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The purpose of this work is to show the way and impart the necessary insight to attain true perfection as defined by the Mesillas Yesharim. In his opening chapter he writes as follows: "The only true perfection is *deveikus* to HaShem. This is what David HaMelech referred to when he said: 'And as for me, closeness to HaShem is my good' (Tehillim73:28). Only this is good, while anything else deemed good by people is vanity and deceptive emptiness."

The ideas presented in this work are based on fundamental principles of the deeper aspects of Torah wisdom. But since not everyone is capable of comprehending these profound concepts, we, for the most part, have omitted our sources, and presented only the practical approach we have developed from these principles. If one desires to also understand the underlying concepts "the Torah is available for anyone who wishes to study it" (Kiddushin 79a).

The ideas presented here have a tendency to proliferate and digress into other topics, so we have made every effort not to stray from the main point which is how to achieve *deveikus* in a tangible and simple way. We have, therefore, greatly condensed the ideas and we have tried to omit any topics that will deflect the reader's attention from the central theme. Our intention is that it will always be clear to a person that his goal in life is attaining *deveikus* to HaShem.

1

The primary task of a person's service of HaShem is to clearly identify the purpose of his life.

Let us begin with a brief introduction.

Every Jew knows as a matter of course that there is a Creator Who created the world, including oneself. He also sustains the entire world, including oneself.

The Creator of the world tells each person what He expects of him. The root of the problem, however, lies in the fact that the person does not have a clear idea of what Hashem wants from him. What exactly does Hashem ask and expect him to do in his life?

One might ask, "Are we dealing with someone who does not know that we have a Torah given to us from Heaven? We have already received the Torah, which explains that man's purpose throughout his life is to fulfill the 613 mitzvos!"

However, the truth is that the world is called olam, which relates to the word he'elem, concealed, because here, in this world, there is tremendous confusion. It is HaShem's will that as long as one does not yearn and work very hard to ascertain precisely, "What does HaShem, your G-d, seek from you" (Devarim 10:12), he will not know it. His life will progress with confusion and obscurity, and he will not have a method of how to serve the Creator.

The point is that although undoubtedly, a person knows that he must keep the 613 mitzvos, service of Hashem is not merely the fulfillment of unrelated mitzvos whenever they present themselves. Rather, the 613 mitzvos must be fulfilled as if one is building an edifice, so that the mitzvos will build a person properly. Therefore, there needs to be a clearly defined method of fulfilling the mitzvos in an organized, structured form. One must know what is to be the beginning of the structure, its continuation, and what is the goal of fulfilling all the mitzvos. In other words, a person must clarify how fulfilling mitzvos builds his soul, and what process to follow in order to achieve this.

There are six hundred and thirteen mitzvos given to man, but he must identify and choose with which of these mitzvos to begin. (Obviously, there are mitzvos that apply daily, and those that apply at specific times, and we know when to fulfill them. We are not discussing these.) There is a mitzvah to love Hashem, and a mitzvah to fear Him, and another mitzvah to cleave to Him, and many such mitzvos. One must put them into a set order. Not knowing the correct order, is a state of he'elem. When there is he'elem, it is difficult to attain the goal of the mitzvos.

2

First of all, before attempting to clarify these issues, there must exist a true desire to gain clarity in these matters. One must view life in a correct manner, understanding what our situation is in this world, namely, that our entire life is only for the purpose of serving HaShem. It is our obligation, as well as our privilege, to clarify the meaning of our life here. We must understand and appreciate that the place for our ultimate rest and pleasure is the world of reward, Gan Eden, Olam Haba etc.. Our entire purpose here in this world is to serve Hashem. We must identify a solid path which we will follow in order to serve Him.

The matters we will deal with here are not abstract ideas or the like, but a way of life in the most literal sense - a program of how to live a true life on earth, a life that brings a person to the desired goal. We will endeavor to clarify the issues proceeding from easier levels to more difficult ones, step by step, presenting a ladder of growth that is as clear to understand as possible. In this way, we will see before us a well established path for serving Hashem.

