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NISSAN TALKS

The Depth of The Month of Nissan

**Collection of Drashas from the
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פסח 005 מדת הנקיין

1 | *Cleaning For Pesach*

Preparing For Pesach Is Part Of Our Avodas Hashem

In whatever time or situation we are in, we should always be aware that it is an inseparable part of our *Avodas Hashem* upon us. It doesn't matter if it is something that has to do with *ruchniyus* (spirituality) or if it something more mundane – wherever we are, whatever the situation, it is somehow part of our *Avodas Hashem*. We must wonder in every situation we have: how is a Jew supposed to go about this?

In these weeks, the Torah observant Jews of the world are very careful to clean the house scrupulously from any trace of *chametz*. We have a commandment in the Torah to make sure that we do not see or find any *chametz* in our house; but this *mitzvah* has much to it which seemingly has nothing to do with Pesach.

Upon reflection, we will be able to see how preparing for Pesach is part of our *Avodas Hashem*, and how through it we can bring ourselves to be closer to Hashem.

Step 1: Don't Do It Mechanically

There is a simple point that we must all know and be aware of. This simple point is that we can find Hashem in anything – without exception! When a person begins to clean his house for Pesach, he first has to get rid of the “*melumadah*” – the tendency to do things by rote. We are not simply cleaning out the house for Pesach “because we have to clean.” Why are you cleaning for Pesach? Because that's what you did last year and the year before it?! That is not the reason.

We all know that to clean the house for Pesach is a *mitzvah* of the Torah, but what are our thoughts as we do this? If a person doesn't stop to think, he is only bothered by questions such as: What is the best way to clean the house? What needs to be cleaned, and how much? The whole relationship with Hashem is lost with all these questions.

So first, we must get rid of our tendency to just do things without thinking. We must realize that preparing for Pesach is purely *Avodas Hashem*. After we know this we can begin to know how it is *Avodas Hashem*, but the first step is this: don't just do it like a robot. Just like we understand that learning and davening is *Avodas Hashem*, so must we be aware that preparing for Pesach is *Avodas Hashem*. If a person feels that cleaning the house for Pesach is not part of *Avodas Hashem*, we can almost tell him that he is forbidden to do it! The *Chovos HeLevovos* writes that there is no such thing as a gray area; it's either forbidden or permissible. If it's not a *mitzvah*, then it's wrong to do.

We will now try to explain how cleaning for Pesach can be *Avodas Hashem*, in a way how everyone will be able to enter the *Yom Tov* amidst *Avodas Hashem*, as opposed to entering it amidst stress.

Step 2: Knowing Why You Clean

If we reflect, we will discover that besides for the *mitzvah* of the Torah to keep the house clean from *chametz* on Pesach, there are more reasons why we need to clean the house.

One possible reason why a person cleans is because he feels bad to make the rest of his family do everything. He personally doesn't care for the house to be clean. Most of the Pesach preparations have nothing to do with the *mitzvah* of destroying *chametz* – just various household chores. Why does a person do all these things for Pesach? Many times it is simply because he feels bad standing around and watching everyone else do all the work. He's doing it all for the sake of *chessed*.

That is one possible reason why a person spends so much time with Pesach preparations.

Another possibility could be that we don't like it when the house is dirty. Hashem created each person with a natural desire to have a clean house. Some people are cleaner than others, and they can't take even the slightest amount of messiness. But all people want their house clean somewhat, so they clean for the house for Pesach.

Another possibility can also be because people like it when things are orderly. During the rest of the year people are very busy, and they want to have one time in the year where they sit down and just arrange everything in its place (This is not the same thing as a desire for neatness.)

So far we have mentioned five possibilities why a person cleans the house for Pesach: Acting robotic, doing it because it's a *mitzvah* of the Torah, kindness, cleanliness or orderliness.

The first kind of person we mentioned – the one who does it robotically – is obviously not doing it in the right way. That is simple and we don't need to explain why.

The second kind of person, who does it solely because it's a *mitzvah*, has to put some more thought into it. It is not enough to know that he must clean the house – there must be some more life involved, some more thinking.

Before he begins to clean the house, he should talk to Hashem and say, “*Ribono shel olam*, For what purpose am I going to clean my house? I have other things to do; I can be learning or relaxing. The reason why I am going to clean my house now is because You, the *Ribono shel Olam*, commanded me that the house be free of *chametz*. Since I want to give You a *nachas ruach*, I will exert myself now to clean my house.”

While a person is cleaning the house, this is what he should be saying to himself. If someone knows how to think in learning Torah as he does something, then he should think in learning and he doesn't have to do this. But if someone usually doesn't think in learning as he cleans the house, and his thoughts are just floating elsewhere, then he should at least pause for a few minutes every so often and remind himself of what he's doing - and why he's doing it.

We are speaking about a very simple thing that anyone can do, even for those who aren't on a high level of constant *d'veykus* with Hashem. Of course, there do exist individuals who have reached a very high level and they always have *d'veykus* in Hashem wherever they are, but we are not speaking of this lofty level. We are speaking about something very basic and simple which anyone can do.

If a person cleans the house simply because he feels bad that his family has to clean the house and he doesn't want everyone else to do all the work, he also has to think about this and say, “*Ribono shel olam*, Why am I doing this? I don't personally feel a need to clean my house. The only reason why I am doing it is so that I can do *chessed* with my family.”

A person should keep talking to Hashem throughout the entire time: “*Ribono shel olam*, it is my will to do Your will. One of the pillars of the world is *chessed*, and I am thus doing *chessed* in order to give You a *nachas ruach*.”

After a day of doing this, besides for the physical exercise you get out of cleaning the house, your entire day is filled with pure *Avodas Hashem*. In this way, a person never leaves his state of *ruchniyus* - even while being involved in this mundane world.

The Natural Desire For Cleanliness

Let us elaborate on the last two points, which are more subtle points about our soul.

There is a natural desire in a person for cleanliness. Everyone loves cleanliness – some more and some less. The soul naturally recoils a bit from messiness. People often see a mess and start cleaning it, and if you ask them, “What are you doing? Why you are cleaning it up?” the answer is, “It just bothers me.”

People clean because they can’t stand the sight of something dirty or messy, and cleaning it up removes this anxiety. It seems that this has nothing to do with trying to become close to Hashem, and that a person is trying to save his soul from some pain. But if we think into this just a little, we can connect this also with Hashem, because ultimately, we can connect everything with Hashem.

So if a person likes to clean, the first thing he should ask himself is: “Why do I like to clean? Did I make myself this way? No. Hashem gave me this nature.”

Realize that whatever your nature is, it was Hashem who gave you such a nature. Not only that, but Hashem is constantly renewing Creation; He is constantly renewing your nature, which is that you like to clean and that you hate messiness.

After you realize with certainty that it was Hashem who gave you this nature to desire cleanliness, and that He continues to renew this nature in you, now think: “Why did Hashem give me such a nature? What is the purpose of wanting cleanliness, and how do I use this natural desire in a person? What are the pros and cons of it?”

The desire for cleanliness doesn’t happen on its own. (It is absurd to think that it does, but the *yetzer hora* gets a person to succeed not to think.) A person must think to himself, “Hashem gave me this desire for cleanliness. It was Him who placed this desire in me.”

This realization helps you begin your relationship with Hashem as you clean for Pesach.

The Deep Reason Why We Like Cleanliness

What indeed is the root reason behind why we like cleanliness?

Cleanliness (*nekiyus*) is one of the ten steps in the ladder of *Avodas Hashem* as described by Rebbi Pinchos ben Yair, the basis of *sefer Mesillas Yeshtarim*. The concept for cleanliness exists for us so that we can realize that we must cleanse ourselves from sin, because sin sullies our soul. Every power in the soul is also manifested somehow in our body; the power of cleanliness of our soul manifests itself in our body, with the need for physical cleanliness.

The truth is that the more a person grows spiritually, the more he increases his need for cleanliness. Some people are very clean in their soul, and others are very particular also about physical cleanliness (in addition to their spiritual cleanliness), but the point is that the more a person purifies himself [internally], the more of a need for cleanliness he has, and the purer his soul becomes.

The root behind the need cleanliness thus comes from an inner desire to become purified. This gives us a whole different attitude to have about our need for physical cleanliness: it is rooted in our soul's need for cleanliness and purity.

Knowing Your Motivation For Cleanliness

There are two reasons why a person wants physical cleanliness; one reason is unnecessary and more of a luxury to a person, while the other reason is coming from the soul's need for purity and closeness with Hashem.

There are situations in which we clean more than we have to, and here the cleanliness is being overdone. It is hard to say exactly what is considered overdoing it, and each person needs to decide for himself what is considered already too much.

If a person is just taking a shower or brushing his teeth simply because he is very concerned about his body, this is totally unnecessary (except for certain rare individuals who won't get affected by this).

Something even worse than this, though, is when a person is really bothered by uncleanliness, yet he ignored it and doesn't make the effort to clean. Such a person not only has physical messiness, but he damages his soul as he ignores the mess, because in doing so, he is suffocating his soul's demand for cleanliness.

So before a person begins to clean, he should ask himself: "What is my motivation in cleaning the house? Am I doing it out of a compulsiveness to clean (just like there are people who indulge in food and drinking), or am I doing it to help my household? If he realizes that he is doing it to help, then he should work on the *Avodah* we mentioned before (which is to say a *Tefillah* to Hashem).

If he discovers that he's doing it because he has a personal need for cleanliness, he must really ask himself if he is overdoing it or not, or if it comes from a sensitivity in his soul for cleanliness (and he therefore needs it). Each person should uncover what exactly is motivating him to clean. Most people do not have these issues, though.

We will therefore discuss a more simple kind of issue that people have which is much more common: when people love to clean something that is clearly a mess. In this, we need to put some thought into the cleaning.

Before a person cleans, he should say: "*Ribono shel olam*, this mess really bothers me. Who gave me this feeling? You – Hashem. Where does this nature in me come from? It comes from a power in my soul to demand purity. *Ribono shel olam*, is it Your will that I break this nature of mine and endure the messiness? Or is it Your will that I live with purity and cleanliness? Since it is clear to me that You want my soul to desire this cleanliness, I will go clean the house in order to get close to You and give You pleasure." Even though you're doing it *shelo lishmah* – not for the sake of Heaven (because you're doing it out of your need for cleanliness) – you can still add this element of *lishmah* into your action. Always remember that cleaning the house for Pesach is purely a form of *Avodas Hashem* - it must be done properly with thought and concentration.

The Importance Of Orderliness

Another point to be addressed is the fifth reason why a person wants to clean the house: to have orderliness.

Just like a person has a natural need for cleanliness - and this need comes from the soul's desire for purity which Hashem put in us - so did Hashem put in us a natural desire for orderliness.

Some people have a more of a need to be organized than others, but all people in general have a need to get things organized. This is not by chance – it is a nature which Hashem gave each person.

Without our natural desire for orderliness, we wouldn't get anywhere. In order for anything to become properly built and developed, there is a certain order involved to build it. Since every person on this world ultimately must properly build himself and develop, Hashem endowed each person with an ability to have orderliness. Without orderliness, we wouldn't be able to build and develop ourselves in *Avodas Hashem*.

The more orderly a person is, the more he is able to build himself in his *Avodas Hashem*. The less orderly a person is, the more confusion he has, and he feels like he is in exile from this. A person has to get out of this exile of confusion and become more orderly. This will feel like the beginning of a personal inner freedom.

Orderliness is thus a need of our soul, but we often use it just for our body's physical needs, such as the need to look very put together and organized.

Just like a dirty house makes our soul suffer, so can living in a messy house bother us so much that it is an impediment to our *Avodas Hashem*. If we don't care about how our house looks inside, we will definitely be affected spiritually as well by this.

It is well-known that when a *tzaddik* would look for a prospective match for his daughter, he would inspect the boy's room and see if he's neat. When a person has no sense of orderliness when it comes to the physical, it is a sign that he has is 'spiritually' messy as well. In order for our soul to get orderliness in spiritual matters, a person needs to first make sure he's neat when it comes to his physical matters.

But we must always remember that it is Hashem who gives us such a nature. We must recognize that our need for orderliness comes from Hashem, and that this need that people have doesn't come by itself.

Realize that this need for orderliness can be used as a way to connect to the Creator. In this way, a person can take the physical world and use it to develop a relationship with Hashem. It is an inner kind of life - a life spent with Hashem even in ordinary, mundane actions. When a person realizes that the need for organization is necessary in his *Avodas Hashem*, he is able to realize that organizing the house is not just an act of kindness with his family, but that it is a necessary part in one's personal *Avodas Hashem*.

In this, there are two parts. Some people were born with a need for orderliness, and it really bothers them when things aren't in place. The *Avodah* of such a person is to realize that this need comes from Hashem, and it is a way to serve Hashem.

But others don't feel such a need for cleanliness. They know with their minds that a person should be orderly, but they don't feel that this is a need for their soul. Such people understand that it makes sense to clean the house once a year, or else the house becomes unlivable, but they do not feel that this has to be done more than once a year.

Such a person has an opposite *Avodah* to do than the first kind of person. Besides for the fact that he must go against his nature and organize his house, he also needs to awaken in his soul a desire to have more orderliness.

Days Which We Can Grow From

A person wonders: Why did Hashem make it that people have to work so hard on Erev Pesach? Doesn't this sacrifice our opportunities to grow spiritually by making preparations for *Yom Tov*? And if we have to work so hard cleaning up, how do we prepare for the *Yom Tov*...?

But if you think about it, these days before Pesach contain tremendous areas which we can use to attain growth. If Hashem made it this way that we have to clean and organize the house, then that is the way for us to acquire all the precious areas of growth which we need.

Really, the acts of cleaning up and organizing the house are here to remind us of our soul's need for purity. This is a precious gain in our *Avodas Hashem*. But the *yetzer hora* comes and takes away the message of it and turns it into mundane actions, drying it up from all the *Avodas Hashem* contained in it.

