consciously experience. These dreams have no substantial bearing on reality, because they are coming from unfixed imagination which is not connected with reality.

Imagination\Greek Exile vs. Intellect\Torah

The Sages compare the Greek exile to "darkness", because they "darkened" the eyes of the Jewish people. The simple understanding of this is that they "darkened" our power of intellect, our power of thought, by battling the holy power of intellect of the Jewish people.

Even more so, the Greek "darkness", which is simply understood as a war of secular wisdom versus the holy wisdom of the Torah, can also be understood as a war between the view of the imagination against the view of the holy Torah.

Let us explain what we mean.

Our Current Exile – A State of Imagination

Simply speaking, a person has a time where he is asleep and a time where he is awake. But going deeper, the initial state of man was sleep. Adam was put to sleep, so that Chavah could be created from his body, and a great slumber descended upon him. The Torah does not say that Hashem woke up Adam from this slumber. The state of slumber remained upon Adam. If he would have gone straight into Shabbos, he would have awoken from this state of slumber. But with the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*, he remained with this state of slumber, which was the imagination.

The *Eitz HaDaas*, according to the *Sforno* and the *Vilna Gaon*, is identified as a tree that produced *medameh*\imagination. As soon as Adam and Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, they remained with their imagination.

Within imagination itself, there is a state of being awake and a state of sleep. Compare this to the difference between a person having a dream that he is having a dream, and a person having a dream that he is awake. They are both dreaming and within their imagination, but the person dreaming he is awake is "awake" within his

imagination, while the person dreaming that he is sleeping is “sleeping” within his imagination. But they are both found within their imagination. That is the level we are found in, on this world.

Of the future, we will say, “*Then, we were like dreamers.*”⁸¹ In the imminent redemption, may it come speedily, we will see that our current era of 6,000 years is like one big dream. We will return to our root, through teshuvah, and then we will see that we were living in a dream all along.

Whether we dream of being “awake” or “asleep”, either way, we are in a dream. That is the depth of exile, and especially the Greek exile, which is compared to darkness. We are in exile within exile within an exile. Exile means that our entire experience and perception is through a state of being “asleep”, through a dreamlike state.

We can see that babies sleep a lot, and children also sleep more. As we get older, we need less sleep, and we are able to be more awake. The depth of this is because our beginning state is mainly sleep. A baby sleeps for most hours of the day, because our very perspective which we view the world with, when we come into the world, is through sleep/imagination. Even when we get older and we mature, it is like being “awake” in a dream – it is still a dream, and it is not as dreamy as being “asleep” in a dream.

Imagination Only Understands The Spiritual Realm Through “Moshol” (Parables)

Going further with this, if there is anything we cannot perceive, because it is on a higher level than our understanding, we are “asleep” towards it. We can “imagine” it – but we cannot actually grasp it and understand it. This is the imagination – when one cannot understand something, the imagination will get to work and imagine it through an example of something on this world.

This is the concept of *moshol* (parable) and *nimshal* (lesson). The *moshol* is within my understanding, while the *nimshal* is above my understanding. When one cannot understand the *nimshal*, he uses a *moshol* to understand it, which is a use of the imagination. His understanding of the *nimshal* will be through the imagination. That is the depth of exile.

Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of all people, wrote *Mishlei*, which reveals the wisdom of the Torah, by means of *moshol*, parables. The Greek exile counters the wisdom of the Torah, and as is well-known, the Greek exile is called “wisdom of the body” (*chochmas haguf*). What is the depth of this?

Let us examine how people connect to the spiritual. How do people connect to the spiritual, when they have never seen it and they cannot sense it physically? By means of a *moshol* (parable), which speaks to the body. That is Greek wisdom. It is a wisdom which uses the means of *moshol*, parables, which is a use of the imagination.

The Torah also speaks to the language of people, and the Torah also uses *moshol*. If there would be no exile, a person would hear the *moshol* and immediately understand the *nimshal*. But in exile, we keep hearing the *moshol*, and we do not absorb the *nimshal*. Even worse, there are many people who love to hear a *moshol* but without understanding the *nimshal* – they would rather remain with the *moshol*. That is the Greek exile! The redemption will be that people will understand the *nimshal* of every *moshol*.

In the exile we are in, we have a perspective in which we see only the *moshol* in things. If we remain only with the *moshol*, that is an even more total state exile. Many times people remember the *moshol* and they don’t remember the *nimshal*. When people live only in the *moshol*, this is “exile”.

⁸¹ *Tehillim* 126:1

An even subtler form of exile is when a person absorbs the *nimshal*, but he only perceives it on a level of *moshol*. That is the “exile of the imagination”.

When we begin to understand something, we need a *moshol*, in order to understand. But when we try to live by the *moshol*, we need to understand reality not through *moshol*, but from seeing reality as it is. That is how we can leave behind the “exile of the imagination”, and this is an *avodah* for all of one’s life. One must first understand things through *moshol*, absorbing the *nimshal* through the *moshol*, and then he must purify himself further, so that he can see reality as it is and he doesn’t need *moshol* to understand things. He can live by the *nimshal* even without using the *moshol*.

The Greek exile, which was the “wisdom of the body”, is essentially a state of being exiled by the “body”. It is when one can only understand inner and spiritual matters by way of *moshol*, which speaks to the body. When a person cannot identify directly with spirituality, and he needs parables from this world in order to identify with the spiritual, this is the meaning of Greek exile! If a person merely goes through this stage as part of his spiritual development, this is indeed the ideal way to go from immaturity to maturity; but if a person remains at that level, it is the depths of the exile.

The Ramban says that whatever the Greeks could not comprehend, they denied. This was said of Aristotle, the greatest Greek philosopher. This meant that their imagination could not comprehend spiritual or Heavenly matters. Whatever they understood, they understood, and whatever they didn’t understand, they could not relate to, so they denied it.

This is the depth of all of the exiles, in general - and the Greek exile especially.

Relating To The Spiritual As A Tangible Reality

The way to come out of the perspective of Greek exile, then, is that we need to see the spiritual world as no less real and tangible than the physical world in front of us.

Even if a person learns Torah and does *mitzvos* and makes sure to do the will of Hashem, he may still be in one big state of “slumber”, because he doesn’t know what the “real” world is. Surely Hashem will reward every person for all of his actions in any case, but the person will still remain in a perspective of exile, until he changes his perception. The Redemption will essentially be a change of perspective. It will be a realization that there is a reality which we never knew existed.

Imagined Recognition of the Creator

With most people, recognition about the spiritual world, and recognition of the Creator (the root of everything) is only being experienced through the imagination.

How does a person recognize the Creator? With one person, it is because his father and grandfathers told him. Another person has recognition of the Creator because he is an intellectual, and knows that it’s logical that there has to be a Creator, because the Creation itself testifies to a Creator. That is a true reflection to make. But one can recognize the Creator through simply sensing the reality. One can simply sense reality when he realizes that just as he can sense the physical reality, so can he sense the reality of the Creator.

Our own existence is entirely a power of imagination which can recognize the Creator. That is why man is called *adam*, from the word *medameh* (imagination). The existence of the Creator is the only absolute Reality that exists. There is no reality other than Him. Our own existence is only a form of imagination, and our entire existence serves to recognize the reality of the Creator. But if we view ourselves as our own reality and we trying to recognize the Creator within it, this is an imagined perception, and it will not be a true recognition of the Creator.

If only most people would even be on this level, to recognize the Creator from within their own existence. We are not speaking here of those who are in the category of “*tinok shenishbah*” (lit. “captive children”; i.e. Jews who are born and raised irreligious), and the like. Rather, even most believing Jews, who know about the Creator because that’s how they were raised and educated to believe, do not have a kind of *emunah* (faith) that is alive and palpable. It is just knowledge to them, in the same way that a person knows (*l’havdil*) that there’s a country called Australia and Africa.

And if a person believes in the Creator because he has arrived at this understanding intellectually, because he sees that the Creation testifies that there is a Creator, this can just be *emunah* on an intellectual level, and not necessarily a reality that a person is in touch with.

Only through palpable *emunah* does a person have true “recognition” of the Creator. What is the way to reach it? Even with those who are exerting themselves to attain recognition of the Creator, this is an issue. Again, we are not speaking here of those who simply live their lives superficially and who are simply taking life as it comes. We are speaking about the few people in the world, the “few in the hands of the majority”, who have devoted their lives to recognizing the reality of the Creator. How can even these few reach it?

Recognition of the Creator can be reached through receiving our *mesorah* (tradition), and through *hisbonenus* (reflection), and from all other ways which our Sages revealed to us. Most people have reached it on an “intellectual” level alone. They see that if there is a functioning world, there must be Creator behind it. But this is actually a perception of imagination – why? Because the person looks at this world, the lower dimension, and deduces that there must be a higher world. This is imagination, because imagination seeks to understand the higher world through the means of this lower world. If one uses this only as a stage in his spiritual growth, that is wonderful, but if he remains at this level, he is still in “exile”.

In the redemption, it will be revealed that one’s recognition of the Creator is not through intellectual perception or through imagination, but by recognizing the reality of the Creator because He exists, because He is the only reality! The Creator *is* reality! This is what the *Chovos HaLevovos* describes. True, complete recognition of the Creator *is* the redemption.

The True Meaning of Exile and Redemption

What is the exile, and what is the redemption?

The main aspect of exile is not that most Jews are found outside of Eretz Yisrael. The Greek exile took place even in Eretz Yisrael, so there is something deeper about exile that isn’t dependent on being in Eretz Yisrael or not. The main aspect of exile is not either our subservience to the nations of the world, and the great suffering that our people have gone through. It is not even defined by the troubles which pursue us each day, or from the Anti-Semitism towards our people, from the nations of the world and from the “*Erev Rav*”.

Rather, the main aspect of our exile is the absence of true, clear, and absolute recognition of the Creator. The exile obscures us from clearly sensing the reality of the Creator, and the redemption will reveal His Presence clearly to us.

In the redemption, when we will become clear of Hashem's Presence, that itself will bring all *shefa* (Heavenly sustenance and blessing) to the world completely, and all of the suffering and troubles will then vanish. Awaiting the redemption is thus not about awaiting anything else that will come to the world other than the absolute recognition of the Creator which will be revealed to the world. That is the redemption we are waiting for.

As long as we are in exile, whether in the collective exile or whether we are in a personal exile (the Ramchal and others say that one can leave his own personal exile even during his lifetime), we have a perspective of imagination, which can only understand the spiritual in terms of *moshol*, parables. Even more so, it means that we are only having a sense of recognition of the Creator by way of *moshol* – the imagination.

Leaving the Greek Exile – Through Recognizing Reality As It Is

But the more a person elevates his spiritual level, the more his imagination becomes purified, and his sense of recognition becomes purified with this as well. At the time of the complete redemption which will come to the Jewish people, which can be experienced in one's soul when he has is "personal" redemption – one will begin to recognize the reality of the Creator in the sense that this is reality itself! It means to recognize the reality as it is!

We have no comprehension in the Creator, of course. All we can do is recognize His existence, which is to recognize the reality as it is: Hashem exists! To recognize that *He exists*, is the level of complete *emunah*. Thus, the main part of exile is the absence of the light of *emunah*, and redemption is mainly about the light of *emunah*.

When this becomes a person's main perception, his entire life changes, and this is the personal redemption of one's soul.