3

If we would ask people: What is your initial assumption considering your present state as to the most worthwhile and appropriate area in which to start your avodas Hashem? One person might respond that it seems to him that his weak point is diligence in Torah study, and that from his point of view, that is the first area he must start working on to rectify. Another will reply that on self-introspection he finds lashon hara to be his vulnerable point. He feels that he is not careful enough about guarding his tongue. Here and there words that are improper or forbidden escape his lips. A third would say that the way he views his situation, the issue he must deal with is shalom bayis. He feels that this is something he must deal with - fast. He does not have enough patience with his family members. He does not include them sufficiently in his decision making process, and he does not provide adequate emotional support. And so, we would find many varied responses among people. It would seem,

therefore, that each person needs his own tailor-made response as to what is the correct path to follow, depending on his unique situation. However, the truth is not quite so. Rather, there is one point that everyone, almost without exception, must begin with.

4

Every one of us has been sent from the higher worlds down to this world. Those who were worthy were sent here from Gan Eden, and those who were not, were sent here from Gehinnom. The common denominator is that we all returned here to this world to serve the Creator, blessed be He. Why did we return to this world? Some people are familiar with the sefarim hakedoshim and have seen in them that each person has returned in order to correct at least one sin. That sin is his main test, and is the main issue he must rectify in this world. But the truth is that even if a person is sent to rectify a particular sin, his work does not begin with the correction of that sin, but much prior to that. (This is generally the case, although there are some exceptions.) One can talk about fixing something when, for example, there is a house that has something damaged, such as a wall, a door, or the like. Then, one can say that the damage must be repaired. But if there isn't even a house, there is no need to fix anything. You first need a house, and then, there can be a need to fix it.

This is also the case with our avodah of the Creator in this world. Even if in fact, a person has come down here to rectify a particular sin, that does not mean that his entire task is only to rectify that sin, and that his work starts and finishes there. Rather, each person must first develop himself, building in his soul a well-founded structure of avodas Hashem. Only after he has built himself in a true way, will his main work be rectifying the sin for which he was sent into this world. But, he first needs a well-founded structure in the soul, a sound framework of avodas Hashem which is properly set up and well-defined.

Furthermore, there are cases when a person rectifies the sin of his previous incarnation in a few minutes. Is the rest of his life, then, a waste? Definitely not! Rather, it is clear that each person must build up his soul from beginning to end, and in addition, pay special attention to the sin for which he was sent back into this world. If so, we see that that particular detail is not his main work at all times. Rather there is a general reason as to why all people come down to this world. One must first clarify what this reason is, and when that becomes clear, it must be forever present in his mind, and kept in sight at all times. This is necessary so that every moment he is alive, the reason why he is alive at that moment must guide his life. One must therefore live with this purpose in mind day after day, hour after hour, literally attending to it each moment. That is to say that the knowledge of the reason for our existence is not an ordinary piece of information, but rather, one to which one's entire life must be attuned. Therefore, each moment, one must adapt his thoughts, feelings, and deeds to this reason. When a person knows and understands the reason for his existence, he will understand that even his personal rectification is connected to this general reason and is really part of it.

5

We will provide an example: A carpenter takes a saw in one hand and a board in the other and begins to saw. If while sawing the board, his thoughts are preoccupied with other matters and he does not put his mind to the task, it is likely that the cut will be faulty, the board will slip out of his hand, or he might, G-d forbid, even cut his hand. This may happen even though when he took the saw in hand, he knew clearly what he was doing and why he was doing it, and he knows how to use this saw. Nevertheless, when he is actually sawing, all this escapes his mind, and he is thinking about something else completely.

The same applies to our discussion. Chazal have said (Sanhedrin 7a) that a judge must imagine that a sword is placed between his thighs (and a small error would be dangerous). Rav Yisrael Salanter zt"l has said that this applies to each person, for everyone is a judge over himself. Our work in this world is comparable to the case of the carpenter. If, chas veshalom, one is distracted from the purpose and goal of life, he is in constant danger. Thus, after one clarifies for oneself the purpose of one's life, he must live with this knowledge on a daily basis, hour by hour, literally "tested moment by moment" (Iyov 7:18). The knowledge of the purpose of life is not just a fact that one hears about, writes down, and then files away for the record, cleaning off the dust once a year before Pesach. This knowledge must be experienced, lived, and breathed, so that one is totally attuned to it.