If a person understands the depth of *Avodas Hashem*, he doesn't clean the house simply because he wants it to be clean. He cleans the house because through that, he connects to an inner point in his soul – the need for spiritual cleanliness. He understands that now is precisely the time to work on this.

The truth is that all of life is like this: the *yetzer hora* comes and takes what's very important and turns it into something that's not important. In whatever we encounter, we should always see the greatness we can achieve in this situation. The more confusing and seemingly pointless a situation appears, the more greatness lies in it if we uncover it.

If a person before Pesach gets caught up in different things from all his hard work, and then he comes into the *Yom Tov* exhausted and stressed out, what is all the hard work worth? We don't gain from this kind of stressed lifestyle. If we don't see how everything we do can be a form of *Avodas Hashem* and how much being involved with the world takes away from our soul, then these days go to waste.

Our preparation for Pesach should not simply be a physical preparation; although we do exert our body to prepare for Pesach, really, there is an inner depth taking place in what we are doing. It is really a preparation of our *soul* for the coming days. Through preparing for it in the right way, a person comes into *Yom Tov* the way he should.

Each person on his own can take these words and open them up more to himself. The common denominator between all people, though, is that the days preceding Pesach are days of *ruchniyus*, not days of materialistic pursuits. They are days of closeness to Hashem.

May Hashem help us that we prepare properly for Pesach during these days, from a sincere desire to give pleasure to our Creator. In these days preceding Pesach, each of us can merit to increase our true closeness and love for Hashem.

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2 | Nissan – Conversation

Nissan: Speech

The special ability in the month of Nissan (according to the *Vilna Gaon*) is identified as the power of speech (“*sichah*”).¹ The power of speech is mainly utilized by women, as our Chazal say, that the women took ninety percent of speech, while the men only took ten percent.² In addition, Chazal state that in the merit of the righteous women, the Jewish nation merited to be redeemed from Egypt.

Thus, the power of speech, which is the nature of the month of Nissan, is mainly reflected in the speech of women, whose merit brought about the redemption.

With the help of Hashem, let us learn how we can utilize the soul’s power of speech.

Three Kinds of Talking

It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that there are generally three kinds of speech:

- (1) Talking for the sake of a *mitzvah* (i.e. *davening*, or speaking with someone in order to help him);
- (2) Talking about matters that are not about a *mitzvah*, but are nonetheless necessary (such as talking about matters that we need to take care of); there is nothing wrong with this.
- (3) Talking about things that are unnecessary.

Man Is A Creature of Speech

A person is called “*medaber*” (a social creature). The Torah calls man a ‘*nefesh chayah*’ (living spirit), which is interpreted by *Targum Onkelos* to mean “*ruach memalelah*” – a “talking spirit”. Speech personifies man. Thus, speech is clearly an ability in man that can be used for holiness.

Analyzing Our Conversations

Let us think about the following: How much time of a day do we spend talking, throughout the 24 hours of the day?

¹ Editor’s Note: This shiur, part of the “*Rosh Chodesh Avodah*” series, was given to women and is geared towards women specifically, in how to use the power of “*sichah*” in the month of Nissan. A shiur similar to this one was given to men – see *Fixing Your Wind* _#09, #010, and #011. For a deeper understanding of the power of ‘*sichah*’ in the month of Nissan, see *Essence of Rosh Chodesh 01. Nissan. Speech and Prayer*.

² *Kiddushin* 49b

Once we're thinking about that, now we need to think: What is the nature of our conversations? Are we talking about things that are a *mitzvah* to talk about? Are we talking about things we need to take care of? Or are we engaging in empty chatter?

Making this reflection helps us become aware of our speech and how we are conversing. Being that there are three kinds of speech (*mitzvah*, necessary, and unnecessary), we need to first identify these three kinds of speech in our own conversations. Most people, upon making this reflection, will discover that most of their conversations are not necessary.

When our power of speech is mostly being used for unnecessary conversations, we can let it bother us that our power of '*medaber*' which defines man is being used for lower and unholy purposes. In fact, many of us will discover that our speech is mostly being used to speak about things that are forbidden – such as *lashon hora* (gossip) and *rechilus* (slander), and *motzi shem ra* (spreading false and derogatory information about others). This is even more degrading to the power of '*medaber*' which personifies man.

Thus, the first thing we have to become aware of is to realize that most of our conversations are not utilizing the true and intended purpose of speech.

Two Kinds of Unnecessary Speech

When it comes to speaking about unnecessary matters, there are actually two kinds of this.

One example of idle speech is when people meet each other and they get into a conversation, and they talk about meaningless things. For example, when two friends meet each other in the store or on the bus, or in the street, or if a bunch of people are sitting together and chatting; they will speak about all kinds of various topics in the conversation, which are really not important to speak about.

Another example of idle speech is when a person finds himself alone, like when's alone in the house, and he wants to relieve his loneliness, so he picks up the phone and calls a friend. This is a more idle kind of talking, because here, the person *seeks* the conversation and initiates the idle conversation.

In the first example of idle speech that we brought, the person encounters a situation in which he ends up talking pointlessly. It can happen when he's with his family or when he goes to other places where he meets people, and he finds himself having pointless conversations. In the second example of idle speech that we brought, the person actively seeks a conversation with another; he deliberately places himself in that situation.

These two examples we brought are not merely two different scenarios of idle speech that can happen. They are two completely different reasons for unnecessary speech.

Why Do People Like To Chat?

Let's analyze the first example of idle speech that we brought: when a person meets others and ends up chatting with them, speaking about pointless things.

Certainly, when a person is around other people, he should talk to them, because it is '*derech erez*' (proper manners) to do so. People become uncomfortable when they are with a person who isn't engaging in a conversation.

It's considered rude and unpleasant to be completely silent around others; therefore, it is only proper that we allow ourselves to engage in conversation with others.

However, most of the time, we are not talking to others simply out of '*derech erez*' for them. It's because we simply enjoy talking! There's a certain pleasure in talking. Just as we enjoy food, so do we enjoy talking. Thus, the deeper reason of why people like to engage in idle chatter is because there is a certain pleasure in talking with others.

On a deeper level, ever since the sin of Adam, there has been pleasure in talking simply for the sake of talking, due to the negative effect of the Snake on mankind. Chazal state that all of the animals asked the Snake, "What pleasure do you have in speaking *lashon hora*?" [For it spoke *lashon hora* to Adam and Chavah]. This implies that although there is no pleasure in speaking *lashon hora*, there is pleasure in talking itself.

Talking In Order To Relieve Boredom and Inner Emptiness

In the second example of idle speech we brought, a person seeks a conversation with others because he is bored and he feels empty inside, so he wants to relieve his feeling of loneliness, through chatting with others.

When a person is getting anxious from the loneliness and emptiness that he is feeling, and he doesn't know how to fill the loneliness, he will seek to fill it through external means, and one of these ways is through chatting with others. In this way, he takes his mind off his troubles.

Chazal say that "A worry in the heart of man, should be spoken to others". When a person is worried or upset about something, he should speak to others about it in order to be able to relieve his anxiousness. Even if a person isn't worried about anything particular, and he's rather just feeling bored inside and a general lack of happiness towards himself, he feels a need to speak with others in order to take away his feeling of inner emptiness and boredom.

The problem with this, though, is that it causes a person to remove himself from his own inner world, as he exits himself and gets involved with the external and superficial world, via all kinds of conversation and chatting.

So we have explained that there are two motivations for talking to others: Either because there is a pleasure in talking to others, or because of loneliness, boredom and emptiness.

In Summary

To clarify, let us summarize until now [and add on some additional points, for clarification]. There is a normal and healthy need of the soul to talk to others, but the problem is when we go beyond the normal amount of talking. There are two reasons why people speak unnecessarily: because there is pleasure in talking, or because a person wants to relieve his loneliness or boredom.

Sometimes, both factors are present when we talk. When a person meets others and he ends up engaging in conversation with them, it is not always because he simply enjoys having a conversation; it can very well be because he feels bored. He feels tension when there is quietness between him and others, so he talks, in order to avoid that feeling of boredom.

Let us again emphasize that there are three motivating reasons of why we talk. Sometimes we talk when it is a *mitzvah* to do so, sometimes we talk in order to take care of things that are necessary, and some of our speech is unnecessary.

Defining 'Necessary' Speech

To clarify, 'necessary' speech doesn't mean that a person will only say things so long as it takes care of something important. This cannot be, because we have a natural and healthy need to talk, and this is also considered 'necessary' speech. It is a need of our soul. What we are coming to address here is, that part of our speech is used for things that are totally unnecessary to talk about, and it is this part of our speech that we need to eliminate.

The Vilna *Gaon* says that the Torah is acquired through "less speech", and that this means that a little bit of talking beyond what we actually need ['schmoozing'] is in fact a 'necessary' kind of talking, for our basic emotional needs. Therefore, our discussion here about 'unnecessary' speech is only concerning speech that we don't need; it does not apply to the basic amount of talking which we need in our life.

Elevating Our Speech

Thus, altogether, we have learned that there are really four kinds of speech:

- (1) Talking for the purpose of a *mitzvah*,
- (2) Talking for something necessary that we need to take care of,
- (3) Pleasurable talking (which is necessary for our emotional health, but it is sometimes overdone),
- (4) Talking out of loneliness and boredom.

Our *avodah* is to fix the third and fourth kinds of speech: when we talk unnecessarily and it's beyond our normal needs for talking, and when we talk out of boredom. It is these kinds of speech which need to be fixed.

We explained that there are two kinds of unnecessary talking: talking for the sake of pleasure (when it's beyond our normal needs), and talking out of boredom. If we analyze our unnecessary conversations, we will discover that both of these factors are usually present. The only issue is in the percentages: how much of the extra talking is being motivated by pleasure to talk, and how much of a percentage in the extra talking is coming from boredom?

Talking For Enjoyment (When It's More Than The Usual)

When a person talks simply because it's enjoyable (when it's more than the usual healthy need), this is like anything else we do that's enjoyable. People do things that are enjoyable, even if it's not purposeful; whatever a person enjoys, he naturally does it. Even if nothing constructive comes from such talking, as long as the person is enjoying the conversation, he will continue on talking for a very long time.

We can see that this kind of conversation is very common. A person goes to a wedding or a *simcha*, or he meets someone on a trip, and he gets into a lengthy conversation with another person he meets; it can go from being two

minutes to being several hours! And it is entirely an empty conversation, with nothing of purpose that was discussed. Where does this nature stem from?

What we need to understand is that everything which Hashem created, He created it for a purpose. The purpose of Creation is often not on one's mind; usually, a person is mainly concerned at the moment to do what he enjoys. To illustrate, a child enjoys anything that will give instant pleasure; when he plays games, he is doing so that he can enjoy the results. When he gets that enjoyment, it lasts momentarily, and then he's onto the next thing he enjoys. So there is a deep nature in man to always seek something pleasurable at the moment. Usually, this desire for pleasure manifests in one's speech.

With most people, their conversations are unnecessary. The conversations that most people have are for the purpose of an enjoyable conversation, and not about anything in particular that is of purpose to discuss.

But if a person reveals purpose in his life, he will begin to notice that there is no longer a need to have most of his conversations. He will realize that most conversations are empty and meaningless. The less a person is living with purpose, the more he engages in conversations that have no purpose; he can chat for hours on end, about nothing important, yet it doesn't bother him that he is having empty conversations. Even worse, most conversations that lack purpose to them often lead to speaking about matters that are forbidden.

To summarize: the more a person lives with purpose in his life, the less he is dominated by the pleasure of the moment. His conversations will become more purposeful and 'to the point'. In contrast, the less a person lives with purpose, the more he is drawn after what's pleasure right now, and he will find it difficult to pull away from an enjoyable conversation that has no purpose to it.

Thoughtless Talking

We explained that there is another motivation for talking unnecessarily: when a person gets used to talking without thinking at all about what he's saying. The Ramban says, "Think about the words [that you are about to say], before you release them from your mouth." If we reflect, we can see that most conversations are thoughtless.

It is shocking to see, but it is very common: We can see people going on and on in their conversations, talking about topics that they have no idea about!

In the first kind of unnecessary talking that we discussed, a person might talk about things that he knows about, but it is simply a conversation that has no purpose to it. For example, a person meets someone and says to him, "I did such-and-such yesterday....Tomorrow, I plan to do such-and-such....My daughter did....My baby woke me up last night. I got up, then I walked around, then I had a drink, then I sat back down." Conversations like this are meaningless. However, at least the person knows what he is talking about.

In the current kind of talking we are discussing, though, a person is having a lengthy conversation about matters that he really doesn't know anything about. He has no clue about the topics he's discussing, yet he talks about them anyway. Many times, a person will have a whole conversation in which he offers his opinions about all kinds of topics, when in reality he doesn't know what he's talking about.

For example, he will give his opinion on politics, on how the principal should run his child's school, his views on *chinuch* (child education), and on current events. It's very possible that he has absolutely no idea what he's talking about, yet he continues to express his views on such matters. Where does this nature stem from?

It is a result of living for the pleasure of the moment. Such an orientation doesn't allow a person to connect his thoughts with his speech. When a person doesn't think, he cannot talk properly; thus, when people don't think, their words sound thoughtless and meaningless. Of course, there is always some minimal thought that goes into how we speak, enough to carry a conversation, but the words will still be lacking a great degree of content. In most scenarios, the words will come out of his mouth quickly, with no involvement of thought beforehand.

There is another problem with thoughtless conversations: the quality of the conversations is often devoid of any real content.

So the more a person puts thought into his conversations, thinking before he talks [as the Ramban writes], the more he will talk with precision, and his words will be less. He won't have to speak so much, because he is already putting content into his conversations. When a conversation has content and meaning to it, it's impossible for a person to talk so much, for his words will be limited to speak a certain amount that is necessary.

Let's summarize the two steps in elevating our conversations that we have spoken about until now. Most extraneous conversations that people have are being motivated for either of two reasons. Either a person is engaging in idle chatter because he is missing a sense of purpose in his life, which results in talking many words that have no purpose to them. Or, the conversations are thoughtless, because the person is simply talking without thinking beforehand of what he will talk about.