When one can only get a sense for the spiritual and for the Creator through hearing *meshalim* \parables, he is trying to understand a higher realm by the means of this lower realm, and this is the use of the imagination, which seeks to understand the higher realms through the lower realms. With this level of perception, one will sometimes forget about His reality, and sometimes remember it. But when one has recognition of the Creator because he is aware that is the reality as it is, he never forgets it. This is the meaning of "*I place Hashem opposite me, always.*"

It does not mean that one always "reminds" himself of the Creator. When you "remind" yourself of the Creator, you are using a feeble ability, which may not last. If one keeps reminding himself of the Creator and he persists with it, perhaps he will receive it as a permanent level as a gift from Heaven (which is the simple meaning of the words of the *Mesillas Yescharim*, that all holiness is first with work, and eventually a gift).

In Summary And In Conclusion

True recognition of the Creator does not come through "reminding" yourself of the Creator, or any other means, which may be helpful, or which may do the opposite. It is simply a recognition of reality as it is. Then all of the "darkness" of the Greek exile will not feel "dark" at all, and in this level, the Greeks cannot have any effect at all.

Redemption from the Greek exile is to recognize reality as it is, which is always revealed, all the time. When we leave the collective exile and merit the collective redemption, and when we merit specifically to leave our personal exile and merit personal redemption, to leave the “darkness” of the Greek exile during these days [of Chanukah], it is an actual recognition of the reality of the Creator, without the use of any imagination.

The more one penetrates into this place of the soul and he is seeing reality as it is, he receives this level of recognition on a permanent level, as a gift from Hashem, where he can recognize the true recognition that there is a Creator who made this world, and even more so, to recognize His very reality, with nothing else besides Him.

14 | Kislev – Sleep & Dreams⁸²

The Month of Kislev: Power of Sleep

We are currently in the month of *Kislev*. Our Sages described the wintertime as a time of “sleep”, and the month of Kislev is especially identified with the soul’s “power of sleep”.⁸³ Our Sages reveal to us that it is not only human beings and animals that sleep. Even the plants and even the non-living objects sleep. Therefore, there is a lot more to sleep than we think. But let us try to understand at least what our own soul’s power of “sleep” is, and how we can channel it towards its proper direction. When a person sleeps, there are both negative and positive aspects of this human function.

Women & Sleep

Let’s look at the first time the Torah talks about sleep. When Hashem created Chavah’s body from Adam *HaRishon*’s body, Adam *HaRishon* was put to sleep. Chavah’s entire creation came about through sleep – thus, the entire creation of woman stems from sleep. Therefore, understanding what sleep is an important part of understanding a woman’s *avodah*.

Sleep – Where Heart Dominates Intellect

As is well-known, the strong point of a man is *seichel* (intellect), and the strong point of a woman is *lev*, the heart. What is the root of this difference? Man was created with Hashem’s wisdom, which is called *chochmah*. The *chochmah* refers to the intellect. That is why a man’s initial perception is based on his intellect and not from his emotions. Woman, however, was created when man was asleep.

When a person sleeps, the heart dominates the intellect, as it is written, “*I am asleep, but my heart is awake.*” When Adam *HaRishon* was put to sleep, the only thing that stayed awake was his heart. Woman was created from this state, and that is why woman act more from their heart, from their feelings and emotions, and less from their intellect.

The Two Parts to the Heart

We need to understand how we use the power of “sleep”, as a way to reach and reveal our spiritual heart. As a general description, the heart is comprised of two parts: our feelings that inspire us, and our deepest desires. The

⁸² ראש חודש עבודה 009 חודש כסלו כוח השינה 82

⁸³ Sefer Yetzirah 5:5

second part, our deeply rooted desired, is also linked with our *middos* (character traits). The *middos* we exhibit are actually an offshoot of our deeply rooted desires (*retzonos*) that are present in our heart.

When a person sleeps, the main part of the heart that stays awake when he/she sleeps is not the “inspirational” part of the heart, but rather the deeply rooted desires of the heart, which produce our *middos*. It is this part of the heart which becomes revealed to the person during the state of sleep.

Dreams

We are referring to dreams. When a person sleeps, he dreams. What is the source of our dreams? There are three different possible sources of a dream. The foods we ate during the day can affect what we dream about, and the body’s liver is involved with this process. The nature of the food affects our dreams, and even the thoughts of the person who made the food can affect our dreams.

There is also a second factor which can influence our dreams: Our Sages state that a person dreams about what he thought about during the day.

There is also a third cause for our dreams: we dream about our deep, subconscious desires that we may not even be aware of. It is written, “*On my bed at nights, I sought that which my heart loved.*” In the *sefarim hakedoshim*, it is explained that our dreams can show us what our deepest desires are; our dreams can help us figure out what our heart really wants deep down.

Each of our dreams contains a key to reaching a deeper understanding of ourselves. We can simply dismiss our dreams and just ignore them - or we can use them to uncover a great wealth. We will try here to explain, with Hashem’s help, of how we can use our dreams.

Our Dreams Show Us Our Pnimityus

Every person consists of two layers: his *chitzoniyus* (external layer) and his *pnimityus* (inner layer). We are all aware of the most external part of our *chitzoniyus*, which is our physical makeup. We see ourselves in the mirror so we recognize our *chitzoniyus*. A slightly deeper part of our *chitzoniyus* than this is our actions that we do. When it comes to this area, we can also identify this part of ourselves, more or less. We are all aware, somewhat, to the actions that we do, each of us to a different degree.

The more inner parts to ourselves, our *pnimityus*, refers to our *retzonos* (what we want), our thoughts, and our *middos*/character traits. This is the main part of who we are, and this is what more closely defines our identity.

Obviously, our *pnimityus* does not negate the need for our *chitzoniyus*. Our *pnimityus* cannot be contained anywhere if we have no *chitzoniyus*. So just because our *pnimityus* defines our self does not mean that our *chitzoniyus* is worthless. But what we need to know is that if we only acknowledge our *chitzoniyus* and we have no recognition of our *pnimityus*, we are missing the main part of ourselves.

How do we recognize our *pnimiyus*? Some of it we already recognize, and some of it is harder to recognize. We generally know if we are drawn towards laziness or towards being energetic, if we are drawn towards positivity or negativity, or if we are drawn towards joy or sadness. Anyone can have this general awareness of his character, when he makes a simple reflection about himself; unless he is a person who stubbornly refuses to acknowledge these tendencies in himself and he'd rather live in denial and fool himself. So we have recognition of our *chitzoniyus* and we also have some recognition of our *pnimiyus*, to a certain extent. But we know that the soul is complicated consisting of many deep layers, layer after layer. How do we get in touch with the more inner parts of ourselves? How do we get to know what is going on deep down in our *pnimiyus*? Our soul is like a roll of string; the beginning of the string is thick, and we can see it. But as the string goes on and on, it gets thinner and thinner, and it becomes harder to see it. This is like the inner parts to our *pnimiyus*, which are so refined that it is very hard to discern.

Almost nobody reaches the depth of their souls, because the more inner parts to the soul are extremely subtle to discern. If someone thinks that he recognizes his soul well, it means that he is still found on the more external layers of his soul, which are thicker and easier to see. But the more a person is recognizing himself, he begins to understand that there is layer within layer, subtlety within subtlety, in the soul. He realizes that anything he does understand about himself is a drop in the ocean. *"It is very deep, who shall find it?"* When a person remains ignorant of self-knowledge and he has never worked hard to understand himself, it is definite that his life will lead him in a proper direction. Living on this world for 70 or 80 years without knowing oneself is like a shoemaker who never learned how to make shoes and he tries to make shoes. A person will not be able to live properly if he does not recognize what is in his soul. Indeed, it takes a lifetime of inner work in order to recognize the soul. The Raavad and the Maharal and others, based upon the verse *"From my flesh I can see G-d"*, have explained that it is not possible to recognize Hashem unless we have a recognition for our own souls. That is why we need to work hard at understanding ourselves, more and more, discovering more and more subtleties about our souls.

Preface to Self-Recognition

Today there are all kinds of self-help books and different methods which teach people of how to understand themselves [psychology]. However, we need to learn about our souls using the information of the Torah and the Sages. In addition, even after a person has gone through appropriate *sefarim* that explain this knowledge, one must understand that is but a step in the process. It does not mean yet that you know yourself. Instead, all of what we learn about is like a stepping stool that helps us get more and more inward into ourselves.

Step 1 – Write Down All Your Feelings & Character Traits You're Aware Of.

The first step of getting to recognize our soul is, to take a pen and paper, and write down all of the positive qualities you are aware of about yourself, and on a separate column of the paper, write down all of the negative qualities in yourself that you are aware of. However, make sure to emphasize the good parts about yourself.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Editor's Note: This is based upon the approach of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l, that the first step in self-awareness is to become aware of one's qualities, for *"woe is to the person who does not know his weaknesses, but even worse is a person who does not know his qualities."* (See *Daas Torah, parshas Bamidbar*). This point is further explained by the Rav in *Fixing Your Fire_012_Individuality*

Simply write down all of the good *middos* and bad *middos* that you recognize in yourself, with emphasis on the good, and this gives you a general look at your soul, and it is the first step in self-recognition. You need to sit with yourself and write this list.

Step 2 – Write Down the Negative Feelings You Sometimes Feel

After making this general list (which should include all the good/bad *middos*, all of the good/bad aspects of your personality, and all of the good/bad desires that you are aware of in yourself), now comes a more inner and fundamental part of this *avodah*: to understand that each aspect of our personality also contains an opposite feeling that we sometimes feel. If we have a good *middah*, there are also times where we experience the opposite of that good *middah*.

This is due to the complex nature of our soul. We are never one-dimensional, and that is why if we experience a good *middah*, we also sometimes experience its opposite. The deep reason for this is because every aspect of the soul consists of itself and its opposite; this is called '*dovor v'hipucho*'.

For example, if we identify in ourselves an emotion of love for others, that means we also have hatred for others sometimes. We are already familiar with what it means to love and hate, but what we may not be aware of is that we sometimes experience hatred towards the very people we love!

For example, if a mother feels certain that she loves her child, there are also times where she feels hatred towards her own child. It might not be absolute hatred, but there is certainly a slight feeling of hatred that she may feel sometimes at her child (and sometimes, unfortunately, it is even more than just a slight feeling). The same is true for all close relationships – husband and wife, and parents with children. There is always love, but there will also hatred sometimes!

There is a well-known story that once a student of Rav Dessler dreamt that he had taken a knife to kill his son. He woke up terrified from the dream and he went running to Rav Dessler, to ask him how it was possible that he could dream such a thing. Rav Dessler said to him, "You love your son, but sometimes you experience negativity towards him, such as when he wakes you up at night and your sleep is disturbed. This little feeling of resentment that you have towards him made it possible for you to have a dream of killing him."

Obviously, the father loves his child, and that is what he mainly experiences towards the child. But does he love him one hundred percent? No, because there is always an 'opposite point' for each point in the soul, which makes its appearance sometimes; there is some small percentage of hatred contained at the other end of the love, and it came up in his dream.

Dreams – The Revelation of Our Subconscious Feelings

When a person is not trying to understand the subtleties of his soul, he doesn't take his dreams that seriously. He knows that sometimes he has pleasant dreams and sometimes he has nightmares. But when one understands that he is here on this world in order to serve Hashem and that self-recognition is a very large part of this ("*From my flesh I*

see *G-d*”), he is aware that there is subtlety within subtlety of recognizing his inner layers, and such a person will view dreams as a great tool to help him greater self-awareness of himself and to improve his service towards Hashem.

Analyzing Our Dreams

Above, we mentioned three sources of our dreams. Our dreams can be influenced by the foods we eat that day, or by something we thought about by day, or by our innermost desires present in our subconscious. Therefore, after you wake up from a dream, try to see which of these three reasons caused the dream.