6

What, in fact, is the purpose of man's life in his world? The purpose of life is well-known, yet it is not really known. It is well-known, because one reads about it, hears about it, and so on. Yet in truth, it is not known. If one would know it properly (the Hebrew word for knowledge is yediah, which means connection), and would be attached to the information, his whole way of life would necessarily change. If a person would apply the entire weight of his spiritual energy toward this fact, and he had a live, burning commitment to the truth, he would take a paper and pen and record for himself the purpose of his life. He would place this paper in his pocket and take it out every quarter of an hour or so, in order to constantly remind himself about it, so that this fact will not be forgotten by him and he will live by it.

7

What, in truth, is the purpose of a man in his world? The words of the Mesillas Yesharim (Ch. 1) are known. He wrote, "The truth is that the only true perfection is deveikus to Hashem. This is what David Hamelech declared: "As for me, closeness to Hashem is my good..." (Tehillim 73:28). In other words, if one wants to know what makes a man fulfilled, he should consider what David HaMelech understood to be good for himself. If it was good for him, it is good for every single one of us. He said, "As for me, closeness to Hashem is my good."

No one is interested in a broken table or chair. No one wants to sleep on a broken bed. All the more so, deep down, no one wants to be a broken person, but rather, a complete person. (There is a concept of a broken heart, but that is not relevant here.) What is a complete Jew? One who doesn't lack hands? Who doesn't lack legs? No, that is only superficial completeness, bodily completeness. True completeness, namely, the inner completeness of the soul, is derived from closeness to Hashem. As the Ramchal wrote in Mesillas Yesharim (Ch. 1), "The truth is that the only true perfection (the true perfection of every single person without exception) is deveikus to Hashem." And he concludes, "Anything else considered good by people is vanity and deceptive emptiness."

This is all a Jew really has in life - closeness to Hashem and deveikus to Him. The entire essence of a Jew is to be close to Hashem and to cleave to Him. It is not only in the World to Come that a man's ultimate purpose is to cleave to the Creator. Even here in this world, man's task and purpose is to cleave to the Creator. Any moment that a person does not cleave to the Creator, he is for that moment, an incomplete human being. He lacks true completeness, which is deveikus to Hashem.

8

A sincere person, who hears these words and truly accepts them in his soul, must take these words of the Ramchal and write them on a sheet of paper and place the sheet in his pocket. About every fifteen minutes he will remove the paper from his pocket, and contemplate its contents well, (so that these words will be before his eyes at all times). He will remind himself constantly: Why am I here? What is the purpose of my life? The answer is: deveikus to Hashem. He will read the words again and again until they stand alive before his eyes and he no longer needs to look at the paper. He will live with a clear inner conviction of the purpose of life and will constantly seek ways to apply it.

9

The time during which a person recalls the purpose of his life is the time in which he is truly alive (other than the time in which he is learning Torah, as will be explained later, with the help of Hashem). For the rest of the time, during which he is engaged in other things without remembering the Creator, he is as if dead. A person needs to be revived from this death at all times. The revival will be by remembering why he is alive and what his purpose is in this world. Even when a person fulfils mitzvos, he must remember that the essence of a mitzvah lies in its connection to the root - tzavta, companionship, as the sefarim hakedoshim explain. That is to say, the ultimate purpose of mitzvos is to become a companion (tzavta) to the Creator, to be close and attached to Him. Without this realization, the main inner essence of the mitzvah is lacking, and it is like a body without a soul.

"Hashem and the Torah and Yisrael are one" (Zohar 3:73a). That is to say, the Torah, - its learning, and the fulfillment of its mitzvos - must be kept in a manner that brings to unity, in a way that enables man to cleave to the Torah and to the Creator. This is the purpose of one's life: attachment to the Torah and to Hashem.

10

"Closeness to Hashem is my good." This is not merely a piece of information or a slogan; it is the reality of life. It does not merely apply to PesachorShavuosorSuccos. It applies to every moment of one's life, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day (for someone who merits cleaving to the Creator even in his sleep), 60 minutes an hour. This is the entire existence of man - to be close to the Creator and to cleave to Him, to feel that, "closeness to Hashem is my good." Certainly, to live in this way, one needs a clearly-defined method in his avodas Hashem how to attain deveikus to the Creator literally every moment. But before we describe the method to attain this, the purpose of life must be absolutely clear to a person, beyond any shadow of a doubt. It must be clear to him that the purpose of life is to feel close and attached to the Creator literally every moment -- an inner attachment with every fiber of one's being. In other words, before we begin to seek and describe the method, it must be absolutely clear which path we seek, and where we want it to lead us. There must, therefore, be absolute clarity that the goal is "closeness to Hashem is my good." This is the point that each individual must clarify completely to himself, until he really feels in his soul that this point, the purpose of life, is clear without any doubt.