If we examine most of the conversations that go on in the world, we can see that most conversations lack purpose to them, in addition to being thoughtless, or with minimal thought from beforehand.

How To Think Before You Talk

The more a person gets used to having purposeful conversations, and he is thinking of how he can put more content into his conversations, he will see an overhaul in how he talks. He will suddenly discover an entirely new power of speech in his life.

Practically speaking, before a person knows he will have a conversation, he should think about what he will say. Let's say a person knows he will go to a certain place and meet people there, and he will know that he will end up 'shmoozing'. He should prepare the conversation: what kind of subjects he will speak about, and how; and what the purpose of the conversations will be.

A person should try doing this once a day. This slowly gets a person used to speaking with thought and with purpose. Understandably, along with this, a person also needs to lessen the amount of idle chatter in his conversations and to avoid speaking words that are thoughtless and purposeless.

[On a deeper note], getting used to this enables a person to reach the holy power of "*sichah*" (conversation) – to leave the "*peh ra*" (evil mouth) that is hinted to in the word "*Pharaoh*", and to instead enter into the holy kind of "*sichah*" – to tell over the story of the exodus for the entire night of Pesach.

Don't Speak About Everything That Comes To Mind

There is also another fundamental point to consider: A person needs to get used to the idea of not always saying everything that comes to mind.

Just because a person has an opinion about something doesn't require him to say it. One must know that there are things he has no understanding of, as well as things he doesn't have that much understanding about, as well as things which he doesn't understand at all. So just because you see a bunch of men or a bunch of women sitting together and discussing a certain topic does not require you to express your personal opinion about the subject being discussed.

A person needs to get used to talking only about things he is clear about. When a person limits his conversations to only speaking about matters that he is clear about, this will also lessen the amount of idle chatter in his conversations, because he will be speaking a lot less. When a person is used to talking so much without any restraint to his speech, he will naturally talk about all kinds of subjects, as if he knows it all. This is more than just a habit that one acquires; it is human nature for a person to talk about all kinds of topics.

So it is very important for a person to train himself to only speak about matters that he knows about, and not to speak about all kinds of topics. As Chazal say, "Teach your tongue to say, "I don't know."

These are the three steps we need in order to elevate our conversations: to seek purpose in our conversations, to think before we talk, and to only speak about things we know about and avoid speaking things that we don't know about.

Conversations Caused By Boredom and Emptiness

Until now, we explained how to fix the first kind of idle chatter, which stems from a pleasure in talking. We explained the three steps we need in order to elevate our conversations.

But there is another kind of idle chatter we mentioned: when a person feels lonely, or empty, or bored, so he engages in conversation with another, to relieve his feeling of emptiness. Either he will go to a friend's house, or he will pick up the phone and call, or he will use any of the means of communication that are available today.

This is a different kind of 'schmoozing' than when two people meet and they get into a conversation. Here, the person actively seeks out a person to have a conversation with. It is usually stemming from inner emptiness and boredom.

The first step to overcome this is for a person to become aware, in the first place, of the loneliness. When he's picking up the phone to call his friend, or as he's feeling the need to communicate, he should stop and ask himself: "Why do I want to talk to my friend now? Is there a real need for this, or is it just a desire I have?"

If a person realizes that it is more of a desire than a need, the next step is for him to analyze where this desire is coming from. Is it coming from a desire for the pleasure of talking, or is it coming from boredom? When he realizes that it is coming from boredom, he should become aware that the boredom is a sign of emptiness. If so, the communication with another that he wants is stemming from a need to fill his emptiness. But it is not really filling his emptiness – he is rather running away from it, by seeking a friend to get into a conversation with.

The first thing one must realize, then, is to become aware of his situation. After that he can work on a solution, as we will soon say (with the help of Hashem), but the very first and essential step must be that he become aware of this in the first place. If one realizes that deep down he feels empty, he should know that this comes from a lack of

satisfaction within himself. A person needs to learn how to solve his general sense of emptiness in life, but here we are not addressing this³. Here we are addressing how to solve conversations that stem from emptiness.

Chatting With a Friend vs. Talking With Hashem

As we brought from the words of the Vilna *Gaon*, every person has a normal and healthy need to converse with others. This is necessary for peace of mind. But most of our conversations are more than the normal amount of speech that we need in order to stay emotionally healthy. The question is, how much of our speech is necessary for our peace of mind, and how much of it is unnecessary? We definitely need to ‘schmooze’ a little, and the only question is, how much.

The more a person lives an inner kind of life, he lives deeper. He lives more with the Creator in his life. He will naturally talk to Hashem a lot more. When a person is alone, and he is used to talking to Hashem, “as a man talks to his friend” (as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes), he will find himself talking to Hashem a lot when he is alone. He can do so mentally or verbally. His speech will mainly be utilized to talk with Hashem, and as a result, he will feel much less of a need to speak with people.

We must know, clearly, that the desire to talk is human nature. We all have it. Most people are not talking as much with Hashem as they are used to talking with people. Talking to Hashem, by most people, is limited to the times of *davening*, but this is not nearly enough; often a person does not feel that he is standing in front of Hashem as he *davens*. A person often does not feel as he is *davening* that he is talking to Hashem; he thinks he is just saying words. Therefore, most people are not using their power of *sichah* properly, and instead, their power of *sichah* is turned outwards – empty chatter with others.

But the more a person is living inwardly and deeper, he is more connected with his true self, and he connects to the Creator more often. His power of *sichah*, for the most part, will be used towards Hashem. When he finds himself alone, instead of becoming bored and seeking a conversation with another, he will realize that being with himself means that he is with Hashem. When he feels a need to talk, he mainly talks with Hashem. This doesn’t mean he never talks to others. He talks to others too; it is just that most of his speech is directed towards talking with Hashem.

The more a person is living inwardly, he trains himself to think more. The first gain from this is that he will find that he speaks less with others, (because he is living more in the ‘world of thought’ than in a ‘world of speech’).

To Speak To Hashem, Naturally

Additionally, one must understand the following important point. We see people who can talk, talk, and talk. Human nature is that we like to talk. Women, especially, have a nature to talk; Chazal say that the women took nine out of ten measurements of speech. The only issue is what we do with all of this talking. It needs to be mainly channeled towards speaking with Hashem.

When two people meet, they can get into a conversation that lasts for hours. If a Jew truly lives with Hashem in his life, he will speak to Him a lot, throughout the day. Speaking to Hashem is not limited to the three times of the

³ See the *derasha* called “The Void”; refer also to *Reaching Your Essence #02 – Searching For Satisfaction*

day that we *daven*. Nor is it limited to when we do *hisbodedus* (meditation). Talking to Hashem is meant for the entire day! It is to speak with Hashem, naturally; to recognize that Hashem is the partner in your life, Whom you include your whole life with⁴.

This will sound very foreign to certain people when they hear it. It might even sound strange and weird. But a person only reacts that way when he isn't used to living with the Creator in his life in a palpable sense. The more a person lives with Hashem in his life, in his heart, in his thoughts – and he feels that he is actually with Hashem, and he feels Him in his heart – he will naturally talk to Him. His power of *sichah* is then channeled towards its true Source.

This is the depth of the redemption from Egypt, when we were redeemed from Pharaoh, from “*peh ra*”, the “evil mouth”, and we instead entered the holy kind of *sichah*. In the true way that a Jew lives life, he indeed speaks a lot – he speaks in prayer to Hashem, and in addition, he speaks a lot with Hashem throughout the day.

Of course, this does not mean to imply that a husband should lessen how much he talks with his wife, and that a wife should talk less with her husband, or that the parents should speak less with the children. This cannot be done, because it is not *derech eretz*, and it is not a way to live. Life requires us to speak with our family members a lot. We are only addressing the many extraneous conversations that people have, which are not necessary. It all stems from a lack of sensing Hashem in one's life.

In Summary

To summarize, when it comes to unnecessary speech, we explained that there are two kinds.

There are conversations that stem from the pleasure to talk; in this, the way to improve is by training ourselves to speak with purpose. In the general sense, this means to live life with a sense of purpose, and on a more specific level, it means to speak with purpose: to infuse content into our conversations. It also includes thinking before we talk about what we will about, and to only talk about things we know about, as opposed to talking about things that we don't know about.

The second kind of unnecessary speech is when a person engages in conversation because he is feeling bored or empty. The way we improve this is by speaking with Hashem whenever we find ourselves alone.

When one gets used to talking Hashem when he is alone, his life will undergo a complete overhaul. He will feel new, even more new than how a convert feels upon becoming a Jew. He will feel like he has left a narrowed kind of existence in which he was living disparate from the Creator, and that instead he has entered a world in which he lives together with Hashem, connected with Him. Every person needs to get used to talking with Hashem, simply, and earnestly. Sometimes we talk to Him from the depths of our heart, and sometimes less. But in either situation, we need to train ourselves to always talk to Hashem, on a regular basis. We can talk to Hashem verbally or mentally.

Understandably, talking to Hashem needs to be done sensibly and only when it is not disrespectful to others to do so. The point is that a Jew needs to get used to living life this way, in which he lives with Hashem and he speaks with Him on a regular basis. His nature of *sichah* is then turned towards the Creator.

⁴ See the *shiur* of *Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus (Practice)* #018 - “Talking Continuously With Hashem”

This is the meaning behind the redemption from Egypt. May we merit with the help of Hashem to speak words of holiness, to tell over the story of the exodus, to speak to others properly, both in our family life as well as towards our friends, neighbors, and those we know.

Even more so, may we merit that our power of speech mainly be used to speak with Hashem, to connect to Him completely – which will make our speech true and holy.

Questions & Answers With The Rav

QUESTION: *What exactly is the power of a woman to talk (since they took ninety percent of speech), more than a man?*

ANSWER: Since a woman's heart is [generally] more opened than a man's heart, she can speak more easily from her heart to Hashem.

QUESTION: *If a woman is very reserved and doesn't like to talk to her neighbors, and instead spends her time reading books all the time (I know such a person), does that come from an emotional problem (since a woman by nature likes to talk), or does it come from avoiding idle chatter?*

ANSWER: It depends. Some people have a more reserved nature and don't like to get into lengthy conversations, and they only talk out of *derech erez*. They will say "Hello" or "Good morning", but they don't like to get into conversations. This can also be because some women are more intellectual by nature, and would rather spend their time reading than talking. But if a woman doesn't like to talk to people, it might come from an emotional issue that she has which needs to be addressed. It could be that she is very afraid what others think of her, and she has an unhealthy fear of people which she must work to get rid of.

QUESTION: *When someone insults another person or talks to hurt people, from where does this come from in a person? Which kind of speech is this included in – talking out of enjoyment (because the person enjoys hurting someone) or out of inner emptiness?*

ANSWER: When a person talks, he reveals what's going on inside his *pnimiyus*. Since we are made up of good and bad, the bad inside a person is revealed by how he talks, and that is why a person can talk to harm another person. Part of what's going on deep down needs to be fixed and dealt with.

QUESTION: *If I'm talking to a close friend and we are just talking mutually, isn't that a mitzvah of chessed?*

ANSWER: We do not mean that a person has to measure every single word that comes out of his mouth. It is impossible to live like this. A father who talks to his child only about what's absolutely necessary is sorely lacking in his relationship with his child. A husband and wife who only talk with each other about what's absolutely necessary is not a way to live together. In every relationship, it's necessary also to talk things that are unnecessary in order to maintain a healthy relationship. We are not saying that a person has to have "exact" speech and only speak what's necessary; this is an impossible way to live. We are just saying that many times, we speak about unnecessary things that have no benefit whatsoever, speech which doesn't contribute to a relationship. This is a fine line we need to think about: what is considered small talk that is necessary for a relationship, and what is considered small talk that is unnecessary.

QUESTION: *If a woman has a certain nature to be very outgoing and friendly, does she have to work on uprooting her nature? For example, if someone has a daughter who is very talkative, does she have to train her daughter not to talk so much?*

ANSWER: We cannot tell our child exactly how much to talk. We cannot tell a child, “Don’t talk more than 30 minutes every day with someone.” We just need to give them over a general message, that we need to make our conversations more meaningful and not to always talk mindlessly.

QUESTION: *If a woman is more intellectual and doesn’t like to talk so much, does that mean that something is wrong with her heart and that she needs to open up her heart more?*

ANSWER: This is a deep question. Generally speaking, a woman’s heart is more open than a man’s heart, and therefore a woman has a nature to talk more with Hashem about her feelings more than a man does. But although this is a rule, there do exist exceptions to the rule. There are some men whose hearts have been opened up much more than most women, and there are some women who are more intellectual than others. If a woman is more of an intellectual and has a hard time talking out her feelings, it might be that she is an exception to the rule, and it is merely upon her to learn how to speak out her thoughts. But no matter how intellectual a woman is, every woman is still a woman, and she has a heart which she can access if she works to get there. A more intellectual kind of a woman might have a harder time getting to her heart, but she still has a heart in her, and she can work to get to it.

But, it can also come from an emotional issue that she has, or it can come from a difficult time she is going through, like if there are major problems in her marriage or in her house. These are emotional problems which can all be dealt with, and it doesn’t mean that something is wrong with her natural heart.

ראש חודש מהות 001 ניסן שיחה

3 | *Nissan - Speech & Prayer*

Nissan – ‘Head of The Months’

Of the month of *Nissan*, the Torah writes, “*This month is to you, as the head of the months, the first of the months of the year.*” The month of *Nissan* is called ‘head of the months’; it is the time of the year when the Jewish people left Egypt. This has ramifications both in time as well as in our own personal soul.

We will try to explain the roots of this matter: what exactly the “head” of the months is that *Nissan* personifies.