When we have dreams, we must figure out where they come from. We mentioned in the beginning three causes for dreams – what we ate that day, what we thought about that day and what we really want. If it did not come from foods or from our daydreams, it must be coming from something in our subconscious. It is hard for us to know exactly which kinds of foods we ate that day that may have caused the dream, therefore, we should mainly suspect that the dream came from our subconscious thoughts and desires.

[Here is an example of how our subconscious desires can show up in a dream.] Once the Chofetz Chaim dreamt that he has become wealthy. The next day, he fasted over the dream. He thought to himself, “Either way, this is not a good dream. If it happens and I become rich, my service to Hashem will be interrupted. And if it doesn’t happen, it is bad that I had such a dream, because it shows me that I want to be rich.”

Our dreams can show us about what our deepest desires are. Sometimes they are about desires we are already consciously familiar with, and sometimes our dreams show us our deep desires which we were out of our conscious radar, and through our dreams, we discover them.

Listening To the Subtleties of our Soul

If one wants to listen to the subtleties contained in the soul, one of the ways is through using our dreams. With the help of Heaven, will briefly list here some ways of how a person can listen to the subtleties in the soul.

Now that we have explained the need to recognize the subtleties of our inner world, our souls, the question is: How indeed do we recognize those subtle parts of ourselves? Here we will present briefly a general picture of how we can know.

1- Learn Sefer ‘Michtav M’Eliyahu’ of Rav Dessler

The *mussar sefarim*, which span the earlier centuries down to the later centuries, were written by our Sages and *Gedolim*, and they exerted themselves to explain to us the most subtle and refined points. In the more recent

generations, we have merited a particular sefer which does this job quite well: the sefer *Michtav M'Eliyahu*⁸⁵, written by HaRav Eliyahu Dessler *zt"l*. In this sefer, we can see how the author toiled to explain to us how to understand the human soul, based entirely on the words of the Sages. He shows us there the most subtle points about the soul.

The very first step we need to take in order to know our soul is to learn sefarim like this which provide us with an in-depth understanding of matters about the soul, which explain to us how our middos work, in their many details.

2 – Time Every Day to Develop Self-Awareness

Just as some people were born with a sense for music or a feel for cooking, so are there people who are born with a subtle sense of discerning their inner worlds. If someone was born with this inner sense for soul matters, he needs to identify it, and he should have designated times each day where he concentrates on this sense for soul matters. He needs to bring out this power from its potential state and activate it, by having time every day for this.

However, not everyone is blessed with this ability. The first method presented above is applicable on all levels: everyone can learn *sefarim*, each on their own level, and gain some understanding into the subtleties of the soul. But the second way we are mentioning – setting side time each day to sense soul matters – will not come so easily to every person, because not every person is born with a sensitivity to soul matters.

In spite of this, each person to some degree can sense matters about the soul and reach a certain degree of subtle understanding towards himself. It is just that the understanding will differ with each person, depending upon how much sensitivity to these matters that a person has been born with.

3- Find a Friend Who You Can Talk To

A third way of how we can understand soul matters is, if possible, to find a friend whom we can talk to about these things. A man should choose a man, and a woman should choose a woman, and they should discuss matters of the soul together. Often the combined understanding of a close friend who understands you can be a great help in understanding yourself.

⁸⁵ Available in English from Feldheim Publishers as “Strive For Truth”

4 - Inner Silence

Now we will say a fourth way of how one can understand the soul, but let us emphasize that it should only be attempted after one is already doing the first step: to learn the sefarim written by our *Gedolim* which explain to us about the soul. We should not be learning any secular psychology books for this, and we should only seek the words of our Sages about these matters.

The fourth method which we will mention begins with having designated times every day for “heart time”, a concept which we have spoken about often in the past. When one has this quiet time each day, he can use the quiet as a way to reflect into his soul, until he eventually attains a certain inner calm. Once a person reaches this calmness, his sense of recognition towards soul matters will be heightened, and he will be able to sense subtler understandings of his soul amidst this quiet and calmness, things which he wouldn’t have been able to sense amidst a noisy environment.

The more a person has entered this quiet and calmness, the deeper he can enter into himself and come across subtle areas in his soul. This allows him to better recognize what’s going on inside himself.

This method is one of the strongest ways to recognize the deep areas of the soul: through having quiet, deep reflection, and subsequent calmness; amidst the calmness, one can sense understandings about his soul. A person can first try reflecting and then steadily reach the calmness, or he can begin right away with calming himself and then reflecting; it depends upon personal preference. When one reaches deeper places in his soul, he experiences his soul more, in a clearer and sharper perception. From there he reaches greater self-recognition – each person on his own level.

5 – Paying Attention to Fleeting Emotions and Thoughts

There is a fifth method of becoming aware of soul matters, which can be worked upon even as we are not amidst the quiet.

The more a person lives throughout the day with general self-awareness, the more he will notice and pay attention to any fleeting thoughts and emotions that quickly flit through his sensory process. There are some thoughts which we spend a lot of time thinking about, but sometimes we notice thoughts which pass by very quickly and they are gone in the blink of an eye. We also experience certain feelings and emotions which are gone as soon as we become aware of them. We can slowly begin to identify these quickly passing thoughts and feelings, and begin to recognize them and become more aware of them.

Throughout the course of the day, a person who is more self-aware will “listen” to the quickly passing thoughts and feelings which come and go very quickly. Don’t take any thought or feeling lightly – each of them is saying something important. These quickly passing thoughts and emotions are portals that can open to us more awareness about what is going on inside our souls.

6 – Dreams

The sixth and final method which we will mention, of how we can come to better recognize the depth of our souls, is the subject of this chapter: the *avodah* of the month of *Kislev*, which is “sleep”. In our sleep, we have dreams, and our dreams show us our thoughts which we are not consciously aware of during the day.

When has already worked upon the previous five methods mentioned, he will access even greater depth to himself when he sleeps. As he sleeps and he is experiencing his dreams, he will be able to identify parts of himself which are hard to recognize during the daytime when he is awake. After he wakes up from the dream, he can analyze what caused the dream: if it was caused by certain foods he ate, or from something he daydreamed about or if it’s coming from something deeper than these things. Often, he will find that the dream is caused by a deep subconscious thought, feeling, or desire.

In this way, a person accesses the deep power that lies in “sleep”, and instead of viewing sleep as a wasted part of his life, he will see sleep as a valuable tool that helps him enter more within.

In Conclusion

All that was said here is only applicable to one who wants to live a more internal kind of life. It is not merely for one who wishes to live an inner life, but for someone who wants to actually *enter* into the inner kind of life. Entering into an inner kind of life doesn’t mean to begin tasting it and then to remain at the doorway. It means to keep entering further within.

These words described in this chapter are not a way to begin serving Hashem. Rather, they are a continuation for someone who has already begun to serve Hashem and he has already traveling his inner world. The six methods mentioned in this chapter of how we can recognize our inner worlds were but general descriptions, which are describing ways of how we can enter into more subtle areas of the soul, enabling us to go deeper and deeper into ourselves, until we get to our innermost point.

We must remember, as we begin to embark on this journey into our inner world, that there is a greater purpose here we should be trying to reach. Our goal must be to gain a keener sense of the Creator. We are merely passing through these inner roads being described as pathways that lead to our innermost point, where we reach the Creator.

I want to repeat and emphasize, however, that the first step cannot be skipped: one must study the words of our Sages about the soul and its *middos*.

May we merit from Hashem to be of those who are seeking to know their inner worlds, of those who are trying to recognize their soul, as a way to reach true self and from there, to reach *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. May all of us merit to climb the spiritual ladder that leads towards Hashem, to recognize our souls with greater and deeper clarity, and from this we can come to have clearer recognition of Hashem, and connect to Him in a more complete way.

14 | Q&A

Q1: Besides for sefer Michtav M'Eliyahu, which other sefarim can the Rav recommend to learn?

ANSWER: Besides for *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, any other *sefarim* learned will depend on how well one understands these things.

- One can try learning the *sefarim* of Rav Chaim Friedlander *zt"l*, the two volumes of *Sifsei Chaim: Middos V'Avodas Hashem*.
- If someone is deeper kind of person, he/she can try learning *sefer Shiurei Daas* of R' Bloch *zt"l* [from Telz].
- If one is even deeper than this, he/she can try learning the *sefarim* of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt"l* (two volumes of *Daas Chochmah U'Mussar*, and five volumes of *Daas Torah* on the *parsha*).
- It is very recommended to learn *Sefer HaMeoros HaGedolim*, which contains stories of the *baalei mussar* since the times of Reb Yisrael Salanter.
- You can also try learning *sefer Beis Kelm*, which was also produced by Rav Dessler *zt"l*; it contains the *mussar* teachings taught in Kelm which he hails from.

Q2: When we make a list of our middos and we discover bad middos in ourselves, what do we do about this?

ANSWER: Just write it down so that you are aware of it. At this point we will not yet be addressing how we actually uproot bad *middos*. Just write down everything you recognize about yourself, in general terms. Remember to focus on your positive points and to avoid focusing too much on your negative points. Don't ignore your negative points, of course. Write them down, but just don't focus on them too much. Make sure that you are keeping the focus on your good points.

Q3: Is there a spiritual meaning why women have a hard time falling asleep when we are getting older?

ANSWER: Yes. The simple reason for this is because when we sleep, our mind leaves us and our hearts dominate as we sleep. In women, the heart is more dominant to begin with, for their hearts are softer; throughout the day, their hearts are more active, so they are already drawn towards sleep from during the day, and that is why their need for sleep at night becomes lessened [which explains why there is a harder time for older women to fall asleep].

Q4: The Rav has said that it is more important to focus on our positive qualities when we write down a list of our middos. Does this include any desires I have that are in order to do the will of Hashem? Or can it also include things which are positive but they are not necessarily in order to do Hashem's will?

ANSWER: Any desire that is aligned with Hashem's will is a positive desire. The lower part of our soul, our *nefesh habehaimis*, contains a mix of desires – some of them are desired by Hashem, and some of them are not. Some of our desires are simply coming from our faculty of *ratzon* (will), and these can be simply desires to want a certain thing, and some of these desires can be channeled towards doing the will of Hashem. Each desire needs to be examined to see if it can be channeled towards doing Hashem's will or not.

Q5: *What then does the Rav mean that we should focus on the positive? Is it referring only to our positive desires, or does it also include our positive middos and other positive aspects of our personality?*

A: If a person only writes down on the list the desires he has which are aligned with Hashem's will, he is probably fooling himself, because a person is usually not on the level where his main desires in life are to do Hashem's will. That is why we should write down on the list all of the natural desires we recognize in ourselves. We can also include in it our spiritual and holy desires which are Hashem's will, but we should not focus on this part alone, because then we would be avoiding a basic part of our self-awareness, by ignoring our natural desires. If someone is at the level where he only does the will of Hashem, that is wonderful, but most people are not living that way, so we need to be honest with ourselves as we make this list.

Q6: *Based on what the Rav said earlier that older women need less sleep, does that mean that a woman who has more "heart time" each day will also need less sleep?*

A: Often it can happen that the more spiritual a person becomes, the less sleep he needs. Some people need more sleep due to certain physical conditions in their body, but generally speaking, the more a person is living an internal kind of life, his need for sleep is greatly weakened and he will find that he doesn't need as much sleep. Of course, we are physical human beings, and we need to sleep. Chazal say that it is impossible for a person to go three days without sleeping. But the need for sleep can be greatly lessened, with the more a person is living an internal kind of life.