Sometimes, while a person is clarifying for himself that the purpose of his life is closeness to Hashem, he may believe and entertain the thought that in order to cleave to the Creator, one must be removed from the world like Moshe Rabbeinu was, and be completely detached from all worldly matters. He should know that such a thought is a product of the advice of the yetzer hara, who wants to distance

a person from the truth and from the Creator. He tries, therefore, to portray closeness to Hashem in black colors, as something appropriate for only unique individuals, but for someone like you (he suggests), there is nothing to speak of.

Yet, the truth is that the Ramchal clearly states just the opposite. The Ramchal, based his work Mesillas Yesharim on the teaching of Rav Pinchas ben Yair, who starts with the most basic level. He states that Torah study leads to watchfulness and progresses until the levels of Ruach Hakodesh and the ability to revive the dead. At the end of his work, after he directs the individual toward attaining these high and lofty levels, he writes as follows (Ch. 26): "And you, pleasant reader, must realize as I do, that I have not completed in this work all the principles of saintliness.... It is obvious that each person, depending on his trade and his occupation, needs direction and guidance. The path of saintliness fitting for someone who is solely occupied with Torah study is not the path of saintliness appropriate for one who needs to hire himself out to work for another. And neither of these is the path of saintliness suited for someone who is engaged in commerce. And the same applies to all the details of a person's involvement in the world. Each person, according to his situation, has aspects of saintliness suitable for him. It is not that the essence of saintliness changes, for it is certainly applicable to everyone, since it is nothing other than acting in a way that pleases the Creator. However, since the conditions are different, it is impossible that the means leading to the goal will not change for each person according to his circumstances. One can be a complete saint if, due to necessity, he performs lowly work, just as much as one whose mouth does not pause from learning." (This must be a real necessity, not laziness about learning Torah. This needs a true evaluation to ensure that he is not, chas veshalom, in the category of those who have forsaken the Torah. He must take counsel from a great man regarding this issue.) It is evident from his words that one can be a pious person who cleaves to his Creator to the extent that he will achieve Ruach Hakodesh and the ability to revive the dead, regardless of his occupation, be it Torah study or labor. This is provided that all his deeds are done truly for the sake of Heaven. He studies Torah to the extent that his time and ability allow, and he works only as much as is absolutely necessary and that too for the sake of Heaven. We see from this that **anyone can cleave to the Creator, and this is not limited to rare individuals who are removed from all worldly matters.**

We have learned, then, that first a person must fully clarify for himself that the purpose of life is to achieve closeness to Hashem. After that, he must be convinced that this is fully relevant to him, and that he is fit and qualified for this, beyond any shadow of a doubt.

11

Before we clarified the obligation and purpose of a person in his world, we introduced an idea and wrote that when the nature of one's obligation and purpose becomes clear to a person, he must remember this purpose throughout the day. He must write for himself his purpose, and about every quarter of an hour, he should take it out of his pocket and read it, so that his purpose will always stand before him. If so, now that we have clarified that the purpose of a person in his world is closeness to Hashem and deveikus to Him, one must write on a sheet of paper that his purpose is to be close to the Creator, and try to remember it throughout the day, as we said above.

This is knowledge about life itself, about the essence of life, not just another piece of information. The following parable will help clarify what we mean: A person climbs into a tree, and sits on one of the branches. Suddenly, the branch breaks and falls to the ground. The person immediately grabs onto the trunk of the tree. He senses that he must hold on to it constantly, lest he fall and die, chas veshalom. Hence, the knowledge that he must grasp the tree is not a mere piece of information. The person understands that his very life depends on it. If he would forget that fact, he would not

naturally exert himself to hold on to the tree, and he would thereby endanger his entire life.