The Twelve Months of the Year: The Roots Of Our Soul

In our soul, there are three [active] elements – wind, fire, and water. (Earth is the element which holds them together, but it is not active). There are also seven powers which branch out from the soul. The Vilna *Gaon* says that these seven powers are not intrinsic of the soul, and therefore it is possible for a person to part from them at times; whereas there are ‘intrinsic’ abilities of the soul that a person cannot part from [which includes 12 roots].

The seven [branching] abilities of the soul are: 1) *chochmah* (wisdom), 2) *oisher* (wealth), 3) *zera* (offspring), 4) *chaim* (life), 5) *memshalah* (dominion), 6) *shalom* (peace), and 7) *chein* (grace).⁵

Here we will not discuss these seven abilities; instead we will focus on the twelve essential roots of the soul, which are represented by each of the twelve months that span Nissan through Adar.

Furthermore, the Vilna *Gaon* lists a unique attribute to each month of the year: (1) *Nissan* is the month of *sichah* (speech). (2) *Iyar* is the month of *hirhur* (thinking). (3) *Sivan* is the month of *halichah* (walking). (4) *Tamuz* is the month of *re'iyah* (seeing). (5) *Av* is the month of *shemiah* (hearing). (6) *Elul* is the month of *maaseh* (action). (7) *Tishrei* is the month of *mishush* (touch). (8) *Cheshvan* is the month of *re'iach* (smell). (9) *Teves* is the month of *rogez* (anger). (10) *Kislev* is the month of *sheinah* (sleep). (11) *Shevat* is the month of *l'eitah* (chewing/eating). (12) *Adar* is the month of *sechok* (laughter).

These are the words of our holy Sages, and it gives us the general picture of the 12 months of the year.

Nissan: The Month of Speech

Nissan, the first month, is the month of *sichah*, speech. The month of Nissan is called “first”, which implies that it is the root of all the other months; if so, speech is the root of all the other abilities contained in the rest of the year.

⁵ In different terminologies, the seven powers of the soul are known as *chesed* (kindness) *gevurah* (restraint) *tiferes* (harmony) *netzach* (eternity) *hod* (beauty), *yesod* (foundation), and *malchus* (royalty). In a different system, the seven are known as *chessed\ahavah* (kindness\love), *gevurah\yirah\din* (restraint\awe\judgment) *rachamim* (compassion), *nitzuach* (victory), *hodaah* (nullification), *hiskashrus* (connection) and *shiflus* (lowliness).

We can see how speech is a common theme that runs throughout Pesach. On Pesach, we went free from *Pharaoh*. The word *Pharaoh* is from the words “*peh ra*”, “evil mouth”, implying that we were redeemed from evil speech [and gained the holy kind of speech]. *Pesach* is from the words *peh sach*, “a mouth that speaks.” There is also a *mitzvah* on Pesach to tell over the story of the exodus, which uses our power of speech.

This is a month all about using the power of speech - and it is not a coincidence that it is like this.

Man is called “*medaber*”, a social creature, and this is what sets him apart from other creations. The Jewish people in particular are called “*medaber*”, for the Sages state that the Jewish people are called “*adam*” (man), whereas the other nations of the world are not called “*adam*”; and “*adam*” is synonymous with the term “*medaber*”, being that “*adam*” is called “*medaber*”. The month of Nissan, which contains the festival of Pesach, builds the particular aspect of the Jewish people that is “*medaber*”: the power to speak.

It is written, “*And man became a living spirit*”, and *Targum* translates this to mean that he became a *ruach memalelah*, a “talking spirit.” This is referring in particular to the soul of a Jew, whom the power of speech is mainly manifest with, in contrast to the other nations of the world.

“*Yisrael v’oiraisa*” – the Jewish people are interconnected with the Torah; the two of these uphold the world’s existence. The connection between the Jewish people and the Torah is through the power of speech. The *mitzvah* to learn Torah is specifically “*And you shall speak in it*”.⁶ It is a verbal kind of *mitzvah*, unlike all of the *mitzvos* which are fulfilled through an action.

The Jewish people personify the aspect of man that is *medaber*: the power to speak. There were Ten Commandments said by Har Sinai, where the Torah was given, parallel to the Ten Utterances of Creation.

Thus, the root of the entire year for the Jewish people begins with the month of Nissan. Nissan is the month of the conception of the Jewish people. Although the month of *Elul* is also considered the beginning of the year, that is true with regards to our actions; with regards to our speech, it is *Nissan* which is the root of the year, for the Jewish people.

Within the month *Nissan*, there is the festival of Pesach, which contains the words “*peh sach*”, “a mouth that talks”. It is the time of the year which builds each of the souls of the Jewish people, each of us on a personal level, with specific regards to our power of *medaber*/speech.

Three Kinds of Speech: ‘Amirah’, ‘Dibbur’, and ‘Sichah’

We find several terms for speech in the Torah. There is *amirah* (to speak softly), *dibbur* (to speak harshly), and *sichah* (conversation).

It is written, “*So shall you say to the house of Jacob [the women] and so shall you speak to the children of Israel [the men].*” *Rashi* explains that the women needed to be addressed in a softer manner, *amirah*, whereas men need to be addressed in a harsher manner, *dibbur*.

⁶ Editor’s Note: We also find that the *mitzvah* to learn Torah is fulfilled mentally, when one “thinks in learning”, and indeed, thought is the essence of Torah, as the Rav explains in many places. (See *Getting To Know Your Thoughts* – Chapter 3). However, there is also a specific command of the Torah to not only learn the Torah and to delve in it, but to speak of it.

We find the difference between *amirah* and *dibbur* with regards to the difference between Creation and the Torah. The world was created through Ten Utterances, “*maamaros*”, which is from the word *amirah*, whereas the Torah was given through Ten Commandments, “*dibros*.”

A third form of speech is called *sichah* (conversation). The word *sichah* is contained in the word *Pesach*, which is from the word “*peh sach*” (a mouth that talks). The *Gemara* says that “There is no *sichah* except in prayer⁷, for it is written, “*Tefillah l’oni, ki yaatof, v’lifnei Hashem yishpoch sicho*” - “A prayer for the afflicted man when he swoons, and pours forth his supplications before Hashem.”⁸

Thus, different kinds of speech are used, depending on the situation. The term “*dibbur*” is used in reference to Torah, whereas the term “*sichah*” is used in reference to *tefillah*, prayer.

Being that Nissan is called the month of *sichah*, it follows that it is a month of *sichah/tefillah* – times of speaking with Hashem, in prayer, in conversation.

What is the depth that lies behind this?

‘*Sichah*’: When There Is No ‘*Daas*’

In the *Gemara*, there is a *halachah* of ‘*masiach l’fi tumo*’, “conversing casually”: if two people are overheard talking with each other, and in midst of their casual conversation they mention certain facts about someone, we can rely on what has been overheard during this conversation and accept it as testimony in *Beis Din*, because there is no reason to assume that they are lying. The concept of *masiach l’fi tumo* is rooted in the term *sichah*.

Elsewhere, the *Gemara* says that ten measurements of *sichah* (talking) descended onto the world; nine of these measurements were taken by women.” Here we also see a usage of *sichah*.

What is the depth behind this matter? It is because there are two kinds of speech [as we are about to explain].

The *Gemara* says that an impoverished person is one who lacks *daas* (knowledge of Torah).⁹ There, the *Gemara* says, “*Dida bei, kula bei, u’do lo da bei, ma bei?*” - If one knows the Torah, he has everything, through it; and if he lacks Torah, what does he have?” The *Gemara* brings proof to this from the *possuk* we quoted before: “*A prayer for the afflicted man, when he swoons, and pours forth his supplications before Hashem.*”

So it is a lack of *daas* that epitomizes *oni*/poverty; and that being the case, the impoverished man, the *oni*, pours forth his *sichah* (supplications) in front of Hashem. Thus, we learn from this that ‘*daas*’ is the opposite of ‘*sichah*’ [so when there is no *daas* (knowledge), a person is left with nothing but *sichah* (conversation)].

We have learned thus far that *daas* is used in reference to knowledge of the Torah, whereas *sichah* does not flow from one’s *daas*.

In learning Torah, the mitzvah to speak of Torah is *dibbur* (“And you shall speak in it”) which comes from one’s ‘*daas*’; as it is written, “*For the lips of the Kohen, guard daas*”. This is referring to the Torah learning, which stems from his ‘*daas*’. The term ‘*daas*’ is also associated with the concept of *hanhagah*, to lead [for Moshe *Rabbeinu* it is the epitome of *daas*, and he was granted the power of *hanhagah* over the Jewish people].

⁷ *Berachos* 26b

⁸ *Tehillim* 102:1

⁹ *Nedarim* 41a

Thus, *daas* is the power of Torah, and it is the power which “leads”; and from *daas*, comes our *dibbur*, an orderly kind of speech which is fused by holy intellect of the Torah.

Sichah, however, is the lack of *daas*; as we brought before from the *Gemara*, an impoverished person is defined as someone has a poor amount of *daas*.

Sichah: Speaking From The Heart, To Hashem

If *sichah* doesn't stem from one's *daas*, where does it come from? The answer lies in the term, “*masiach l'fi tumo*” – “casual conversation” – it stems from ‘*tumo*’¹⁰. This does not stem from one's *daas*. *Sichah* does not come from *daas*; it comes from the *lev*, the heart. The Sages said that “Words that come from the heart, enter the heart.” This is the essence behind the power of *tefillah*/prayer. In contrast, learning the Torah uses a completely different ability: the ability of *daas* (knowledge). Torah is all about *daas*, whereas *tefillah*/prayer is all about an absence of *daas*.

Sichah, the power of the month of Nissan, is the concept behind its festival, Pesach. Leaving Egypt (Pesach) was the beginning of our path, and we ended it when stood at Har Sinai to receive the Torah (Shavuos). So our path began with *sichah*, with Nissan/Pesach – a month in which our power of *tefillah* was revealed – and it ends with *daas*, with the giving of the Torah/the festival of Shavuos, in which we received the Ten Commandments, the *dibbur*/speech that stems from *daas*.

The exodus from Egypt did not take place due to the merit of the Torah, for the Torah was not given yet. It was entirely achieved through prayer! Of course, they had Torah learning as well, for the Sages state there was a *yeshivah* in Goshen. But there was no giving of the Torah yet, so there wasn't enough of a level of Torah for them to be redeemed. It was prayer which redeemed us from Egypt: “*And their supplications arose.*”

When Moshe told the people that they would be redeemed soon, they did not listen, from their “*koitzer ruach*” – they were “short of breath.” In other words, they were not yet connected to *daas*; they could not yet connect to the words of Moshe, who is *daas*, for they had not reached *daas* yet.¹¹ They were at the level of *tefillah l'oni*, “A prayer for the afflicted man.” Although they certainly possessed *dibbur*/speech, it wasn't a *dibbur* of the giving of the Torah yet, and instead all they had in them was their ability to cry out to Hashem in prayer: “*And their supplications arose.*”

Every year, when the month of Nissan returns, this power of *sichah/tefillah* (earnest prayer and conversation with Hashem) comes back with it. It is the power which brings us redemption; it returns to us every year, enabling us a new chance each year to merit redemption.

Telling Over The Story of the Exodus: The Power of 'Sichah'

In the *Haggaddah*, we say, “Even if we were all wise sages, even if we were all understanding, it is an obligation to tell over the story of the exodus from Egypt.” There are many explanations of this matter, but we will present an explanation of this according to the lines of our discussion.

¹⁰ Editor's Note: Later in this shiur, it will be explained that “*tumo*” is referring to “*temimus*” – “earnestness.” It will also be explained that *temimus* does not stem from our *daas*, and it is rather ‘above’ our *daas*.

¹¹ Editor's Note: This is in line with the words of the Arizal, that the Egyptian exile was an “exile of the *daas*”. In Pesach #002 (Redeeming Our Soul), the Rav elaborates further upon this concept of “exile of the *daas*.”

Telling over the story of the exodus – *sippur yetzias mitzraim* – is not a *mitzvah* accomplished through the powers of our intellect. It is very unlike the *mitzvah* of learning Torah, in which we use our powers of the intellect, *chochmah* and *daas*. The *mitzvah* of *sippur yetzias mitzraim* it is reminiscent of the concept we brought earlier from the *Gemara*: the idea of “*masiach l’fi tumo*” – “casual conversation”. It is a kind of simple speech, which flows from pure earnestness in ourselves, and not from the area of the rational intellect. “*Even if we were all wise sages, even if we all understand, it is an obligation to tell over the story of the exodus.*” This *mitzvah* is not dependent on being a Torah scholar or not! It is not about wisdom. It is about being able to tell over the story just as when you are having a casual conversation, simply, earnestly – ‘*masiach l’fi tumo*’.

Nissan, The Tribe of Yehudah, and Temimus/Earnestness

The month of Nissan is explained in our *sefarim hakedoshim* as being represented by the tribe of Yehudah¹². Upon the birth of Yehudah, our matriarch Leah expressed her gratitude to Hashem, “*This time I thank Hashem.*” [We will explain the depth behind this matter]. There are two roots of the twelve tribes: Rachel and Leah. Yaakov *Avinu* possessed two uniquely different qualities: he is called the ‘*ish tam*’, (wholesome man), which refers to his power of *temimus/earnestness*, and he is the one whose “hand grips onto the heel of Esav”, which refers to his power of destroying Esav in the future. The two main wives of Yaakov *Avinu*, Rachel and Leah, received one of these two powers.

Yosef, the son of Rachel, received Yaakov’s power to destroy Esav in the future. In one of the prophecies about the future, Yosef is compared to a fire that will destroy the “straw” that is Esav. This is not the *temimus* of Yaakov *Avinu*; it is Yaakov’s other power, his power to destroy Esav, and it is essentially this power which Yosef received from the Torah that he learned from his father Yaakov. It was Yehudah who received the *temimus* from Yaakov *Avinu*. His mother Leah thanked Hashem upon his birth, which hints to the *sichah/temimus* which she connected to in Yaakov and received from him. So Yosef received the *chochmah* (wisdom) from Yaakov *Avinu*, while it is Yehudah who received the *temimus* (earnestness) from Yaakov *Avinu*. Yosef received the Torah from his father Yaakov *Avinu*, through *daas*. This enabled him to receive the *chochmah* of Yaakov *Avinu*. But Yehudah received from Yaakov *Avinu* the power of *temimus*.