Q7: *We have a general question about how to serve Hashem. We are a group of women who learn Chovos HaLevovos (Shaar Avodas Elokim), and it is explained there that a person cannot reach his neshamah (soul) until he has purified his middos (character traits). But we are getting the impression that the Rav's general approach towards Avodas Hashem differs with this, for the Rav is saying that we must first reach the depth of our neshamah and after that to work on our middos. This implies that we don't have to first work on our middos in order to reach our neshamah. How do we reconcile the Rav's approach with the words of the Chovos HaLevovos?*

ANSWER: That is a very good question. The *Chovos HaLevovos* lived in the times of the Rishonim (the earlier sages, spanning the tenth and fifteenth centuries), but we live in the times of the Acharonim (the later sages, which began from the period of the fifteenth century), of which it is written about by our *sefarim hakedoshim* that we are closer to the time of Mashiach, in which the light of the *neshamah* is easier to access, for it will soon be revealed upon the world. This phenomenon contains both an advantage and a disadvantage, as follows.

The advantage is clear: the *neshamah* is made easier to access, in our times. But it also presents a certain danger. You can have a person who did not sufficiently work on his *middos* and he begins to enter inward into his soul, and he reaches the light of the *neshamah* which is more easily accessed nowadays – and then what happens? The light of his *neshamah* enters his unfixed *middos*, and then all of his *Avodas Hashem* is not genuine, because he is still full of unrefined character.

Can we say that one should first work on his *middos* and only after that he should enter into his *neshamah*? This is certainly a valid point. But in spite of this, the *sefarim hakedoshim* state that as the generations get closer to Mashiach, it is easier for us to access our *neshamah* and reach its innermost point.

Therefore, our *avodah* ends up being two-fold. We need to work on our *middos* at the very same time that we work to reach our *neshamah*. We have to be careful not to fall into the trap of neglecting to work on our *middos*, *chas v'shalom*.

Q8: *The Rav has said that men are more gifted with chochmah and seichel (the intellectual abilities) as opposed to “heart”, whereas women are more gifted with “heart” and less with intellect; because Chavah was created from a state of sleep, where the intellect isn’t working and only the heart is active. However, it seems that the sefer Chovos HaLevovos, which is explaining to us the duties of the “heart”, is certainly teaching us how to approach the world with intellectual chochmah and seichel, and not with spiritual feelings of “heart”. What is the proper path in a woman’s Avodas Hashem? It is it the path of the Chovos HaLevovos (which seems to stress the use of seichel/chochmah), or the path of the Rav, who is explaining that womanly are meant to mainly use the heart and not the intellect....?*

ANSWER: You have made a clear and proper definition. But the truth is that if there is just “heart” and there is no use of the intellect, a person will not succeed in *Avodas Hashem*. Even more so, there is additional reason today why women need to use their intellect in *Avodas Hashem*. Women today are worldlier and are anyways using their intellect, to think about other things that are not spiritual. If women would not be using their intellect at all, they would easily connect to the “heart”, but since women are using the intellect more these days, for materialistic concerns, the only way to counter this problem is to put their intellect to holy uses.

So in essence, the heart is the main function of the woman, as opposed to the intellect; but in more recent times, where there are women who have become more intellectual as they are involved more with the outside world, they are using the intellect for non-spiritual purposes, so they are less drawn towards using the heart; and the only way for them to counter this is to use their intellects for holy purposes. However, in most women, the heart is the stronger point than their intellect, and thus the main *avodah* of a woman in most cases is to use the heart, and less with intellect. The language of our Sages, such as the words of *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*, is certainly a more intellectual approach that is geared towards men and not towards women, but in our times where women are anyways using their intellect in all kinds of areas, they need to channel their intellect towards holy areas, to counter the use of their intellect that is being used towards mundane things.

Q9: *If we learn a sefer such as Sifsei Chaim, and we come across parts that have to do with Gemara that are only for men, what should we do?*

ANSWER: If you come across any parts in the sefer which you cannot understand, skip those parts. The truth is that sefer *Sifsei Chaim* was written for yeshiva men, so you will definitely come across parts that are not meant for women to learn. Rav Dessler’s sefer *Michtav M’Eliyahu* is preferable for women to learn because it is written in easier language. If you find *Michtav M’Eliyahu* too hard to understand, you can try learning sefer *Alei Shur*, which is easier to understand. (Volume II of *Alei Shur* is easier to understand than Volume I).

Q10: *If we recognize our desires and middos, does that mean that we recognize our “neshamah”? Or is the “neshamah” deeper than this and it requires more layers to traverse?*

ANSWER: The second option you guessed is correct. We begin to understand ourselves by recognizing what is taking place in our *nefesh habehaimis*, There are many levels (the ‘animalistic’ part of our soul), after that we can recognize our *nefesh Elohis* (the G-dly part of our soul), after that is our *Ruach*, and after this is our *Neshamah*. It takes a long time in order to reach the *Neshamah*.

Q11: Since the *Neshamah* is very far from a person's reach, is it possible for a person to feel a closeness with Hashem after gaining the more basic levels of self-awareness? Or is this not possible until a person reaches the *Neshamah*?

ANSWER: It surely is possible. We have been describing a path here in which we build our way upwards, beginning from the bottom levels and working our way upwards. It is definitely possible for a person to feel sparks of higher levels even before he is there, because the light of the higher levels sometimes shines itself onto the lower levels. However, we will not be able to understand the sparks of the higher levels until we have actually entered more inward.

Every person contains a spark of the *neshamah*, which enables him to feel a deep closeness to Hashem at times, even before he has risen to the higher levels of his existence. There are several ways of how it is experienced. Sometimes it happens when a person has a deep feeling of simple faith in Hashem (*peshitus/temimus*), sometimes it is experienced through a deep experience of *davening*, sometimes it is felt through talking to Hashem, sometimes it can come from feeling a deep love for Hashem.

But it still does not mean that the person's actual soul level is there. There is a 'crack' in the soul which enables us to connect deeply to Hashem through those places, as we mentioned earlier, due to the light of the redemption which is closer to us now, which enables the light of the *neshamah* to be more easily accessed. That is why it is easier these days for a person to feel deep experiences in his soul, long before he has entered within.

However, as we said earlier, it doesn't mean that person is actually there at that level. It is just that sometimes, the light of the *neshamah* penetrates into the lower layers of the soul and enables a person to connect to it easily.

Thus, generally speaking, we must work our way upwards, starting from the lower levels of our soul. That is why when we work on our middos, we begin working with the lower levels and we work our way upwards, as opposed to beginning from a higher plane. We need to start from the bottom upwards. First we need to recognize the lowest parts of our soul and work our way upwards. We work to 'build' ourselves in this organized manner.

It is certainly possible for one to begin with the "*neshamah*" level, but it is a dangerous to do so. There are some people who begin with this path because they cannot deal with their weaknesses, and if they were to begin analyzing their weaknesses, they would do nothing to improve themselves, so they instead begin to enter the "*Neshamah*" level as an alternative. For such people, there is no realistic alternative, so they feel no other option other than to begin with the "*Neshamah*" level. Others are inclined to begin with *Neshamah* because there's a strong portal available in their souls that enables them to reach their *Neshamah*, and they would have a hard time descending to the lower levels of the soul and working from there. Others want to begin with *Neshamah* simply because they want to see success right away and they wouldn't want to deal with the failures of their weaknesses that are present in the lower layers of their soul.

So it is possible for a person to begin with the *Neshamah* level, but in all of these cases, it is always risky to do so.

The path which we must mainly use to traverse in our *Avodas Hashem* is to work in a step-by-step manner, beginning from the lower layers of our soul. This was the main path which our great leaders traversed throughout the generations. There were always exceptions to this who began to work on themselves from the higher plane [*Neshamah*], but they were still taking a risk, and it is usually dangerous for us to take that unusual route.

Q12: *When I begin this avodah of calming myself to enter deeper within, I try various ways of trying to calm myself. I am doing so in order to connect to Hashem. I think of pesukim (verses) that mention Hashem, and I think about the “Ein Sof” (the Infinite) of Hashem, and this calms me, and I truly feel that I am more connected to Hashem when I do this. Is this a true feeling that is coming from my neshamah, since I am feeling a deep feeling? Or is it just something that calms me and there is a lot more for me to feel....?*

ANSWER: I do not know personally who is asking this question, so I cannot give a complete answer to this question. But generally speaking, any feeling which feels deep to you contains some truth to it, for there is a ‘crack’ in the soul that enables you to experience the light of the *neshamah* somewhat. But it is only experienced temporarily and it doesn’t mean that you are at that level. It is possible for a person to live in that higher state on more permanent basis, but if a person has not purified the lower layers of his soul, he is taking a very dangerous path by attempting to live in this higher state. It is fine to connect to this higher place in yourself from time to time, but then you must make sure to return to your lower levels and continue fixing yourself there.

When one is working his way upwards, beginning from the lower levels of the soul, and he is not yet feeling a deep connection with Hashem, it is very hard for most people to patiently work on themselves, when they are not getting a feeling of more connection to Hashem. This is especially the case with our generation. That is why every person needs to connect to Hashem from the place where he is currently found in, and along with this, he needs to work his way upwards. Each person can connect to his inner point of the soul, on his own level.

The truth is that sometimes a person is only imagining that he is becoming closer to Hashem, and sometimes it is a real feeling. However, even if it’s being imagined, he is still being spurred on to become closer to Hashem and to enter deeper into himself; and if only all people could imagine in this way. But, we cannot build our path in *Avodas Hashem* based upon this point. It is fine to feel a deep closeness with Hashem if this will calm you and then you immediately return to reality and you work on yourself; as long as you understand that you have merely entered into a ‘crack’ in your soul which lets you experience a higher level. But you must immediately return afterwards to the actual level that your soul is found on, and to continue to work on yourself from there.

15 | Kislev – The Bow⁸⁶

The Mazal of Kislev – “Keshes” (The Bow)

The *mazal* of the month of Kislev is called “*keshes*” (which can either mean “bow” as in bow-and-arrow; or it can mean the “rainbow”).⁸⁷

Yitzchok Avinu blessed Esav with the gift of “*keshes*” – his descendants would become successful archers in battle. The Sages explain that the “*keshes*” of Esav refers to the Greek nation⁸⁸. Thus, the *mazal* of the month of Kislev, which is *keshes*, is directly related as well to the events of Chanukah, where we had to deal with the Greek exile.

Where is the first time in the Torah that a *keshes* is mentioned? The first “*keshes*” mentioned in the Torah was the “rainbow”, which appeared in the sky after the *Mabul*.⁸⁹

However, the rainbow existed already before the *Mabul*. The *Midrash* states that there were ten things created on Friday at twilight, and one of them was the “*keshes*”, the rainbow. The Ramban explains that the original rainbow of Creation, which was created on the sixth day, is a rainbow that is formed when the sun’s rays bounce upon the wind. But the rainbow that appeared after the *Mabul* was a sunlight amidst the “clouds”.

Only after the *Mabul* did there appear a rainbow that appeared in the clouds. Hashem said that the rainbow after the *Mabul* is a sign that He will remember the *bris* (the covenant) that He made with mankind not to destroy the world. Before the *Mabul* there was also a rainbow, but the *Mabul* gave new meaning to the rainbow: now the rainbow would be called “*kashti*” (“My sign”), which He places in the clouds, as a sign that He remembers the *bris* that was made.

What was the *keshes* of before the *Mabul*, which was created on Friday at twilight? And what was the rainbow that came after the *Mabul*, which is associated with the clouds? What is the difference between these two kinds of *keshes*?