12

The very same is true with the issue at hand. A person must understand that his very life depends on this. He must keep in sight constantly the basic knowledge that the purpose of one's life is to be close to the Creator. This must not be an ordinary kind of knowledge, rather, one must understand that his entire life depends on this, and if he forgets this knowledge, he places his whole life in jeopardy. Even before one knows how to cleave to his Creator, he must first set before his eyes the clear knowledge that man's entire life depends on the awareness that his only goal is to be close and attached to the Creator.

13

The Ramchal teaches that the "Tree of Life" is named so based on the passuk: "And you, who cleave to Hashem, your God, are all alive today" (Devarim 4:4).

The essence of life is, "And you who cleave to Hashem...." That is called life. When, chas veshalom, a person does not cleave to his Creator, he is in a state akin to what Chazal (Berachos 18b) say: "The wicked are called dead even when alive." Even though outwardly and physically, such people are living, they lack the true vitality, which is deveikus to the Creator. Since they lack this, they are described as dead. The passuk states: "And you, who cleave to Hashem, your God, are all alive today." When there is a fulfillment of "And you, who cleave to Hashem, your God," there is life. If this is not present, then life is not being truly lived, chas veshalom.

14

We must contemplate these words and understand them well, impressing them deeply into our hearts. We are dealing with the entire essence and purpose of man. The purpose of man is, "And you, who cleave to Hashem, your God, are all alive today." That is the entire essence of man, as the Ramchal wrote, "'As for me, closeness to Hashem is my good.' Anything else deemed good by people is vanity and deceptive emptiness." Let us internalize this idea, that in fact there is nothing else meaningful in life besides closeness and deveikus to Hashem, and that all of the 613 mitzvos are only means to reach this goal. Undoubtedly, one needs a method by which to take these words to heart. Nonetheless, we will first clarify the matter in our minds with absolute clarity. It must become perfectly clear that the essence of life is closeness and deveikus to Hashem, and nothing else. All our actions, whether physical or spiritual, are only means to becoming attached to the Creator, and the most powerful means is the Torah Hakedoshah.

15

The conclusion of all we have said is that one must have a clear desire to cleave to Hashem literally each moment, and to truthfully want it. Then, when he has this clear desire, his task is to seek a method by which to reach a state of deveikus to the Creator literally each moment. But first, one must maintain a clear awareness that this is in fact his purpose in life, and have a clear desire to achieve it. The greater one's desire is to live with constant deveikus to Hashem, the greater will be his ability to toil and remove all the disturbances that prevent him from true attachment to his Creator. But if the

desire and will are weak, any trivial, small hindrance will prevent him from achieving true deveikus to his Creator.

16

There is a well-known idiom that one "can't see the forest for the trees." Everything in the world serves a spiritual end, so we will use this saying for our purposes, to explain the proper lifestyle of deveikus to Hashem. There are 613 mitzvos, the main one being Torah study, as our Sages said, "Torah study is equal to all of them." The 613 mitzvos are only the roots, the details are very numerous. The words of the Zohar, who describes the 613 mitzvos as 613 pieces of advice, are well-known. What is this advice for? The answer is that they direct us how to cleave to the Creator!

That is to say, the mitzvos are not unrelated entities, but rather, a roadmap, indicators as to how to achieve deveikus to the Creator. The mitzvos, therefore, have two elements: There is the action or the speech specific to that mitzvah, and there is also the purpose of the mitzvah, which is to bring a person close to Hashem and achieve deveikus. The numerous details of the practical aspect of the mitzvos are the many trees of the forest. But we must not lose sight of the forest. From the standpoint of the inner essence and the ultimate goal, all the mitzvos have one end; closeness to Hashem and deveikus to Him.

17

Let us contemplate this with an example of one common mitzvah: donning a tallis. A man rises in the morning, goes to shul, and wraps himself in his tallis. He has fulfilled a Torah mitzvah. What is he thinking about as he does this? Actually, the first question should be not what he thinks about, but does he think at all. Quite possibly, his actions are done with virtually no thought (we refer to contemplative thought; there is, of course, some practical thought). But let us assume that he does think. Let us analyze his thoughts while wrapping himself in the tallis. If he is thinking properly, he should be thinking as follows: since the halachah is that a Torah mitzvah requires intent, I intend that by wrapping myself in the tallis I shall fulfill a Torah mitzvah.