The power of *temimus* is a whole different kind of understanding. It is written, “*Toras Hashem Temimah, meshivas nafesh*” – “the Torah of Hashem is complete, it settles the soul.” This concept does not mean to imply that Torah/*daas* and prayer/*temimus* are separate from each other, *chas v’shalom*. Rather, it means that there is a part of Torah which is attained through *daas*, and there is a part of Torah which is attained through *temimus*. The power of the month of Nissan, which is *sichah*, is essentially the power that is identified with “*temimus*” (earnestness). [Thus, *sichah* flows from our *temimus*.]

The Holy and Evil Uses of ‘Temimus’

The power of *temimus* exists both in the side of holiness as well as in the side of evil. So there is a good and holy way to use *temimus*, and there is also a negative connotation of *temimus*.

¹² There is an entire series devoted to explaining the *avodah* of the 12 months of the year based on each of the 12 tribes; see *Tribe of Rosh Chodesh #001 – Nissan -Yehudah*

The negative implication of *temimus* implies a lack of *daas* when it is detrimental to the person. *Chazal* say, “Women have light *daas*”, therefore, women naturally have more *temimus*, because they are less inclined towards *daas*. But when there is a lack of *daas*, a person will develop an uneducated and foolish kind of earnestness, [“pseudo-*temimus*”], such as becoming naïve and other negative attributes. This is an evil [and undeveloped] kind of *temimus*.

In contrast, the holy kind of *temimus* is to be an “*ish tam*”, as it was said of Yaakov *Avinu* - which implies *shleimus*, wholesomeness and completion. A *tam* is an unblemished animal, whereas a *baal mum* is a blemished animal; thus the term “*tam*” implies being whole and perfect.

Many people have a negative connotation of *temimus*, thinking that it implies foolish naiveté. But *temimus* is entirely different than how most people think of it. *Temimus* is indeed superficial when it stems from a simple lack of *daas*. Such *temimus* flows from incompleteness. It is holy when it stems from the power to be wholesome and perfect, and to be earnest from that place in oneself; such *temimus* is stemming from completion.

It is brought in the words of the Sages that Yaakov *Avinu*'s ‘wholesome image’ is carved into the Throne of Glory. Elsewhere, the *Gemara* says that the beauty of Yaakov *Avinu* was reminiscent of the body of Adam *HaRishon*. The meaning of this is that Yaakov had reached *shleimus*, completion, which was symbolized through his trait of being an *ish tam*; in that way, he resembled Adam *HaRishon*, the epitome of perfection [before the sin].

Prayer - Standing Before The King: A Glimpse At Shleimus/Completion

The Sages said that “There is no *sichah* (conversation) except prayer.”¹³ Prayer is to “stand before the King”. All creations are lacking; no one is complete. There is only One who is complete: *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. When one truly stands before Hashem in prayer, he is coming into contact with a *hakarah* (recognition) of what it means to view *shleimus* (completion). In contrast, one who does not “stand in front of the King” is one who does not have any recognition of *shleimus*.

When one truly senses that he is before Hashem as he prays, he recognizes the reality of Hashem's existence. His heart is alive and awake to the fact that Hashem resides in his heart. That is the true, inner definition of “standing in front of the King”. He can then feel what *shleimus* is.

Of course, even with this perception, that doesn't mean that the person has reached *shleimus*. There is no such thing as a perfect person, so it is impossible to actually reach *shleimus*. But at least one can have a recognition of what it is.

When one is engaged in prayer, he is aware that he is lacking, and that the Creator is the complete One who can fill whatever he lacks. In *Shulchan Aruch*, it is brought that one should reflect upon the greatness of the Creator and on the lowliness of man, as a prerequisite to prayer. However, this does not mean for a person to simply compare his lowliness to that of the greatness of the Creator (which is also true, on the simple level). It is deeper than that: it is for one to realize that Hashem is perfect and complete, while I am lacking and incomplete. That is the perception which must accompany one's feelings as he prays.

This is the true depth of “standing in front of the King”: to recognize that I am lacking, while Hashem is complete. This is the depth behind all of prayer.

¹³ *Berachos 26b*

When a person is praying with this perspective, his prayers to Hashem are not stemming from a mere will to complete what he lacks, for that would not be *'sichah.'* Rather, *'sichah'* is to be like *"the afflicted man when he swoons, and pours forth his supplications in front of Hashem."* It is to recognize that "I am lacking, for I recognize that I am in front of Hashem – Who is perfect", because that allows me to recognize what *shleimus* is.

Sichah is to be *'masiach l'fi tumo'*. The more a person is lacking, the more he will pray to Hashem, and that is true; but this is not yet the depth of prayer. The depth of prayer is for one to recognize that he stands before Hashem, and from that perception, one prays. This is the *sichah* that is *tefillah*: *"masiach l'fi tumo"*, to be able to let the words flow casually and freely, in recognition of the perfect *temimus* of Hashem.

'Temimus' Stems From 'Shleimus'

So we must not have the mistaken notion that *temimus* is to simply lack *daas*. It is rather to recognize what *shleimus* is; out of a recognition that I stand before Hashem, aware that He is complete and perfect, which means that I am not complete.

When *temimus* does not come from this perspective, such *temimus* is the kind of *temimus* that came about after the sin of Adam, a *temimus* which connotes deficiency, and such *temimus* is not holy. Only the *temimus* that stems from *"In front of Hashem, he pours out his supplications"*, is the *temimus* which comes from the depths of [recognizing] *shleimus*.

The Incomplete, Facing The Complete

When we were enslaved in Egypt and we cried out to Hashem to be saved, such prayer stemmed from how we felt lacking in our situation. Therefore, it did not represent the depth of our salvation from Egypt. The redemption from Egypt is rather epitomized by the *possuk*, *"I, Hashem, am going out, amidst Egypt."* When Hashem revealed Himself at the end of the plagues, this was the apex of the exodus; it was what made that night into Pesach. From this episode came our redemption.

Egypt is *Mitzraim*, from the word *meitzar*, "confinement", which implies a situation in which we are missing and lacking. When Hashem revealed Himself in Egypt at the end of the plagues, this was the revelation of perfection amidst all that was lacking. It was the revelation of the Endless amidst the limited and confined. It was the stark contrast of the absolutely complete against the backdrop of the utterly incomplete.

It is not by coincidence that Hashem chose to reveal Himself in that manner. It was to show us that as we are aware of our own incompleteness, we need to view what Completion is. On one side of the coin, we must be aware of our deficiencies, and on the other side of the coin, we must be aware of the great Perfection that exists: the perfection of the Creator. This is the depth behind prayer.

It is not Torah which reveals this perspective; it is only prayer where this concept is revealed. Torah is all about perfection, for it is perfect and complete, whereas prayer is all about the incompleteness of man. In the exodus from Egypt, we were utterly incomplete and lacking, and we came into contact with perfection: the revelation of Hashem, amidst all the incompleteness we were in. It was not about just revealing the state of perfection or about showing us how incomplete we are. None of these alone is the lesson. Rather, the purpose of it was to show us how the incomplete must recognize that which is Complete.

In the laws of telling over the story of the exodus, the *Rambam* writes that we must “begin with disparage, and end with praise.” [We begin the *Haggaddah* by saying how dismal the Jewish people had become, and we end with praise, describing the greatness which we became.] This is the idea of the concept we are describing, in which perfection is revealed amidst incompleteness.

This idea is what lies behind prayer: for one to recognize that because Hashem is perfect, I am lacking, as I stand before Him. It is that perception which truly enables one to pray and pour out his heart to Hashem. It is not simply for one to feel that he is lacking; although it is certainly true when one prays, he needs to feel that he is lacking. It is to recognize that because *Hashem is perfect*, I am not, therefore, I pray. [Thus, the main emphasis of a person during prayer should therefore be, on the fact that “Hashem is perfect”, as opposed to dwelling on one’s own imperfections].

For this reason, the entire *Shemoneh Esrei* is composed as a public prayer, and not in the private and individual language. It is because prayer is not about turning to Hashem from my own personal imperfections; rather, it is that because we turn to Hashem, from there, we recognize how lacking we are.

The Difference Between “Daas” and “Temimus”

During this time of the year – the month of Nissan, and on Pesach specifically, we can reach the depth of the power of *sichah*.

Sichah is also from the word ‘*shach*’, to bend, to be lowered. The *Gemara* learns out that *shechitah* (ritual slaughter) on animals is the place of the body which is “*shach*”, a part of the body which bends over, which is the neck¹⁴. We also find this term with the word ‘*shiach*’, a burrow in the ground, which is a low place. *Sichah* is thus about lowering oneself and being subservient.

The Sages praise one who lowers himself “like an animal” and is able to engender high qualities of character because of this. This is referring to the trait of *temimus*. It does not come from a lack of *daas*; to the contrary, it comes from *shleimus*, from perfected character.

Shleimus – self-perfection – is not able to be achieved through *daas*. Our *daas* is limited. Even Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who achieved the highest level of *daas* possible, was only able to comprehend as far as his *daas* could understand. It was his *daas*; it was not the *daas* of the Creator. *Daas* can understand only so much, but it cannot grasp the plane of *shleimus*. Only through *tefillah*/prayer, which stems from *temimus*, can a person reach *shleimus*.

This is because *temimus* is above *daas*. It can be said that at the point where *daas* ends, that is where *temimus* begins.¹⁵ Therefore, one’s *temimus* can grasp perceptions that his *daas* cannot grasp.

The Egyptian exile is called the “exile to our *daas*.”¹⁶ It follows, then, that the redemption from Egypt meant that our *daas* had been redeemed. Yet, besides for this aspect, there was even deeper revelation: the revelation of our power of *sichah/temimus* - which is higher than *daas*.

¹⁴ *Chullin 27a*

¹⁵ Editor’s Note: This statement is reminiscent of a statement of Rav Dessler, “In the place where seichel (intellect) ends, that is where emunah (faith) begins.”

¹⁶ A statement of the Arizal. For further elaboration of this concept, see Pesach #002 – Redeeming Our Soul

Telling Over The Story Of The Exodus, All Night Long: The Power of “Sichah/Temimus”

The *mitzvah* to tell over the story of the exodus, ideally, is meant to span the entire night of the *seder*, for as long as one is capable of doing so. This is the spiritual light that is *temimus*: the state of perfection that was revealed from Hashem’s Presence appearing in Egypt, the peak of our exodus. The *mitzvah* to tell over the story of the exodus is not something you read, hear, or merely “learn”. It comes from a deep recognition in our souls of “*I, Hashem, will go out, in the midst of Egypt.*”

The deeper the recognition of this, the deeper the *mitzvah* of telling over the story of the exodus will become.

From Pesach To Shavuos: From “Temimus” To “Daas”

These days of the month of *Nissan* are days in which we have the special opportunity to acquire the power of *sichah*. Through our power of *daas*, we cannot reach anything perfectly, because *daas* cannot reach *shleimus*, as we explained. *Shleimus* can only be reached when a person has a recognition of it, which comes from his *temimus*.

When Shavuos comes, it is the time to accept the Torah, and the Torah is a “*Toras Hashem Temimah*”, a Torah that requires *temimus*. It is written, “*Wisdom, from where is it found?*” The *posuk* is saying that the source of all *chochmah*/wisdom is *ayin*, “nothingness”, which is really referring to the *temimus* that must precede all of the *chochmah* of the Torah. It is *temimus* which is the deep source of all *chochmah*. If one has reached *temimus* on Pesach, he has the prerequisite to be able to receive the Torah on Shavuos.

The next month, *Iyar*, contains the power called ‘*hirhur*’, deep and reflective thought. If *hirhur* is not preceded with this *sichah*, though, then *hirhur* becomes superficial: one will only be thinking about various personal issues that are not of real importance.

The true way to prepare to receive the Torah is only through *temimus*: to recognize the *shleimus* of Hashem. “*Remember the day in which you stood before the mount of Sinai*” – the deeper meaning of this is that Torah must first be nursed from an inner source: from “standing at Har Sinai.” In other words, in order to accept the Torah and learn its wisdom, one must first have some recognition of perfection: to view the perfection of the Creator.

“*Follow after Me, into the desert.*” This is referring to the *temimus* which a Jew must have towards Hashem: to realize that Hashem is perfect and complete, so I will follow Him, wherever He takes me and wherever I must go.

The essence of Pesach, besides for its many other aspects and *halachos* which are also important, is this concept: to be ‘*masiach l’fi tumo*’, to let our conversations with Hashem flow, freely and naturally, from our point of *temimus*.

ראש חודש מזל 001 ניסן טלה

4 | *Nissan – The Lamb*

Sanctifying The New Months In Our Times

“*The head of the months [Roshei Chodashim], to Your nation, You gave.*” The concept of *Rosh Chodesh* came into fruition when we left Egypt, whereupon we received the commandment of *Rosh Chodesh* [to sanctify the new month]. The actual names of the months [Nissan, Iyar, etc.] were not formulated until the times of Ezra, but the concept of the 12 months of *Rosh Chodesh* itself was given to us when we left Egypt.

The month of Nissan is called “*head of the months, the first unto you*” – it is the month in which the redemption from Egypt took place. When we left Egypt and we were given the *mitzvah* to sanctify the month, this was not just another detail we received; it formed the roots of the entire structure of the Jewish people.

Nowadays, we no longer have the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the new month. We don’t have a *Beis Din* to sanctify the new month, and we don’t have the ways with which the appearance of the new moon can be recognized, which our Sages established, as the *Mishnah* records. Today, it seems that sanctifying the new month is no longer relevant to us. Is sanctifying the new month still of relevance to us, today? [We will explain that it does].