“Keshes” in the Side of Holiness Vs. “Keshes” in the Side of Evil

The concept of “*keshes*” is found both in the sides of good and evil, just as everything else in Creation, which exists in both the sides of good\holiness and evil\impurity.

The Torah describes Yishmael as being a skilled archer, who was successful hunter with his *keshes*, his bow and arrow. This is describing the evil kind of *keshes*. [Later we will explain what this is]. In

⁸⁶ ראש חודש מזל – כסלו – קשת 86

⁸⁷ Sefer Yetzirah 5:4

⁸⁸ Beraishis Rabbah 65:8

⁸⁹ The Deluge (otherwise known as the Flood)

contrast, the holy kind of *keshes* is found with Yosef. One of the blessings given to Yosef is “*keshes*”. The *keshes* of Yosef has the power to fight Esav, and in the future, the *keshes* of Yosef will overcome the evil *keshes* of Esav.

What is the holy kind of *keshes*, and what is the evil kind of *keshes*? What is the *keshes* of the nation Yisrael, which is holy, and what is the *keshes* that the Greek nation possesses, which is evil?

Evil “Keshes” – A Sense of False Completion

Keshes is from the word *koshi* (difficulty), and it is also from the word *kishut* (adornment, or beautification). [The implication of “*koshi*” (difficulty) is the evil use of *keshes*, whereas the use of *kishut* (adornment\beautification) is the holy use of *keshes*, as follows.]

A *keshes* is always a half-circle, as the Talmud explains.⁹⁰ In a *keshes* of bow and arrow, there is the arrow, and there is the half-circle of the bow, which the arrow is strung from. The *keshes* – it use as a bow that flings arrows - is a weapon of war. In this sense, *keshes* connotes *koshi*, “difficulty”, for it means war.

How is the *keshes* used in war? The very fact that it is a half-circle makes it possible for the arrow to be flung from it.

The *keshes*\rainbow is also a half-circle. A rainbow results from when the sun meets the wind, resulting in an arch-sharped bow - a rainbow – which has the shape of a half-circle. However, the two ends of the half-circle do not meet with each other. Each end stands on its own and the two ends do not unify; they remain as two separate ends which do not meet at some point. This symbolizes how the *keshes* connotes difficulty and war.

Applying this concept in terms of the soul, the evil use of *keshes* is when one is incomplete yet he thinks of himself as perfect and complete. This is also known as the trait of *kashyus oref* (to be stiff-necked; a kind of evil brazenness), which is also related to the word *keshes*. The arrow in a bow is only able to be strung because of the half-circle of the bow; so too must one understand that he is only a half, and he is incomplete. When a person perceives himself as whole and complete, he has the negative trait of *kashyus oref*, and this is the evil side to “*keshes*”.

“Keshes” In Holiness: Praying To Fill What We Lack

The holy kind of *keshes* is when a person utilizes the power of *bakashah* (request; prayer) – also rooted in the word *keshes*. The Sages said, “*Tefillah* (prayer) does half.” When a person wants something, he is like a half-circle, like a bow - he knows he is not complete, he feels lacking

⁹⁰ *Eruvin 65a*

somewhat, and he seeks completion. Thus, when he prays for what he lacks, his prayers accomplish the other “half” that he is missing.

Bakashah is when I realize that I only have half, and I am trying to get the other half. This is what lays behind the concept of *tefillah*. It is when I have the perspective that I am not remaining in the half that I have; I am hoping to have my other half filled. This is the holy kind of *keshes*: the power of *bakashah*, or *tefillah*.

This is how “*keshes*” results in “*kishbut*” (adornment, or beautification), which is the good and holy use of *keshes*. Hashem designed all of Creation in a way that we are all lacking and insufficient, and we need to be completed by other “half” - the Creator. All created beings are incomplete and need to be completed by their other half, which is the Creator. The beauty of Creation, its *kishbut* (beauty), is precisely when the many “halves” of this creation are completed by their other “half”.

As an example, Hashem did not bring any rain until Adam prayed for it. This taught us that man is essentially lacking, for he is a created being and thus insufficient, and through prayer, he accomplishes the other “half” that is missing. At the beginning of creation, Hashem created the *keshes* (the rainbow) on Friday, at twilight. But the Sages also said that at that very time, the *sheidim* (demons) and *mazikin* (harmful spirits) were also created. This alludes to the evil kind of *keshes*, which is *kashyus oref*.

But after the *Mabul* came a *keshes* (rainbow) which symbolizes holiness. The rainbow which Hashem put into the sky after the *Mabul* was a sign that He would forever remember the *bris* (covenant) He made with the word to never destroy it again. This *keshes*\rainbow appeared in the clouds. Unlike the original *keshes*\rainbow of creation, which is a combination of sunlight and air, the rainbow that came after the *Mabul* was a combination of sunlight and cloud. The clouds enable the rain, which man had to pray for, in order for the rain to come. Thus, the *keshes* that appears in the clouds represents *bakashah*, prayer. This is a kind of “*keshes*” that requests its other half.

This is in line with the concept of *bris* that the *keshes*\rainbow represented. In a *bris*, there are two sides, and one of the sides is loyal to the other; the one who agrees to the *bris* is saying that he is incomplete by himself, and he needs the other to complete him.

But by the *keshes* of bow and arrow, the bow seems to be complete in and of itself, even though it is only a half. This is the evil kind of “*keshes*” – the “*keshes*” of Esav, of Yishmael, and of the Greek nation – a *keshes* that does not recognize its incompleteness, thinking that it is complete in and of itself, failing to realize how it really needs another half to complete it.

Keshes and The Concept of Bris

Yosef *HaTzaddik* represents the concept of keeping the *bris* (the holy covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people, which we must guard in various ways), thus, Yosef contains the holy kind of *keshes* (for the holy kind of “*keshes*” is associated with the concept of *bris*), which can counter the evil *keshes* of Esav.

Chazal say that if one stares at the *bris* of himself⁹¹ (and surely if he stares at the *bris* of another), his own “*keshes*” (his “bow”; the male organ) is withheld, and he will not be able to bear children. The *bris* implies that he is but a half, who is incomplete and needs to be completed by the one whom he made the *bris* with; meaning, he must guard the *bris* with the one whom he has made the *bris* with, which is his spouse [and on deeper level, the Creator].

This is the holy kind of “*keshes*”: when I realize that I am but a half, and I need another half to complete me. This perspective of “*keshes*” (in the side of holiness), is at the core of the concepts of *tefillah* and *bris*.

Deeper Meaning of “Keshes”: Equalizing With Others & Integrating With Hashem

There is also another meaning to *keshes* explained in Chazal: *keshes* is also from the word “*hekesh*”, which means “comparable.”

The *keshes*\rainbow after the *Mabul*, which symbolized the concept of *bris*, was about the *bris* between Yisrael and Hashem (even though it took place before there was a *Klal Yisrael* yet, it was an allusion to the future *bris* that Hashem would make with *Klal Yisrael*, through the Torah). The rainbow after the *Mabul* showed that all creation are “*mukashim*” (to be compared, so to speak) to Hashem.

The *halachah* is that it is forbidden to stare at the “*keshes*” of oneself or of others⁹², and the Sages say that this is like gazing at the *Shechinah*, which is forbidden. How is the *keshes* of the body compared to the *Shechinah*? It is because *keshes* alludes to how all created beings are “*mukash*” (compared) to Hashem.

Thus, to stare at the *keshes* (whether it is the *Bris Kodesh* on the body, or whether it is the rainbow, which symbolizes the *bris*) is like staring at the *Shechinah*, which is forbidden.

“Hekesh” – What I Have Is Equal To What Others Have

There are two abilities in man that contradict each other: *tefillah* (prayer, which means that I am insufficient and I need something to complete me), and *someiach b'chelko*, “being happy with one’s lot”. These two abilities contradict each other because if I pray, I am not happy and sufficient with what I have, and if I am happy with what I have, I see no reason to pray, because there is nothing that I lack that I am trying to fill.

⁹¹ It is forbidden according to Halacha for one to gaze upon the male organ, either of himself or of another.

⁹² see *ibid*

Simply speaking, “one who has a hundred wants two hundred”, and a person cannot be *someich b’chelko* as long as he wants something that he doesn’t have right now. But if a person gains the ability to be “*makish*” himself to others – in the sense that he feels that what he has is equal to what others have, and that what others have is equal to what he has – then he sees no reason to want anything that others have, for he realizes that he really does have what he sees in others. This is the deep attitude that is behind the power to be *someiach b’chelko*.

When one is using the concept of *keshes* for evil, he will want something and will fight and engage in war with others, in order to get what he wants (this is the “*koshi*” aspect of *keshes*, and it is evil). When one is using the concept of *keshes* in the side of holiness, when he wants something, he will pray to Hashem to get it (this is the “*bakashah*” aspect in *keshes*, and it is good and holy). But there is also a higher way of using *keshes*: if I want something, I can realize that whatever I have is really *equal* to what another has - and then I will no longer want what others have. I can only pray for something I want when I am unaware that I really have what another has; once I realize that I have what others have, I see no need to pray for it.

The desire in a person to have anything else that he doesn’t yet have is a lack of *someiach b’chelko*. It is a lack of understanding that whatever I have is really *equal* to what another has.

When Hashem split the waters on the second day of Creation, the lower waters were jealous of the upper waters. The lower waters thought that the higher waters were more important, so the lower waters were jealous. They thought that the upper waters have something that they don’t have. A person always wants the other half of what he is missing, which seems to not be in his possession. Either he will fight to attain it (which is evil) or he will pray for it (which is holy). But there is a deeper perspective he can have: if one is “*makish*” himself to others – if one realizes that all that he has is equal to what others have, and that the same is true vice versa - he realizes that the half which others possess is also a part of him. He is not lacking anything. This is the depth of *someiach b’chelko*.

“Keshes” and the Greek Nation

The Sages associate the concept of *keshes*, contained in the month of Kislev, with the Greek nation. What is this *keshes*? The ancestor of the Greek nation, Yefes, was given a blessing by Noach that he would “dwell in the tents of Shem”. In other words, Yefes was blessed with the *chochmah* (wisdom) that would come to the Greeks, which would eventually challenge the *chochmah* of the Torah, which was inherited by the descendants of Shem. What, essentially, is the difference between the Torah’s wisdom and the Greek wisdom?

The wisdom of the nation Yisrael, which is the wisdom contained in the Torah, is essentially the fact that Hashem learns with a person as he learns Torah; “One who sits and learns Torah, the *Shechinah* sits with him and learns with him.”⁹³ When one learns Torah, he is able to have the understanding that he is but a half, who is incomplete and who needs to be completed by another

⁹³ *Berachos 5a*

half, the Creator. By contrast, when one learns any wisdom other than the Torah (and any non-Torah wisdom is included in Greek wisdom), it is viewed as a wisdom that complete in and of itself, devoid of any other half; it is disconnected from Hashem. Only with learning Torah can a person realize that his wisdom is just a half, which needs Hashem in order for it to be completed.

Hashem is on one side, Yisrael is on the other side, and there is a *bris* (covenant) that connects us together. That *bris*, symbolized by the *keshes*, is the Torah. But what is this *bris* of the Torah? It is when one learns Torah with the understanding that his learning is just the “half” that he is accomplishing, and he still seeks the other half, Who is Hashem.

Before learning the Gemara, there is a *tefillah* to say, composed by the sage Rabbi Nechunia ben Hakanah. This is a *bakashah*, a request and a prayer from Hashem, that we should succeed in our learning. We need *bakashah* before we learn Torah so that we can understand that our Torah learning is our “half” that we can accomplish, and to understand that our other half that we need is Hashem.

This is the holy power of *keshes*, which Yosef personified. Yosef merited to be called one who is “tender in his years, yet a father of wisdom.” Yosef became great in *chochmah* (wisdom) because he merited to have Hashem learn with him, through learning with Yaakov Avinu. Yosef recognized that he is the other “half”, the lower half, whereas Yaakov is the upper half. Such Torah learning is the Torah of the nation of Yisrael.

By contrast, the evil kind of “*keshes*” is the perspective of the Greek nation, which is when one perceives his wisdom as complete and independent of Hashem, when in reality, any of the wisdom that he learns is but a half a larger whole, which he fails to recognize.

In Conclusion

Thus, altogether, there are three levels to the concept of *keshes*. The evil kind of *keshes* is when I think that I am complete. The good kind of *keshes* is when I realize that I am a half that needs to be completed by another half. A higher level of *keshes*, which was the level reached completely by Moshe Rabbeinu, is when one understands that he is “*mukash*” - when one is at a state of equilibrium with all others, because he recognizes the other half as equal with his own half. Moshe Rabbeinu realized this fully, and that is the depth of why the *Shechinah* spoke from his throat.

The *avodah* in the month of Kislev, which is about the concept of *keshes*, is thus to realize that I am but a half, and that I must seek to be completed by my other half.

“There is no generation which does not have in it a righteous person like Moshe”⁹⁴ – thus, every Jew can attain a spark of Moshe Rabbeinu’s level, to be “*mukash*”, to equalize ourselves and align ourselves with our other “half”, Hashem – and in this way, we can merit some degree of Moshe’s level: “the *Shechinah* speaks from his throat.”

⁹⁴ Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim*

16 | Teves – Goat⁹⁵

The Mazal of Teves – The G'di (Goat)

The festival of Chanukah, in contrast to all other Biblical and Rabbinical festivals, is unique in that it overlaps two months – Kislev and Teves. The *mazal* of Kislev is *keshes* (the bow), and the *mazal* of Teves is *g'di* (goat)⁹⁶ - thus Chanukah, which connects together the months of Kislev and Teves, is a union of these two *mazalos* of *keshes*\bow and *g'di*\goat.

The simpler understanding [of the connection on Chanukah between *g'di*\goat and *keshes*\bow] is as follows. The Sages state that the Greeks sent a message to the Jews, “Write for your selves on the horns of a bull that you have no portion in the G-d of Israel.”⁹⁷ *Rashi* explains that the ‘bull’ was a hint to the sin with the Golden Calf; thus, in turn, Chanukah was a rectification of the sin with the Golden Calf. A hint to this is that the first letters of the words *g'di*\גדי and *keshes*\קשת, which are the letters *gimme*\ג and *kuf*\ק) are equal in numerical value to the word *eigel*\עגל.⁹⁸ Thus, the concepts of *g'di*\goat and *keshes*\bow, are both associated with the rectification of the sin with the Golden Calf.

Here we will delve specifically into the role of the *g'di* (goat) in Chanukah of the spiritual power that it represents.

The Greek Nation Is Symbolized By The Leopard

Concerning the future, it is written, “*The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the goat with the leopard.*”⁹⁹ In a vision to the prophet Daniel, the Greek nation appeared to him in the form of a leopard. He saw four beasts, parallel to each of the four exiles, and the third beast he saw was a leopard, parallel to the third of the exiles, which is the Greek exile.

A leopard is full of many different spots, which are unique from each other. These many spots that are part of its physical appearance are called *tzuros* (formation), a hint to the many *tzaros* (difficulties) which the Greek exile would cause the Jewish people.

The redemption, where “the leopard will dwell the goat”, symbolizes a point in time where the “leopard” (the Greek nation) will be connected with the “goat” (the *mazal* of the month of *Teves*) – in other words, where the leopard will be ‘lowered’ [humbled] to the goat. Chanukah, which

⁹⁵ ראש חודש מזל 013 טבת – גדי

⁹⁶ Sefer Yetzirah 5:14

⁹⁷ Beraishis Rabbah 2:4, Vayikra Rabbah 13:5

⁹⁸ *eigel* is equal to 103 (ע is equal to 70, ג is 3, and ל is 30; for a total of 103. The letters ג and ק are 3+100, which is 103.

⁹⁹ Yeshayahu 11:6

connects together the ‘leopard’ with the ‘goat’, is thus a revelation of a concept of a ‘leopard’ in the side of holiness (and the leopard is part of the lion family, so it is really a reference to the lion).

Hence, the *mazal* of *g’di*\goat is really a spark of the light of the future, in which the leopard will dwell with the goat, and the wolf will dwell with the lamb. The evil “leopard” - the Greek nation - was defeated, and thereby lowered to the level of the goat, revealing instead a holy and rectified kind of “leopard”, which can dwell with the goat (the leopard’s root in holiness is the lion).

The Sages say that in the future, all the festivals will disappear except for Purim¹⁰⁰, and there are those who include Chanukah as well.¹⁰¹ The understanding of this opinion, that Chanukah will not cease in the future, is linked with the fact that the *mazal* of the month of Teves is *g’di*\goat, which on an inner level is referring to the complete level of *g’di* in the future, where there will be a union of leopard with goat. (The future will also be a revelation of the full level of the “light of Torah” - which is also what Chanukah revealed.)

Let us try to understand more about this *mazal* of *g’di*\goat.

G’di and the Tribe of Gad

The word *g’di* (goat) is rooted in the word “Gad”, who was one of the twelve sons of Yaakov Avinu. Gad was named by Leah from the words, “*Ba gad*”, lit. “Gad has come”.

*Rashi*¹⁰² cites three different meanings of Gad’s name. One of the meanings of it is “*Ba gad, ba mazal*” (lit. “Gad has come, good *mazal* has come”). The word “*gad*” is thus synonymous with the very concept of *mazal*. Another reason for Gad’s name is because his birth was like a “*begidah*”, a “betrayal” – in the sense that he was born from a maidservant, and not directly from her. A third reason for his name is because he was born circumcised, and the word *gad* means to “cut”, hinting to the cut of the *bris milah* that he already was born with.

The word “*mazal*” is from the word “*noizel*”, to “flow”; the concept of *mazal* is about the continuous flow of all *shefa* (Heavenly sustenance) to the Jewish people. Throughout the 12 months of the year, there are 12 *mazalos*, and the *mazal* of Teves which is *g’di*\goat corresponds to the tribe Gad - who is the root of *mazal*, for Leah said upon the birth of Gad, “*Ba gad, ba mazal*”. Thus, the *mazal* of Teves, which is *g’di*\goat, is the root viewpoint of all the other *mazalos* throughout the other months of the year. The *shefa* of all the *mazalos* of the year flows from the *mazal* of Teves, which is *g’di*\goat.

Since the term “Gad” implies different meanings - as explained above – the concept of Gad and the *mazal g’di*\goat therefore contains opposite concepts. This will either mean that the *shefa* of all

¹⁰⁰ Midrash Shochar Tov: Mishlei: 9:1

¹⁰¹ Ateres Zekainim Orach Chaim 676, Sefer HaChaim 3:7, Magid Maisharim parshas Vayakhel, Manos HaLevi: *hakdamah*

¹⁰² Beraishis 30:11, and *Rashi ibid*

the *mazalos* stem from Gad’s aspect of “discontinuation” (*gid*\cut), or, from Gad’s aspect of *begidah*\betrayal – also a form of discontinuation (either of these implies a bad *mazal*), or, the opposite – the *mazalos* may all stem from Gad’s aspect of “*ba gad ba mazal*”, the fact that Gad implies good *mazal*, a continuation of uninterrupted *shefa*. So Gad, or the *mazal g’di*, can either imply continuation of *shefa*, or it may imply the discontinuation of *shefa*.

Gad’s aspect of *gid*\cutting\discontinuation implies limitations, as in the phrase, “Words as tough as ‘*gidin*’ - spears”.¹⁰³ There are 248 limbs and 365 *gidin* (sinews) in the body; the 248 limbs are parallel to the 248 sins which the Torah enumerates, and the 365 sinews are parallel to the 365 *mitzvos* of the Torah. The Ramban says that the 248 sins of the Torah represent *yirah*\fear of Hashem, which is the idea of staying contracted to boundaries, whereas the 365 *mitzvos* represent *ahavah*\love, which is expansion.

Let us now delve into the roots of these matters.

The Power of Goatskins Which Saves Yaakov (the Jewish People) from Esav (Western Society)

When Yaakov had to take the blessings from Esav, he disguised himself with goatskins. Yitzchok felt the skin on his neck and hands, which was covered in goatskins, and therefore thought he was Esav, and that is what ultimately secured Yaakov with the blessings (and which also aided him in the spiritual war against his brother Esav). Thus, it was goatskins which saved Yaakov.

The war of Esav against Yaakov was first centered on who would get the blessings. He fought Yaakov to leave the womb first, so that he could become the firstborn and have blessings, and later, he tried getting the blessings for himself, and was subsequently at war with Yaakov for taking the blessings from him. Yaakov was able to defeat Esav and take the blessings, through wearing the goatskins.

But the battle with Esav wasn’t yet over. Later, the angel of Esav fought Yaakov when Yaakov went back to retrieve the *pachim ketanim*, the small pots which he had left behind (and the Sages said that these *pachim ketanim* were actually the small jug of oil which would eventually become the same small jug of oil with the signature of a *Kohen Gadol* used in the miracle of the Chanukah story.¹⁰⁴). After Yaakov overcame Esav’s angel, he received the commandment not to eat the sinew of *gid hanasheh* - also from the word *g’di*. The implication of this is that Esav’s angel was trying to attack Yaakov Avinu’s power of “*g’di*”, by hitting him in the thigh, where the area of *gid hanasheh* is. Essentially, it was trying to turn Yaakov’s power of *g’di* into its opposite implication, “*gid*” – which means “cut”, or discontinuation.

¹⁰³ *Rashi to Shemos 19:3*

¹⁰⁴ *Megaleh Amukos parshas Vayishlach (Beraishis 32:24)*

The prophet says that in the future, Esav will be like straw, and Yosef will be like a fire, which will burn and destroy the ‘straw’ that is represented by Esav. Esav is also compared to a fire. Esav is the evil kind of fire, whereas Yosef is holy fire, and the holy fire of Yosef will destroy the evil fire of Esav in the future. There is a hint to this from a certain *halachah* pertaining to the laws of Shabbos. The Gemara says that if a fire starts on Shabbos, one should first surround the fire with goatskins, which can cause the fire to die down.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the power of the “goat” can overcome fire. This is a hint to the power of the “goat” which Yaakov Avinu was protected with, which has the power to overcome Esav.

This concept is also at the root of the miracle of Chanukah. The Sages compare the Greek exile to “darkness”, and the exile of Edom (Esav) to the lowest abysses of the earth (the *tehom*), and that the exile of Edom gets its strength from its predecessor, Yavan (the Greek nation). Thus, the Greek exile continues with the exile of Edom\Esav. We find that in the episode of Yehuda and Tamar, which formed the roots of the Messianic dynasty through their children Peretz and Zerach, that Yehudah gave goatskins to Tamar. Thus, the roots of the Mashiach involved goatskins.

The roots of the Messianic dynasty are these two sons of Yehuda and Tamar: Peretz and Zerach. The word “Peretz” is from the term *poiretz geder*, “to break through fences,” the quality associated with royalty, for “a king can break through fences, and no one may protest.” It is the power to break through limitations, corresponding to the “*gid*” aspect of Gad (cut\discontinuation\limitation) and, in its place, to reveal the *g’di* aspect of Gad, which is *mazal* - continuation.