The Twelve Tribes Always Remain

In the beginning of *sefer Shemos*, the Torah records all of the names of Yaakov *Avinu*’s descendants who went down to Egypt, which includes the 12 *shevatim* (tribes) and all of their families. When the Jewish people entered Egypt, there were 12 tribes, and when we emerged from Egypt with the exodus, the 12 tribes were still intact. The lesson that this implies is, that no matter how much we go through exile, our 12 tribes always remain.

This is the depth of the redemption from exodus, and this is the inner meaning of the “great possessions” which we left Egypt with. When we left Egypt, we were given the *mitzvah* of *Rosh Chodesh*, and the Torah calls it a “*time of atonement for all their offspring.*” – this was our “great possessions” we left with: *Rosh Chodesh*, the 12 months of the year, which are parallel to each of the 12 tribes, are an atonement for us, for all the generations to come (There are many interpretations of the meaning of “great possessions” that we left Egypt with, but this is one of them).

The 12 tribes are present both in time, soul, and place. They are manifest in time, in *Rosh Chodesh*, the 12 months of the year. And the 12 tribes also exist in the sphere of our own soul. They also manifest in “place” with the 12 allotted portions of *Eretz Yisrael*, which are each given to one of the tribes.

The *Gemara*¹⁷ states that we have a tradition, that never will any one of the tribes be destroyed.” All of the 12 tribes of the Jewish people, without exception, will survive exile. Just as there is no Jewish soul can never be extinguished, so is it impossible for one of the tribes to ever disappear. A member of a tribe can die, but the tribe as a whole will always survive. So the 12 tribes, which manifest in time, can never cease.

¹⁷*in Tractate Bava Basra*

Being that this is so, the 12 tribes form the essence of the structure of the Jewish people. They manifest in the soul as 12 tribes, and they manifest in time as the 12 months of the year – *Rosh Chodesh*.

The Mazalos (Constellations) And How They Affect Time

Time is affected by the 12 months of the year, but besides for this, there is another factor that contributes to time: the heavenly, celestial bodies. These include four factors: the sun, the moon, the stars, and the *mazalos* (the constellations).

The Jewish people are affected by two different systems: the system of the 12 tribes, which are present in time and in soul, as well as by the system of the “7 shepherds” [Avraham, Yitzchok, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon, and Dovid].

How do they exist in time? The 7 shepherds in time are represented by 7 stars, which are called *kochvei leches* (“traveling stars”); this system begins from the *mazal* (constellation) known as “*maadin/dam*” (red/blood)¹⁸, and so forth. The other system affecting Creation is the system of the 12 tribes, represented by 12 *mazalos* (constellations) that are in each of the 12 months. To give a few examples, the *mazal* of the month of Nissan is the lamb; the *mazal* of the month of Iyar is the bull, and so forth.

Mazal In The Gemara and In Halacha

Of what relevance do the *mazalos* have to *Halacha*? In the *Gemara*, there is a dispute if there Jews are subject to *mazal* or not. But do we find *mazal* actually affecting us nowadays, in *Halacha*? We can find many places where *mazal* does affect *Halachah*. It is brought in the *Gemara*, as well as in *Shulchan Aruch*, that it is better for a Jew to go to court against a non-Jew during the month of Adar, when the *mazal* for the Jewish people is at its best, as opposed to the month of Av, where our *mazal* is at its lowest.

Additionally, the *Gemara*¹⁹ says that if an ox gores a person, it is contributed to the person’s *mazal*; and the *Gemara* explains that one is liable to pay for damages only when his ox gores the ox of a Jew, not the ox of a non-Jew. Thus, *mazal* has bearings on *halachah* as well.

‘Mazal’ As It Applies To The Jew’s Soul

With regards to our own souls, how is *mazal* manifest? There are several terminologies of *mazal* found throughout the writings of our Sages. Rashi²⁰ says that *mazal* means that “a person is *bar daas* (capable of knowledge) and therefore he knows how to protect himself.”

This needs understanding. What does *mazal* have to do with a person’s *daas*? If anything, it should be the opposite; if one knows how to take care of himself, then if he was harmed, it must be because of his bad *mazal*! And

¹⁸ Editor’s Note: In terms of the Zodiac, *Maadin* is known as “Mars”

¹⁹ *Bava Kamma* 2b

²⁰ *ibid*

if he doesn't, then it's due to his own negligence, not to his *mazal*! However, as we will explain, this is only a question that stems from a superficial lens. In reality, *mazal* is related to *daas*.

Elsewhere, the *Gemara* states that if one has a fear which he can't explain, it is coming from his *mazal*, which sees the fearful event of the future and thus causes a person to become anxious. *Rashi* explains that it is an angel who hovers above the person, which shows the person the fear.

In another place, the *Gemara*²¹ states that when the Jewish people stood at Har Sinai, the impurity ('*zuhama*') of the Snake that had been on mankind since the sin ceased. The *Gemara* asks: What about converts? The *Gemara* answers that with converts, their *mazal* was present at Har Sinai. We can imply from this as follows. The converts were not present at Sinai, but their *mazal* was. Therefore, the entire imprint from Sinai that is on a convert was experienced through the *mazal* of the convert. But the original souls of the Jewish people who stood at Sinai had not only their *mazal* present there, but they were given a special commandment then: "Serve G-d, on this mountain." [So the original souls of the Jewish people received a higher experience of Sinai, besides for what their *mazal* experienced; whereas the converts only received an experience of Sinai through *mazal* alone.]

The Two Aspects of 'Mazal'

What does it mean that the *mazal* of converts was present at Har Sinai? To understand this, in general, we need to know what the term "*mazal*" is, in the language of the Torah. *Mazal* is first alluded to in the Torah by the birth of Gad. When Gad was born to Yaakov *Avinu*, *Rashi* states, "*Ba gad, ba mazal*," – "Gad comes, *mazal* comes."

The matter of *mazal* consists of two parts: (1) One aspect of *mazal* is *hashpaah* (emanation), from the word *shefa* (sustenance); being that the word "*mazal*" can mean "*nozal*", to "flow", the term *mazal* implies a 'flow', of Heavenly sustenance, which is called "*shefa*". (2) The other aspect of *mazal* is *taharah* (purity).

The first aspect, "*hashpaah*", is reflecting one of Hashem's 13 Attributes of Mercy: "*Notzar chesed l'olafim*," "He lets kindness flow for thousands [of generations]. The second aspect, *taharah*, is reflecting another of the Attributes of Mercy: "*V'nakei*," "And He cleanses."

The *Gemara* says that when the Jewish people stood by Har Sinai, the spirit of impurity that had entered us from the Serpent was removed. This cleansing process only took place upon the Jewish people, not with gentiles, so the gentiles still remain affected by the impurity of the Serpent. As for converts, the *Gemara* says that since their *mazal* was present at Sinai, the impurity left them. What this really implies is that their *mazal* allowed them to receive the "*taharah*" aspect of *mazal*; being at Sinai removed the impurity of the Serpent upon them, a connotation of being "cleansed", which alludes to the "*V'nakei*" aspect in *mazal*. Those words are explicit in the words of our Sages.

Now we can ask, though: Is there a difference between the souls of the Jewish people, and the souls of converts, being that that they were all cleansed from impurity at Sinai?

According to what we have explained, there is a difference. The converts only received the "*taharah*" aspect of *mazal*, which is "*V'nakei*" – to be cleansed of impurity. In that sense, the souls of converts share the same *mazal* as the souls of all other Jews. But the converts never received the "*hashpaah*" aspect of *mazal*, which is called "*Notzar Chesed L'Alafim*." That *mazal* was given only to the original souls of the Jewish people.

²¹ *Shabbos 146a*

We can now understand the following. In the *Gemara*, where there is a dispute if the Jewish people are subject to *mazal* or not, the entire issue is, do the Jewish people possess higher *mazal* than that of the other nations? Are the Jewish people limited to the *mazal* of *taharah*, or do they also possess a higher *mazal* (*hashpaah*)? That is the entire issue of the *Gemara*.

Thus, *mazal* is not simply a superficial term of ‘*mazal*’ which people call it as. In terms of the Torah, the Jewish people possess two kinds of *mazal* – the aspects of “*hashpaah*” and “*taharah*”.

Zuhama (Impurity): Zilzul (Cheapening of Holiness)

Mazal is from the word “*mezalzel*”, to cheapen. Being that *mazal* for the Jewish people is essentially about *taharah* – being cleansed from impurity – it will mean that *mazal* cleanses us from *zilzul* (cheapening). When the Snake coaxed Chavah to eat from the tree and sin, it placed a spirit of impurity (*zuhama*) upon her. What exactly is this *zuhama* that entered mankind since the sin? It is defined as the nature to be *mezalzel* – to cheapen holiness.

When the Jewish people stood at Sinai, they were cleansed from the *zuhama* placed on mankind that came from the Snake: they were purified from *zilzul*. And its place, their holy *mazal* was revealed.

“*V'nahei*” is thus the trait of Hashem which refers to cleansing the Jewish people from impurities placed upon them by outer forces. It essentially cleanses us from the *zuhama* of the Snake, which is the evil habit of *zilzul*. The soul needs to be cleansed from *zilzul*. What does a person tend to be *mezalzel* in? *Chazal* say that that there are “matters which stand at the exalted heights of the world, yet people are *mezalzel* in them”. It is those matters of *zilzul* which we need to be cleansed from.

This is the depth of the festival of Pesach, in which we are cleansed from sin. The *mitzvah* of *Korbon Pesach* has a special *halachah* when carried out by converts: it had to be cleansed from any *chometz*. The *mitzvah* to get rid of *chometz* on Pesach, on its deeper level, is to cleanse ourselves from the *yetzer hora*, who is called the ‘yeast in the sourdough.’ It is essentially meant to cleanse us from *zuhama*.

The Mazal of Nissan: “T’leh” – The Lamb

The month of Nissan, “the head of the months”, is the root of the other months; therefore, its *mazal* is the root of the other *mazalos*.

The *mazal* of the month of Nissan is called ‘*t’leh*’ (טלה), the lamb, which is also called ‘*seh*,’ the calf, the animal used for the *korbon pesach* (paschal sacrifice); it is called *g’di* (the goat). It is written, “Pull, and take for you” – the Sages expound this to mean, “Pull away your hands from idol worship, and take a *korbon pesach*”.

The depth of this matter is as follows. The *mazal* of Nissan, which is *t’leh* (טלה), (the lamb), is the opposite of the word לט, *lat*, “curse.” When a person sins, he causes ruination to himself. When man sinned, he ruined the earth. *T’leh* טלה (or the *korbon pesach*) contains the letters ט and ל, which alludes to the ל"ט מלאכות (the 39 forms of forbidden labor on Shabbos); for *melachah* (labor) is a curse placed upon mankind. When the *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt, they rectified the sin of Adam, who was ruined through the curse of *melachah* (or ‘39 *melachos*’) placed upon him. The exodus from Egypt revealed the aspect of “*V'nahei*”, the cleansing and purification process of the Jewish

people, which cleanses mankind from the curse and ruination that was placed upon us from the sin. This was the secret behind the *t'leh*/טלה (otherwise known as the *korbon pesach*) – the opposite of the state of being “cursed” (טל).

The word *t'leh*/טלה is also related to the word טל/*tal*, the dew. The dew has a special nature of transforming curse into blessing. In the future, the revival of the dead will happen through dew, the *tal techias hameisim*, which will transform the ruined into the blessed.

Thus, the exodus of Egypt cleansed our souls. When Adam sinned, mankind fell into a cursed level, to the “yeast in the sourdough” [the evil inclination], the *zuhama* (spirit of impurity) of the Snake. This was what created a need for the subjugation to Egypt: to cleanse us from the cursed state of mankind, from the *zuhama* of the Snake, and to return us to the perfect state of Adam before the sin. The exodus from Egypt began the purification process, and when Hashem said “*Serve G-d, on this mountain*”, this was the complete level of the rectification.

Nissan: The Month of Renewal

The purification process of the Jewish begins, though, with the month of Nissan. The month of Nissan is called “*Hachodesh hazeh lachem*” (This month shall be to you) – it represents the power of *chiddush* (renewal), from the word “*chodesh*” (*month*).

What is the power of *chiddush*/renewal that is present in the month of Nissan? When Adam sinned, Creation entered a ruined state, it became *lat*/cursed, and in the month of Nissan, we have the power to be cleansed from that cursed state which mankind fell into ever since the sin of Adam. This is the secret behind the concept of *teshuvah* (repentance), in which a person becomes like a ‘*berya chadashah*’, a new being; the Rambam says that when a person does *teshuvah*, he must view himself as a totally new person, who is not the same person as before.

The power that we have to be cleansed from sin, “*V'nakei*”, to become a new being, is reminiscent of a convert, who is considered to be like a child born anew. When we left Egypt, we gained the status of being a like a newborn child; we became entirely new. And when we stood at Sinai, we were like converts. A newborn child and a conversion to Judaism are both examples of being born anew. Thus, the month of Nissan, represented by the *mazal* of *t'leh* (lamb), bears the power of renewal to the Jewish people, to cleanse us from the sins of before and to make us completely new. It is the power to begin again anew.

On one hand, there is a continuation in Creation, of the same reality. From that perspective alone, *teshuvah* is not possible. But Hashem gave us the power of *chiddush*, to renew ourselves – to be cleansed from all previous damage. Nissan is called the ‘head of the months’, the month that is renewal and cleanses us from the past. How does the *t'leh*/lamb [which is the *mazal* of Nissan] cleanse us off from sin? It is through the soul’s power of *chiddush* (renewal), which is alluded to in the words, “*Hachodesh hazeh lachem.*” When Moshe Rabbeinu was taught about the *mitzvah* of *kiddush hachodesh* (sanctifying the new month), he found it to be difficult. The depth of this is because it was the *mitzvah* about Rosh Chodesh, which is a beginning, and “all beginning are hard”, *Chazal* teach. But the difficulty of the beginning can be mitigated when a person makes sure to begin completely anew.