Thus, there is an ongoing spiritual “war” between these forces of *g’di* (*mazal*, continuation) and *gid* (cut\discontinuation).

The G’di\Goat – The Connecting Point Between Yehudah and Yosef

Chazal state that after the sale of Yosef, when Yehudah “descended” to Goshen, it was as a punishment for causing Yosef’s descent to Egypt. Furthermore, in the episode of Yehudah and Tamar, Yehudah was proven wrong when she showed him the goatskins, which proved that he had been with her. This was in full measure for having caused pain to Yaakov Avinu when he made him think that Yosef was dead, by showing him goatskins dipped in blood. On a deeper level, the goatskins symbolize all of the wars between Yaakov and Esav, with all the spiritual failures involved, which the Jewish people will go through in the ongoing war with Esav.

In the side of holiness\rectification, the “*gid*” (discontinuation) aspect becomes *g’di*\goat\continuation, the *mazal* of Gad, which is completely good *mazal*, in which the *shefa* is continuous – through the power of *g’di* and all that it represents. The power of *g’di* first came to the aid of the Jewish people in the life of Yaakov Avinu, when he was saved by goatskins; and it was continued through Yehudah, who fathered the Messianic dynasty which involved the use of goatskin.

¹⁰⁵ *Shabbos 120a*

In both of the blessings of Yaakov and Moshe which were given to Gad, the tribe Gad is compared to a young lion. This corresponds to the “leopard” in the side of holiness which Gad corresponds to [which has the power to defeat the Greek exile, the evil leopard].

Gad\G'di – The Power of Bris Milah Where All Mazal and Shefa Comes From

Thus, we find a connecting point between Yosef and Yehudah. At first, Yosef descended to Egypt through the means of Yehudah (who was mainly responsible for selling him), and afterwards, Yehudah descended to Goshen by means of Yosef (for the brothers shunned him after the sale of Yosef, causing him to descend from his previous royal status). The inner task of Gad (*g'di*) is to connect together Yosef and Yehudah and to continue this connection [as will be explained].

In the beginning of *Parashas Vayigash*, when Yehudah approaches Yosef, this is symbolic of the future, when Yehudah will become connected to Yosef [via the two Messiahs, Moshiach ben Yosef and Moshiach ben Yehudah]. From the connection between Yosef and Yehudah, comes all *mazal* and *shefa* to the Jewish nation.

From where does all the *shefa* and *mazal* come from? It is all rooted in Gad, the power of the *g'di*, which symbolizes good *mazal* and continuous *shefa* (as explained above at length). We mentioned earlier that the opposite of the “*mazal*” aspect in Gad is his aspect of *gid* cutting, which symbolizes ‘disconnection’. On a simple level, this appears to mean that there is an aspect in Gad which contains bad *mazal*. However, we can now view this with a deeper meaning: through the cutting of the *gid* (circumcising the foreskin), a Jew gains the holiness of the sign of the *Bris Kodesh* (Holy Covenant) – of which all *shefa* comes from.

Thus, it is precisely the “*gid*” aspect which can bring all *mazal* and *shefa* – this is referring specifically to the “*gid*” aspect in the side of holiness, which is the concept of *Bris Milah*, circumcision of the foreskin. This is also the implication of Gad’s power of being born circumcised. He was born already with the foreskin cut, and this is really a sign of his good *mazal*, for all good *mazal* comes to a Jew from the sign of the *Bris Kodesh*, which is symbolized by the cutting and removal of the foreskin; from *Bris Kodesh*, one receives good *mazal* for his children and for all his continued offspring who descend from him.

Thus, the depth behind Gad is that he causes connection through the act of cutting and separation, which appears to be nothing but separation, but which is in actuality a connecting force. The “cut” foreskin which Gad was born with is the source of his good *mazal*. This is the depth behind Gad’s power of having been born circumcised. In this way, Gad’s aspect of *gid* is not a negative *mazal* for him, but to the contrary, it is synonymous with his aspect of *ba gad, ba mazal* – his good *mazal* – which corresponds to the spiritual power of the “*g'di*”. Through the “cutting” of the *Bris Milah*, which is the *gid*, there is a connecting point between Yosef and Yehudah, and from there, all *shefa* comes.

The Month of Teves – A Difficult Month, Which Contains The Light of Chanukah

The month of Teves, on one hand, is a troublesome month for the Jewish people. It contains “words as tough as *gidin* (spears)” – it contains *Asarah B'Teves*, the 10th day of the month of Teves, where all of the events leading up the destruction of the Holy Temples began.

But there is also a higher, deeper aspect to the month of Teves. Its *mazal* is *g'di* goat, from the word Gad, which symbolizes the very concept of *mazal*. We have explained here that the depth of this power of “*g'di*” is due to the power in the Jewish people of *Bris Milah*, circumcision, an act of cutting and separating which leads to connection and a combination of mighty spiritual power, which has the strength to defeat the evil forces of Esav. This is the root of how the month of Teves can contain Chanukah, which is the light of the future.

The Power of Gad's Success At War: When The “Hands” Are Connected To The “Head”

Part of Gad's blessing is that he is successful when his tribe goes to war with his enemies. In the blessing of Moshe, Gad is compared to a young lion which can tear apart its victims, removing the skull together with the arm in one blow.¹⁰⁶ The depth behind this is because Gad can ‘connect’ together the arm with the head [and all that these two parts of the body symbolize].

In the Chanukah miracle, the “majority fell to the hands of the few”. Simply speaking, this meant that although the *Chashmonaim* were outnumbered by the Greek army, the *Chashmonaim* were still able to defeat them. But the depth of this is that the *Chashmonaim* became the majority, through their own spiritual power, making the Greeks into “few”, and this was how the Greeks fell into their hands. The Greeks were only more powerful than them in their numbers, size and physical strength - in their “hands”. But the *Chashmonaim* were more powerful than the Greeks because they were represented by the “head”, which is above the hands.

Thus, the secret of winning against all negative forces is when the Jewish people connect their “hands” with their “head”.

“Peretz”’: Holy Power of Breaking All Limitations Which Can Defeat The Greeks

On a deeper level, Gad's success is not because of *mazal* or either because of his power of “cutting”, but because he has the power to go to war against his enemies in order to reveal the continuation of all holiness.

¹⁰⁶ *Devarim 33:20*

The Greek nation fought the Jewish people by forbidding them from *Bris Milah*; the depth of this is that they were fighting the continuation of the Jewish people, for all good *mazal* for the Jewish people stems from *Bris Milah*. This was their intention as well in contaminating all the oils in the *Beis HaMikdash* and in breaking down all of its walls. They were using the power to “cut”, *gid*, an evil power of *peritzas geder*, “breaking fences”, which aims to break down the holiness of the Jewish people.

But the Jewish people contain a holy ability of *peritzas geder*, symbolized by Peretz, ancestor of the Messianic dynasty and all royalty, which uses this power for holiness. When the Greeks tried breaking through all of the ‘fences’ of the Jewish people, this was essentially the Greek “darkness” which the Sages attribute them to, but when the *Chashmonaim* prevailed, it was the power of *peritzas geder* which does not bring darkness, but light and illumination.

This is Gad’s holy power of “*gid*”, which is his ability of *peritzas geder* when used for holiness, where *mazal* is continuous. The Greek nation wanted to weaken this power of the Jewish people and to darken all of their *mazal*. But through the power of *peritzas geder* (breaking fences) in the side of holiness, symbolized by Peretz, Zerach, and Gad, there was spiritual light and illumination which dispelled all of the “darkness” of the Greeks.

Chanukah contains this spiritual power of Peretz, of holy *peritzas geder* (breaking fences). It also contains another spiritual illumination: it must be lit at the entranceway, with the menorah on the right and the *mezuzah* on the left, and this implies that we use the spiritual power of the *mezuzah* to guard our entranceways, fences, and *gedarim* (boundaries). With these two spiritual powers combined – holy *peritzas geder*, and *shemirah* (protecting) our own *gedarim* which guard our holiness - the complete level of *mazal* is revealed, and then we enable the power of the “king can break fences”, the root of redemption.

Chanukah – The Mitzvah That Is The Light of the Torah

The light revealed on Chanukah is the power of Gad, who tears apart his enemies like a lion, removing their ‘skull’ and ‘arm’ at once. We have Torah and *mitzvos*, and the Torah symbolizes the head, for it is the wisdom (which is contained in the cerebral faculties), whereas the *mitzvos* symbolize the hands, for they are physical actions. Throughout the rest of the year, there is this difference between Torah learning and *mitzvos*. But on Chanukah, we have a *mitzvah* of lighting the menorah, which is a *mitzvah* that contains “Torah” in it, for it is a *mitzvah* which shines the light of the Torah. On Chanukah, we have an act of a *mitzvah* which is entirely the light of Torah! Thus, Chanukah is the connection between the “hands” (*mitzvos*) with the “head” (Torah).

This is precisely the power of Yosef, which can defeat the power of Esav. Yosef’s holy “fire”, which can burn through Esav, is the concept of combining the “hands” with the “head” – a level where our acts of *mitzvos* contain the light of Torah.

Esav's power is fueled by *asiyah*\action, as alluded to from his name "Esav" which is from the word *maaseh*\action, and symbolized by his power of the "hands" which personifies him. What is the way to defeat Esav's power of action, his "hands"? Through *mitzvos* alone, we cannot defeat Esav, for it will only be action against action. But if our actions of *mitzvos* are fueled by the holy power of thought that is the Torah, our actions combined with the "Torah" in them can then overcome Esav's power.

The *mitzvah* of lighting the Chanukah *menorah* is a unique *mitzvah* act which reveals the spiritual illumination of Torah outward to the rest of the world, from the entranceway of the house where it is lit. It is this power which can overcome Esav. In order to overcome "action" – the power of Esav – we need to combine our own actions (*mitzvos*) with the mind, with the power of holy thought, the Torah. In this way, our "hands" (actions) become empowered with the "head" (mind\Torah).

Thus, the power of Gad is essentially the power to infuse our actions of *mitzvos* with inner, holy thought. This is the depth behind "*Mitzvos* require *kavanah* (concentration)"¹⁰⁷ – on an inner level, it means to combine "Torah" within our actions, to combine the arm\hands*mitzvos* with our head\skull\Torah. Then, our Torah and *mitzvos* become unified as one.

All of the festivals will cease in the future, except for Purim and Chanukah. Similarly, the *mitzvos* will cease in the future.¹⁰⁸ These two statements are interconnected. It is because all of the festivals (besides for Chanukah and Purim), and all of the *mitzvos*, represent the "hands" without the head, thus they will cease; whereas Chanukah is the light of the future, in which our hands\actions*mitzvos* will become connected with our head\thought\Torah.

This is the light of the future....

¹⁰⁷ *Pesachim 114b*

¹⁰⁸ *Niddah 61b*

17 | Kislev – Binyamin¹⁰⁹

The Month of Kislev Corresponds to the Tribe of Binyamin

The month of Kislev, according to the *Raavad* and the *Gra*, corresponds to the tribe of Binyamin, the youngest of the twelve brothers, who completed the twelve tribes.

The Unique Aspects of Binyamin

When Binyamin was born, his mother Rachel named him “*Ben Oni*”, “son of my suffering”, for Binyamin was born amidst the fatal childbirth that took his mother’s life. Later, his father Yaakov gave him the name Binyamin, from the words “*ben yamin*”, “son of my right”.

Binyamin was different from the rest of the tribes in many different ways:

1. Binyamin caused all of the brothers to reunite with each other, when they all had to save him from imprisonment.
2. He was the only brother who did not take part in the sale of Yosef.
3. He was the only brother who did not bow to the wicked Esav [for he wasn’t born yet], and in this merit, the *Gemara* says that Mordechai, who descended from Binyamin, also did not bow to Haman.¹¹⁰
4. Binyamin was the only of the brothers who was born with two twin sisters.
5. He was one of the four people who died completely free from sin, and who died solely because of the “effect of the Serpent” on mankind.¹¹¹

Rachel Imeinu’s Soul In Binyamin

Every man is connected with two women who are in his life: his mother, and his wife. The Torah says, “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh*”).¹¹² At first one is connected to his mother, and then he must reserve his primary connection for his wife. Every person starts out as a fetus in his mother, where he is only connected

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110 *Yalkut Shimeoni* 1054

111 *Shabbos* 55b (The four who never sinned were: Binyamin, Amram (father of Moshe), Yishai (father of Dovid HaMelech), and Kilav (a son of Dovid HaMelech).

112 *Beraishis* 2:24

with his mother and to one else. He must listen to his mother's Torah when he is a child, as it is written, *"And the Torah of your mother, do not abandon."*¹¹³ But eventually, he must marry and leave his mother, and cleave to his wife, and to become "one" with her, as the Torah says: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* When a person is still connected with his mother, he is not yet connected to a wife. Once he leaves his mother and he becomes connected with his wife, he is no longer connected with his mother, for now he has a wife.

With Binyamin, though, this was not the case. Chazal state that as Binyamin was being born, his mother Rachel gave her soul to him.¹¹⁴ Binyamin's mother Rachel remained hidden in his soul, escorting him throughout his life. Chazal also state that Binyamin married the twin sisters he was born with.¹¹⁵ The depth of the fact that Binyamin was born with two twin sisters was because he was able to be connected to two women at once. Since Rachel's soul lived on in Binyamin, it is as if he was connected with two women at once – his mother, and his wife.

Chazal state that when a person sins, "it is upon his mother to clean up his mess". A person sins only because he has a physical body that was taken from the earth. After Adam sinned, he separated afterwards from Chavah for 130 years. During that time, there was no woman in his life. He was no longer connected with his wife for this time, and he returned to his "mother", the earth he came from. Since Binyamin represents the concept of being 'connected' to two women at once, Binyamin was a rectification of Adam's sin, for Adam could not be connected with two women at once, whereas Binyamin could.

Normally, a man is either connected to his mother or to his wife, but he cannot be connected with both at once. But Binyamin was connected with his mother and his wife at the same time. Binyamin was also not connected with any sin, because he was one of the four people who never sinned, and he only died because of the Serpent's effect on mankind.

Rachel's soul in Binyamin enabled him to be connected with two women at once: to his mother (Rachel) and to his wife (the twin sisters he married). Therefore, on a deep level, it was not a coincidence that Rachel was buried in Bethlehem and she could not be buried with Yaakov. It was really because Rachel lived on in Binyamin, because she gave her soul to him, and that is why she could not be 'buried' with Yaakov – it was because she continued to remain alive, in her son Binyamin! That is also why she was buried in Bethlehem, the place where Binyamin was born – it was a hint that she continued to live on through Binyamin's birth, in Binyamin's soul.

Thus, the depth of why Binyamin never sinned was because he was a rectification of the sin of Adam. After the sin, Adam could not be married to two women at once – he was separated from his wife Chavah and he returned to his "mother", the earth, where his body came from. Binyamin rectified this, by being "married to two women" at once.

¹¹³ *Mishlei 6:20*

¹¹⁴ *brought in the name of the Arizal*

¹¹⁵ *Rashi Beraishis 35:17 (see also Gur Aryeh ibid)*

Binyamin: The Point of No Sin Which Rectifies The Sin of Adam

Chazal also state in the *Sifrei* that Binyamin is different than the other brothers because he was born in *Eretz Yisrael* – specifically, in Bethlehem - whereas the other brothers were born outside of *Eretz Yisrael*. The depth of this is that the other brothers were not connected to the holy of ‘ground’ (symbolized by the holy land of *Eretz Yisrael*), and that is why there were not born in *Eretz Yisrael*, whereas Binyamin is connected to a holy kind of ‘ground’, the point where there is no possibility of sin. That is the depth of why Binyamin was born in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Binyamin had no sins, and he did not deserve to die due to any sins, and he only died because of the Serpent’s effect on mankind. Therefore, Binyamin represents the point where there is no sin. The Sages state that “The air of *Eretz Yisrael* makes one wise”,¹¹⁶ which means that the land of *Eretz Yisrael* represents a total removal from sin. Adam’s body was taken from Bavel and his head from *Eretz Yisrael*¹¹⁷, so he still had some connection to “death”, to unholy ground, to the possibility of sin. But Binyamin was born in *Eretz Yisrael*, so he was entirely from *Eretz Yisrael* - and therefore, Binyamin was connected to holy kind of “ground”: the point where there is no possibility of sin, where there is no curse of death upon man that results from sin.

Binyamin’s blessing from Moshe is that he is the “*yedid Hashem*”, the “friend of Hashem”¹¹⁸, and that he has a portion in the land of the *Beis HaMikdash*. How did he merit this? The *Gemara* says that a *retzuah*, a strip of land, crosses between Yehudah and Binyamin’s portion of land¹¹⁹, and the tribe of Binyamin was pained at the fact that he doesn’t have this portion of land, which contains the section of the *Beis HaMikdash* that housed the *Mizbeiach*. Due to this pain, Binyamin will merit that the third *Beis HaMikdash* in the future will be built in his portion of the land.

Elsewhere, we find a dispute in the Sages about who was the first to jump into the sea. According to one opinion in the *Gemara*¹²⁰, it was not Nachshon ben Aminadav who first jumped into the sea, but the tribe of Binyamin, and therefore he merited a part of the *Beis HaMikdash* in his portion of land. The depth of this as follows. At first, the world was filled entirely with water, and then Hashem split the waters, forming the dry land.

This original dry land became ruined from Adam’s sin, when the earth became contaminated from the sin. Thus, Binyamin fixed the ruined state of the earth – he rectified the sin of Adam - by jumping into the sea. The sea split into 12 paths, the root of the 12 tribes, which became 12 *kesarim* (crowns). Thus, the dry land by the splitting of the sea was, on a deeper level, a rectification of the sin of Adam which had ruined the earth.

This was similar to when the waters of the world were gathered together on the third day of Creation to form the dry land. The first to jump into the sea (Binyamin) revealed a new, rectified

¹¹⁶ *Bava Basra* 158b

¹¹⁷ *Sanhedrin* 38a

¹¹⁸ *Devarim* 33:12

¹¹⁹ *Zevachim* 118a

¹²⁰ *Sotah* 17a

kind of dry land. Thus Binyamin merited the *Beis HaMikdash* in his portion, for Binyamin represents the rectified kind of “ground” that is free from sin, which is fitting to house the holy *Beis HaMikdash*.

Binyamin & The Power of “Sleep” In Kislev

The tribe of Binyamin corresponds to the month of Kislev, which contains the spiritual power called “sleep”.¹²¹ What is the connection?

We find that the *Beis HaMikdash* is called the *cheder hamittos*, the “bedroom”, a place of sleep.¹²² A hint to this is that the *tzaddik* Yaakov *Avinu* slept on the future site of the *Beis HaMikdash*. The depth behind this is as follows.

Adam was put to sleep so that Chavah could be created from him. The first woman was formed from a state of sleep. In this state, Adam and Chavah were two beings in one unit. After the sin, when death came to the world, the state of sleep became a “sixtieth of death”. Now there would not only be sleep, but death - the result of sin - which causes a separation between man and woman. Through sleep, which is like death, the soul returns to its original source. Death returns the body to the earth and the soul to Heaven, and sleep is similar to this. Through sleep, a person is somewhat dead, because his body becomes still and silent, and his soul returns to Heaven. But in the original level of sleep, which is when Adam was put to sleep in order for Chavah to be created, Adam and Chavah were meant to remain connected as one unit. The sleep which came upon Adam was in order to enable Chavah and allow them to remain connected to each other, to be two beings that were one.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was a place that symbolizes the holy level of sleep. It was called the “gate of Heaven”,¹²³ a place where prayers would ascend and be heard, the place where the angels descended and ascended on Yaakov’s ladder that reached Heaven. It was where Yaakov’s head was placed on the ground: on a deeper level, this means that it was the connecting point between the physical and the spiritual, the point where Heaven touched earth. Since it was in Binyamin’s portion, Binyamin represents the point where there is a connection between the body and the soul, between earth and Heaven.

Binyamin’s Power Counters Greek Evil

Greek wisdom, which is the opposite of the Torah’s wisdom, is like the impaired level of “sleep”, where the brain isn’t functioning properly and the intellect is dulled. Greek wisdom is called the

¹²¹ *Sefer Yetzirah* 5:4

¹²² *Rashi Shir HaShirim* 1:16

¹²³ *Beraishis* 28:17

“fallen intellect” (*chochmah nefulah*). The *Gemara* says that the Greek ruler Hordos renovated the second *Beis HaMikdash* and made it look very beautiful, because he wanted it to be the most beautiful building in the world.¹²⁴ This is because the Greeks were solely interested in physical beauty.

Binyamin was born on the road, and the depth of this is because Binyamin connects the land of *Eretz Yisrael* with outside of *Eretz Yisrael*. In other words, through Binyamin, Heaven touches earth, just as the place where Heaven touches earth, the *Beis HaMikdash*, was contained in Binyamin’s portion of the land.

In the blessings of Yaakov, Binyamin is compared to the wolf.¹²⁵ The wolf kills its prey in the morning and divides it at night. The deeper meaning of this is that Binyamin connects the day and night together, which hints to how Binyamin is the connecting point between of all the dimensions of time, space, and soul. This is also the depth of why Binyamin is called the *yedid Hashem*, “friend of Hashem”, because his title of “*yedid*” connotes this connection.

Binyamin corresponds to the power of “sleep” in the month of Kislev, because sleep is a point where death and life are connected together, for sleep is a “sixtieth of death”, yet a person still remains alive when he sleeps. The body is somewhat dead when a person sleeps, because it becomes still, but the soul is kept alive. Binyamin corresponds to “sleep” because he represents the point where life and death are connected together. The *Beis HaMikdash* turned sins into merits, thus it turned death into life. This all took place in Binyamin’s portion, hence, Binyamin has the power of forming the complete “connection” (*yedid*): to connect life and death together. This is why Binyamin corresponds to sleep – a state where life and death are connected together.

The month of Kislev, which corresponds to Binyamin, is the time where there is a spiritual war between the Jewish people and the Greek empire. It was the war of Greek wisdom, the “beauty of Yefes”, against the wisdom of the Torah. But the most beautiful place in *Eretz Yisrael*, the portion of the *Beis HaMikdash* which was in Binyamin’s part of the land of *Eretz Yisrael*, is what counters the superficial beauty of the Yefes\the Greek nation. Furthermore, the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (the Jerusalem Talmud) was composed in Yerushalayim, and it is the wisdom which comes from true and holy beauty, which counters the unholy beauty and wisdom of the Greeks.

Hence, Binyamin’s portion in *Eretz Yisrael*, which contained the first two *Batei Mikdash*, and which will contain the third *Beis HaMikdash* in the time of *Moshiach*, is the holy state of “sleep” that connects life and death together, which will be the state of the complete Redemption, may it come speedily in our days.

¹²⁴ *Bava Basra* 14a

¹²⁵ *Beraishis* 49:27