The Depth of Bechirah: Choosing To Begin Anew

Earlier we brought from the *Gemara* that man has *mazal*, which *Rashi* defines as being a “*bar daas*”. This refers to man’s power of *bechirah* (free will) – man can choose between good and evil, but on a deeper level, man can choose

to begin from a new start, and that is the depth of how we use our *bechirah*. The *Sforno* writes that our *bechirah* is to choose to imitate Hashem's ways, just as Hashem 'chooses', so to speak, to act kind and compassionate.

How does Hashem 'choose'? He chooses to renew His creation every day. As it is written, "*He renews, in His goodness, the act of Creation, every day.*" This is the "*bechirah*" which Hashem chooses, so to speak – He chooses to utilize His *daas*, to begin everything anew each moment.

Renewal Is Exclusive To The Jew's Soul

This is the depth of the exodus from Egypt: to separate from the previous situation, and to begin from new. When we left Egypt, we were born as a nation, and we received the power from then onward to be able to totally begin again anew, no matter what previous situation we are in.

The nations of the world begin from the New Year, but they do not have the power of a new month. Therefore, a gentile does not possess the power of renewal in his soul. Only through conversion, can a gentile ever gain the power to become renewed – and the depth of this is, because only a Jew has the power of renewal.

Renewal & Continuation

There are really two sides to *mazal*. So far, we have explained 'one side of the coin': the power of renewal. But there is 'another side to the coin': the fact that we descend from the *Avos* (our forefathers), for "the merit of our *Avos* did not cease". In that sense, we are a continuation of our great past, of the *Avos*. This is the opposite power of renewal: it is the power to continue the past.

So there are really two opposite powers we possess: the power of renewal, to change our situation – and the power of continuation, which is to continue the same situation as before. These two concepts contradict each other, but our soul is built from these two contradictory forces. If we would only have the power of renewal, a person could come to deny the reality of sin, *chas v'shalom*, by always believing that he can be renewed himself after he sins, and he loses his concept of consequence for sin.

Yet, if a person were to only believe in his power of continuation of the *Avos*, and he is unaware of his power of renewal, such a mindset is imprisoning to the soul; if he were to be in Egypt, he would believe that he can never leave it, *chas v'shalom*, because it is an exile decreed from the times of the *Avos*, and there is no way out, no way to be renewed...

Renewal (*chiddush*) is the power that we have which can help us rise from all past failure and sin. However, it needs to be balanced with its opposite power, the power of continuation (*hamshachah*), in order for it to be properly used and not taken overdone. Only if we have already developed the power to continue from the past, can we know how to use the power of renewal properly.

Two Levels of Repentance: Renewal, and Renewal With Continuation

Based on the above, we can understand a deeper difference between two levels of *teshuvah* (repentance): *teshuvah m'yirah*, repenting out of fear, and *teshuvah m'ahavah*, repenting out of love.

The *Gemara* says that when a person does *teshuvah m'yirah*, although his sins are forgiven, the sins do not become transformed into merits; but with *teshuvah m'ahavah*, not only is he forgiven, but even his sins become transformed into merits. The understanding of this is that with *teshuvah m'yirah*, a person wants to disconnect from his past sins and move on; he gains the ability of renewal, but he is missing the concept of continuation of the past. But with *teshuvah m'ahavah*, the person is not only forging a new beginning; he is still connected to the past and continues it. Thus, his sins become transformed into merits for him.

The Inner Mazal: “Notzar Chessed L’Alafim”

Thus, there are two aspects of *mazal* in every Jew. There is the aspect of “*Notzar Chessed L’Alafim*” (or *hashpaah/hamshachah*), and there is the aspect of “*V’nakei*” (*taharah*).

The power of *V’nakei/taharah* is essentially the power of *chiddush/renewal*, to be cleansed and to become new, disconnecting from the past situation. But there is a power even deeper than this: along with becoming renewed, a person also needs to acknowledge his past [the *Avos* that he comes from]. This is the more inner kind of *mazal* [which, as it was explained earlier, is only for the original souls of the Jewish people, and not converts]: “*Notzar Chessed L’Alafim*”. The concept of *Notzar Chessed L’Alafim* implies that Hashem remembers the merits of previous generations, for thousands of generations to come.

If you think about it, we haven’t even gone through thousands of generations yet, and this is not even possible within the allotted time span for Creation. So what does it mean that Hashem remembers the merits of our *Avos*, for thousands of generations to come? It means that there is a constant continuation of those merits.

The Balance Between Continuation and Renewal

Nissan is called, “*HaChodesh Hazeh lachem*” (“This month shall be to you”), from the word *chiddush/renewal*, which hints to the renewal contained in it. But it is also called “*Rishon hu lachem, l’chol chodshei hashanah*” (“The first it shall be to you, for all the months of the year”) – the *posuk* also mentions that Nissan contains a “*shannah*” (year) aspect besides for its “*choidesh*” (month) aspect. The ‘*shannah*’ aspect mentioned in the *posuk* alludes to the other power of the month of Nissan: continuation of the past. It is essentially the power to return to a previous situation.

Thus, we need [a balance of these] two opposite abilities, which are both present in the month of Nissan: the power of renewal, and the power to return to the past.

Understandably, the powers of renewal and continuation (returning to the past) are opposite concepts of each other, and they are in contradiction. If someone is not a *bar daas*, he does not know how to contain these two opposites. One who possesses *daas*, though, understands the secret of incorporating opposing and contradicting abilities within himself.

So on one hand, we must be able to renew ourselves, which is to change ourselves. On the other hand, we need to be able to attach ourselves with the Reality that never changes. When we have these two abilities together and they are in proper balance of each other, this is the perfection of a Jew’s soul.

The *mazal* of Nissan is the *t'leh* (the lamb), which symbolizes the renewal, the ability to disconnect from the past, for as we explained, *t'leh* is related to the word *tal*, the dew, which symbolizes new beginnings; in the future, the dew will revive the dead.

On the other hand, as we explained, Nissan also contains a power that is the opposite of renewal: the power to continue the past, the same-old reality that never changes. This is also known as *sichah*, talking, the ability that is also associated with the month of Nissan²². *Sichah* is when a person talks simply about what he enjoys, and he can keep talking about it, continuing his conversation more and more, because he is enjoying the conversation so much.

The non-changing aspect of the soul is a deeper power than our power of renewal. In the non-changing aspect of our soul, we connect to the same-old reality that never changes; to the timeless aspect known as “*Ask your fathers, and they will say to you; you elders, and they will tell you*”. This is what lies behind the concept of “*Notzar Chessed L'Alafim*”, the inner aspect of *mazal*; it is the fact that we received a tradition passed down from our forefathers.

But as we explained, this alone will not suffice. Although we must continue the great past of our *Avos*, which is our power to be connected to the past, we also need the power of renewal, so that we can become a whole new being, and leave past failures behind.

In Conclusion

May we merit from Hashem to connect to *havayah*, to the unchanging dimension of reality [which will be fully revealed in the future], along with the renewal [of the future] in which Hashem will renew His world, with the coming of the complete redemption; may it come speedily. Amen.

²² For more on “*sichah*” in the month of Nissan, see *Essence of Rosh Chodesh_ 01_Nissan _Speech and Prayer as well as Rosh Chodesh Avodah_01_Nissan_Speech*

ראש חודש שבט 001 – ניסן – יהודה

5 | *Nissan – The Tribe of Yehudah*

Nissan – The Tribe of Yehudah

The Vilna *Gaon* writes that the twelve months of the year are parallel to the twelve *shevatim* (tribes). There are many different opinions in the writings of our Rabbis concerning which months are parallel to which of the 12 tribes. According to some opinions, the month of Nissan represents the tribe of Yehudah.

Yehudah: The Expression of Hodaah (Giving Thanks)

When Yehudah was born, his mother Leah expressed thanks for him, saying, “*This time, I thank Hashem.*” The name Yehudah is rooted in the word *hodaah*, thanks, because Leah felt thankful to Hashem over his birth.

As our Sages say, being that Yaakov *Avinu* had four wives²³, and our matriarchs knew through prophecy that 12 sons would come from Yaakov *Avinu*, the natural order of events would have been that 3 children would come from each mother [4x3=12]. Therefore, Leah thought she would not beget more than the 3 children to Yaakov. When she saw that she was given a fourth child, she realized that Hashem was giving her even more than her allotted portion of children. Thus, she had special reason to thank Hashem.

The *Gemara*²⁴ says that Leah was the first person in history to give *hodaah* (thanks) to Hashem, when she gave *hodaah* to Hashem over the birth of Yehudah. However, there is also a deeper understanding to this, as we will see.

‘Hodaah’: Through Denying Idol Worship

The *posuk* in the *Megillah* says that Mordechai was called “*ish yehudi*” [which simply means that he descended from Yehudah]. The *Gemara* expounds upon this that “Whoever denies idol worship, is called a ‘*Yehudi*’ (a Jew).” Mordechai fought the trend of idol worship in his times, thus he earned the title of ‘*ish Yehudi*’. Thus, a denial of heresy, along with acknowledging the existence of Hashem, is what constitutes being called a ‘*yehudi*’. If so, *hodaah* is not just about admitting to something. It is about denying the other alternative.

The Torah records that Esav married a woman whose name was “Yehudis”. *Chazal* explain that her name was called Yehudis because she denied idol worship, and anyone who denies idol worship is called ‘*yehudi*’. Esav married her with the agenda of impressing his father Yitzchok, marrying a righteous woman who didn’t serve idols, which would get his father to think that he had given up his ways of idol worship. [In reality, this was all a deception, and later we will explain more about this].

So the root of the term *yehudi/hodaah* is not just about acknowledging Hashem. It involves a denial of idol worship, and from that, faith and acknowledgment in Hashem can then become revealed.

²³ The two *Imahos*, Rachel and Leah; and the two maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah.

²⁴ Talmud Bavli: Tractate Berachos: Chapter Nine

'Hodaah': 'Bittul'/Nullification

There is another aspect to Yehudah's name. In the episode of Yehudah and Tamar, Yehudah admitted to Tamar that she was correct; "*She is more righteous than me.*" Chazal praise Yehudah in this act for the fact that he "admitted, and he was not ashamed", and because of this meritorious act, Yehudah merited that the kingdom of David descended from him. This paved the roots of Mashiach and the future redemption.

The *Gemara* says that our matriarch Rachel is praised for "grabbing onto the art of silence", whereas Leah is praised for the "grabbing onto the art of gratitude". We see that the *hodaah* which Leah revealed is expressed as well in the life of her son Yehudah, who is associated with that very *hodaah*, as follows.

The *Gemara* states that Yosef sanctified the name of Hashem in private²⁵, thus he merited that a letter of Hashem be added to his name; there is *possuk* in the Torah which names Yosef as "*Yehoisaf*", so we see that a letter ה was added onto his name; whereas Yehudah sanctified Hashem's name in public²⁶, thus he merits the full name of Hashem in his name²⁷.

Thus, there is a deeper aspect to the *hodaah* in Yehudah's name. It wasn't just because Leah felt gratitude to Hashem that she had been given more than her allotted portion of children. It was because *hodaah* implies admitting to something, which is the trait of nullifying oneself. This is called *bittul* (nullification).

Even more so, *hodaah* implies a denial of something else. In order for a person to give *hodaah* to Hashem, he has to first deny idol worship. After denying heresy, a person can then have faith in Hashem and be thankful to Him. So in order for a person to be "*modeh al ha'emes*" – to admit to the truth – he has to first deny the opposite of truth.

The deepest implication of *hodaah* is when Hashem's Name is sanctified in public. The *Gemara* says that because Yehudah sanctified Hashem's Name in public [through being '*modeh*' to Tamar], he merited to have Hashem's Name of *havayah* revealed in his own name.

Denying Idol Worship: The Incomplete Level of 'Hodaah'

Let us reflect more about Yehudah and the root concept behind his name, *hodaah*.

As explained above, *hodaah* implies a denial of the alternative option. In order to 'admit' that Hashem exists, one has to deny the existence of other gods, or else his *hodaah* is not a true *hodaah*. If I believe in Hashem, that means I must deny that there are other gods. Thus, all *hodaah* implies a denial of something else. As the *Gemara* says, a Jew is only called '*Yehudi*' if he denies idol worship.

If this is the definition, though, such *hodaah* is not the complete level of *hodaah*, for it involves an element of denial. Although the denial here is a denial of idol worship, which strengthens the admittance to one's belief in Hashem, the entire such *hodaah* is based on the fact that idols are denied, which makes the *hodaah* incomplete. It is *hodaah* only in the sense of the denial of idol worship [and it is not *hodaah* for the sake of *hodaah*]. It is reminiscent of the case in the *Gemara* of '*modeh b'miktzas*'²⁸, one who admits partially to a claim. In the case of *modeh b'miktzas*,

²⁵ By the confrontation with the wife of Potiphar, when he refrained from sinning with her

²⁶ When he admitted publicly that he was wrong and that Tamar was correct

²⁷ The name "Yehudah" contains the four letter name of Havayah

²⁸ Bava Metzia 3b

he admits partially to the claim, but he denies the other half that he isn't admitting to. The entire *hodaah* is based on a *kefirah* (denial) of something else. It is thus called *modeh b'miktzas*.

Thus, the *hodaah* of Leah over the birth of Yehudah wasn't the complete level of *hodaah*. Her *hodaah* to Hashem was based on the fact that she received more than her allotted portion of children; this came at the expense of the other wives of Yaakov Avinu, who would now bear less children, now that more children were being given to Leah. Since her *hodaah* came at the expense of others, we can view it as an incomplete kind of *hodaah*, because her *hodaah* implied that she is getting her part, while the others are being denied their part.

Thus, any *hodaah* which results in a deficiency to another, cannot be called complete *hodaah*. Whenever it comes to interpersonal relationships with others, any *hodaah* that one expresses will imply that he has received what others didn't receive, so the *hodaah* is incomplete. By contrast, the complete level of *hodaah* is only when my *hodaah* isn't causing any deficiency to another; when it isn't coming at the expense of another.

Incomplete "Hodaah"

Thus, when *hodaah* is a denial of something else, or when it comes at the expense of another, it is the incomplete level of *hodaah*. Such *hodaah* is only considered *hodaah* from the perspective of this "world of falsity" that we live in. [In contrast, true *hodaah* comes from a higher dimension than this world of falsity].

The *Sforno* says that Yehudah was not the first person to be named Yehudah. The wife of Esav, Yehudis, preceded him. Yehudis denied idol worship, thus she is called Yehudis, for anyone who denies idol worship is called "Yehudi". Why indeed did Esav marry a righteous woman who denies idol worship? He wanted to trick Yitzchok Avinu by making him think that he married a righteous woman. If so, the entire *hodaah* of his wife Yehudis is a *hodaah* that was false! It represents a kind of *hodaah* which isn't about admitting for the sake of the truth. The true and complete kind of *hodaah* is being done for the sake of the truth, and not for any other personal reason.

Thus, *hodaah* is incomplete when it is based on a denial of the alternative option. Such *hodaah* involves an element of falsity, and it is represented by the false *hodaah* of Esav, in his marriage to Yehudis. The *hodaah* found on This World includes both admitting and denial; the "denial" aspect in it makes it incomplete, for true *hodaah* does not come from a denial of something else.

Complete 'Hodaah'

Where do we find a revelation of complete *hodaah*? It is hinted to in the words of the *Gemara* we brought earlier: Yehudah sanctified the name of Hashem in public, and because of this, he merited that the four-letter Name of Hashem (*havayah*) be part of his name. This is a kind of *hodaah* (admittance) which does not come due to any denial of something else.

It was revealed in this world by the giving of the Torah, when Hashem said, "I am Hashem, your G-d." This was a revelation of the ultimate *hodaah*, the belief in Hashem's existence, before there was any mention or possibility of other gods. It was a kind of *hodaah* that is above this world entirely. Such *hodaah* is not coming for the purpose of denying other gods; it is coming to state the existence of Hashem. It is not about a denial of falsity. It is a revelation that there is only one option in reality, as opposed to "two" options (belief in Hashem vs. belief in idols and falsity).

The higher revelation of *emunah* is when it is revealed there is only “one” option – faith in Hashem - as opposed to ‘choosing’ between the ‘two’ options (faith vs. heresy). When one’s *emunah* is crystal clear, there is no possibility of another option. When one’s *emunah* is not that clear, though, although he can still have *emunah*, his *emunah* is being questioned, because he sees ‘another’ option.

This can be compared to *Chazal*’s critique of Noach for being one who ‘believes, yet doesn’t believe.’ With such *emunah*, a person believes in Hashem and admits to His existence, denying any other possibility, but he is still retaining the ‘option’ that there is another ‘possibility’. He still has doubts, and he wonders about other possibilities. As is well-known, doubts are induced by the force of Amalek in the world. When a person has any doubts in his *emunah*, Amalek has some hold on him. When *emunah* is clear, there are no doubts, no trace of Amalek. With such *emunah*, there is no need in the first place to deny the notion of false gods.

Thus, the *hodaah* represented by Yehudah is not complete *hodaah*, for it involved a denial of something else (it came at the expense of the other wives of Yaakov *Avinu*, who would now have less children, now that Leah is being given more children). Therefore, all *hodaah* which we recognize in This World is incomplete, for it is within the perspective of the current 6000 year era we are in.

Nissan, Yehudah, and Redemption

In the month of Nissan, we were redeemed, and *Chazal* state that in the future, we will be redeemed as well, in the month of Nissan. This has its roots in Yehudah, whom the month of Nissan represents. Yosef was the first to go down to Egypt. He represents the exile. Yehudah represents the power to leave the exile. How do we see this? *Chazal* state that Yehudah established a yeshiva in Goshen, in Egypt, for the duration of the exile. This laid the hidden roots for the redemption from Egypt.

In Nissan, we will be redeemed, and the redemption comes through the power of Yehudah. However, it will not be through the ‘*hodaah*’ aspect of Yehudah, which is incomplete. The future redemption will not be about denying other gods so that Hashem can be revealed. Rather, the future redemption will be like Yehudah’s act of sanctifying Hashem’s Name of public – a complete *hodaah*, a *hodaah* for the sake of revealing His name of ‘*havayah*.’ When the name of *havayah* is revealed in the future, it will be revealed then that Hashem “was, is, and will be”, the only ‘one’ option that exists.

The Sages state that nowadays, the Throne of Hashem is incomplete, due to the presence of Amalek, who does not allow for the complete revelation of Hashem’s Name. In the future, when Amalek will be erased, there will be no more possibility of doubts, and the *emunah* in Hashem will be absolute and definite.

This is the depth of “In Nissan, in the future, they [the Jewish nation] will be redeemed.” It will be revealed then the complete level of ‘*hodaah*’ that is present in Yehudah’s name, the revelation of a reality in which there are no other possibilities, other than the full acknowledgement of Hashem’s existence.

Nissan: The Time To Reach The Complete Level of Emunah

During this time of the year, Nissan, we can reveal the more complete level of *emunah*, in which there are no ‘two’ possibilities, and that there is only ‘one’ possibility: our complete *emunah* in Hashem.

When we see *hester* (concealment) in creation, our simple way to deal with this is to choose to have *emunah*, rather than focus on the *hester*. But the deeper method, which reflects the *avodah* here we have been describing – the power of Yehudah, which is more revealed in the month of Nissan - is to view the *hester* as being part of our *emunah* itself. All *hester* that we see is somehow a part of our *emunah*, and is not in contradiction with it.

This is the concept of complete *hodaah*, of *emunah shelaimah* (complete faith), of Yehudah sanctifying the ‘Name of Hashem’ in public.

תפילה 0118 – ולירושלים

6 | *Yerushalayim In Place, Time and Soul*

Yerushalayim In Place, Time and Soul

ולירושלים עירך ברחמים תשוב We ask Hashem in this blessing to rebuild *Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem).

Mentioning *Yerushalayim* is one of the pillars that uphold the Jewish people. The *Gemara* says that when a person davens, he should direct his heart to *Eretz Yisrael*, and when davening in *Eretz Yisrael*, one should face Jerusalem (and to the *Beis HaMikdash*, and within that, to the *Kodesh Kodashim*).

The Root of Jerusalem is Pesach

There were three times a year when we would trek to Jerusalem – by the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. Pesach is the root of all festivals, for it was when we first left Egypt. *Targum* says that the first time we sacrificed the *korbon pesach* was in Jerusalem, so our connection to *Yerushalayim* in time began on Pesach.

Today we have no *Beis HaMikdash*, but we have the spiritual light of the *Yomim Tovim* (festivals) in its stead. On Pesach, we left Egypt, and that spiritual light is still here, for each year we must imagine that we left Egypt.

We did not just leave Egypt to go to *Eretz Yisrael* - it was the time when we brought the *korbon pesach* (paschal sacrifice); it was the first time that we connected to the *Beis HaMikdash*. This is the essence of *Chodesh Nissan*, and specifically the festival of Pesach.

Holiness In Place, Time, and Soul

There is a concept of our Sages called “World, Time and Soul,”²⁹ that everything exists on three planes – in place, in time, and in our own soul. With regards to reaching holiness, there is holiness in a certain place in the world, as well as in a certain time of the year, and in our own soul.

The holiest place in the world is the *Kodesh Kodashim* (Holy of Holies) that was in the *Beis HaMikdash*. The time of holiness is found in the festivals. Holiness in our soul is reached when we are in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Our Sages state that Hashem first created Jerusalem, then *Eretz Yisrael*, and the rest of the world spread out from there. Jerusalem was the first place that was created. We find this with regards to our own soul as well. The *Gemara*³⁰ says that Adam’s head was created from *Eretz Yisrael*, and to be more specific, from Jerusalem (and the rest of his body was taken from Bavel).

We ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei* to rebuild the *Beis HaMikdash*. Just as there can be war on the place that is *Yerushalayim* - so can there be a ‘war’ on the *Yerushalayim* in our soul.

²⁹ *Sefer Yetzirah*, III
3030 *Sanhedrin* 38a

Yerushalayim In Disgrace

The nations of Edom and Yishmael are dominating *Yerushalayim* today. The city of Hashem lies in disgrace. The nations dominate here and contaminate its holiness!

The place of the *Kodesh Kodashim* itself is taken over by Arabs. And now, in our soul as well, ‘Edom\Esav’ and ‘Yishmael’, which are two root forces of evil in Creation, are also dominating our *Kodesh Kodashim* within: the evil is attacking our own souls.

The Sages revealed that there are three openings to Gehinnom. One place is in the desert; another place is in the ocean, which Yonah *HaNavi* saw. Another opening to Gehinnom is *Yerushalayim* itself. *Yerushalayim* is the place that unifies the tribes of Yisrael together, but when it is disgraced through impurity, it becomes the opening to Gehinnom!

This is true in the physical *Yerushalayim* as well as in the ‘*Yerushalayim*’ in time and in soul. Esav and Yishmael are dominating *Yerushalayim*, and now the ‘*Erev Rav*’ is dominating the *Yerushalayim* in the time, by controlling it and all that surrounds it. And in our soul as well – just as the place of *Yerushalayim* has become disgraced – so has it become lowered in our soul.

Vacations On Pesach – A Disgrace To The Holy Time of the Year

The three festivals, and especially Pesach, is the ‘*Yerushalayim*’ of time. The ‘*Yerushalayim*’ of today’s times has been lowered and disgraced from the true *Yerushalayim* that it is supposed to be.

It’s hard to believe this, but this is the painful reality we are in, when we are in the era preceding Moshiach: people who consider themselves to fear Hashem are using advertisements to sway the world of Torah, *bnei Torah*, to take vacations on Pesach to – to where? To **Austria?!** And it says there is a *hecsher* there with *mehadrin*. They aren’t advertising this to wayward people. They are advertising it to thousands of *bnei Torah*.

This is a total disgrace to our holiness. It is the time of Pesach, when we are supposed to mainly connect to the holiness of *Yerushalayim*, but now, the holiness of this time has been lowered and disgraced. Only the Angel of Death could devise this! Where is the holiness of the special times going?

Remembering ‘Yerushalayim’...

We ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei* to return *Yerushalayim* to us and rebuild it. One part of this request, which is the simple meaning of it, is to remember the destruction that took place here hundreds of years ago. The other part of this, which is deeper, is to remember the time of the three festivals - which are now being disgraced.

The holiness of this time, even in Eretz Yisrael, is being dominated by the forces of Esav, Yishmael, and Erev Rav. Instead of the rebuilding of *Yerushalayim*, a *ruach shtus* (spirit of folly) has come here. Anyone with a little *daas* is bothered by how such a thing can happen here.

Our head was created from *Yerushalayim*. People are basically falling from the head they were created from! The holiness of this place, this place which is the ‘beginning’ of all holiness, is being totally and utterly disgraced, and in the very month that is called the ‘beginning’ all the months.

The very place in which holiness manifests has become disgraced. We are being severed from our own heads [on a spiritual level]. The holiness of the three festivals is being concealed, and now we face an opening to *Gehinnom*, right here in *Yerushalayim*. When *Yerushalayim* is contaminated from its holiness, it goes from being the holiest place in the world, to become an opening to *Gehinnom*.

The air of Eretz Yisrael makes you grow wise; the wise scholars of Jerusalem were regarded to be the wisest, according to our Sages. But the holiness of Jerusalem, when it is damaged, causes the greatest confusion to our minds - whether it is being destroyed in place, time, or soul. We ask Hashem to return Jerusalem to us. This does not mean that we simply want this physical Jerusalem to be rebuilt; there are some people, *rachmana litzlan*, who erroneously think that they have already merited to see the rebuilding of Jerusalem just because they see it.

Yerushalayim: A Perfect Place – Or An Opening To Gehinnom

Yerushalayim is from the word “*yarei shaleim*”, one who “fears perfection.” The *Ramchal* describes this as *yiras hashveleimus* – the soul’s demand for perfection.

This is what is behind our prayer to rebuild Jerusalem: that perfection be restored. The “*Yerushalayim*” in our soul is when a person strives to become an *adam hashveleim* (spiritually perfected). By mentioning *Yerushalayim* all the time – not just superficially, but to think about its real concept – that is how we can truly seek *shveleimus*.

But when the holiness of *Yerushalayim* is being lowered, disgraced, and concealed from us, instead, the opposite of *shveleimus* comes. It is not just an absence of *shveleimus*. Rather, the antithesis to *shveleimus* comes here. The holiness of Jerusalem is opposed by the opening to *Gehinnom*, and then all the qualities of Jerusalem fall to the Other Side of Evil and are concealed.

Our Ultimate Choice To Make

Here we come to the true choice we must make. The main thing we must choose is *yiras shomayim*, for this is our whole *bechirah* (free will); for “everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven.” Our Rabbis wrote that in the era preceding Moshiach, the true power of *bechirah* will be revealed.

In previous generations, they didn’t have to use *bechirah* as much as we have to today. They didn’t face such evil like we are facing today. But now, when *Yerushalayim* is being disgraced and *shveleimus* is concealed, the truth is very covered over from us. Things which were never done here, things which people used to be embarrassed of doing here, nowadays, it has all entered *Yerushalayim*.

Now comes the true test of *bechirah*. People are swaying *bnei Torah* to disgrace the holy times of the year by going to these foreign places in the world, and now we are being tested with the ultimate choice: what will we choose? Will we really choose Hashem’s Will and we seek *shveleimus* - or the opposite of this, *rachmana litzlan*?

The previous generations never had to use *bechirah* like we have today. Today, we are being faced with choosing between good vs. the very *worst* kinds of evil. The depth of our power of free will is if we will choose to use our free will to become a *yarei shaleim* – to seek spiritual perfection; to *long* for it.

This is our inner and real meaning of our request to rebuild “*Yerushalayim*”. May we merit that rebuilding of “*Yerushalayim*” – speedily in our days. Amen.