Let us think about this. We mentioned above that the Zohar describes the 613 mitzvos as 613 pieces of advice on how to become close to Hashem. If so, since a person wears a tallis day after day, week after week, for many years, why doesn't he sense the closeness to Hashem that should have developed from the many times he fulfilled this mitzvah? The words of the Zohar, after all, are true and factual. It ought to be that everyone who has in mind daily to fulfill the Torah commandment of wrapping himself with a tallis should gradually feel in his heart more and more closeness to Hashem. Why do we find that there are not that many people who have merited attaining palpable closeness to Hashem through their daily wearing of the tallis? There must be a deeper and truer way to fulfill this mitzvah. We must search for what is lacking in the way we put on our tallis, to discover why the inner goal, which is palpable closeness to Hashem, does not result from our performance of this mitzvah, even among many fine people.

18

Let us try to understand the issue. We have mentioned only one example, wrapping oneself in a tallis. But we also learn Torah and fulfill numerous other mitzvos. What is it that prevents us from feeling close to Hashem through these mitzvos? Perhaps we fulfill the external conditions of the mitzvos, but

for many of us they lack their inner essence and purpose, which is closeness to Hashem. We need to clarify how does one learn Torah and perform the mitzvos in a way that will earn us palpable closeness to Hashem? "In my heart, I will build a sanctuary." This sums up the responsibility of every Jew. The mitzvos must bring him to a state where Hashem will be with him and dwell in his heart, and he will really sense it.

19

That being the case, we must now clarify how a person can continue learning Torah and observing the mitzvos, putting his maximum effort into this, and simultaneously transforming them into a path toward experiencing in his heart real closeness to Hashem. That is to say, we shall seek a method how a person can bring himself closer to his Creator, and give the deeds that he does already a deeper dimension that will bring him to a true closeness to his Creator. All that we are suggesting is included in the comment of the Mesillas Yesharim that there are two types of self-assessment of one's actions: checking out and scrutinizing. There are types of behavior that must be stopped, but even the deeds that should be continued must be scrutinized, so as to perform them in a more meaningful and proper way.

20

Let us summarize the ideas we have written up to this point. We first established that the purpose of man in his world is to have deveikus to the Creator. What is this deveikus? Feeling Hashem in the heart, sensing Him (we will explain this later in detail). How often does one need to be close to the Creator? Each day and each hour of the day (with the exception of the time one is immersed in Torah study, as explained in Nefesh HaChaim, part 4). A person must feel that just as he cannot exist without air to breathe, because he would die, chas veshalom, so too, he must strive to sense that his whole vitality comes from feeling closeness to Hashem. Without it, he is considered dead.

We also wrote that we need to clarify why Torah study, with which we are very involved, and the many mitzvos we fulfill, do not generate in our hearts the simple feeling of closeness and deveikus to Hashem. What is lacking in our Torah study and mitzvah fulfillment that they do not generate within us palpable closeness to Hashem?

21

Let us begin to clarify in more detail the concept of closeness to Hashem.

Who is the Creator? Has anyone ever seen Him? The passuk clearly states, "No person can see Me and live"! (Shemos 33:20). Even concerning His Glory, which Moshe Rabbeinu asked to see (ibid: v. 18 - "Show me now Your Glory"), Hashem said to him, "You will see that which is behind Me, but my Countenance cannot be seen" (v. 23). Hashem Himself certainly cannot be seen at all. This is clear and obvious.

What do we mean when we speak of being close to the Creator, as in the passuk, "As for me, closeness to Hashem is my good." What does it mean to be close to Hashem? There is a well-known statement of Chazal, "No place is devoid of Him" (Tikkunei Zohar 91b). In other words, Hashem is literally everywhere. If so, if we try to understand the concept of closeness to the Creator in a physical sense, in the manner that a chair might be close to a table, then we would all be considered close to

the Creator, because wherever we are, the Creator is also present. Why, then, does one need to toil his entire life to achieve closeness to Hashem? After all, the moment one is born, one is immediately close to the Creator. What, then, is his life's work?

Obviously, this is not the meaning of closeness to Hashem. When I sit near a table, I am close to the table. When I sit on a chair, I am close to the chair. But this kind of closeness is not the closeness to the Creator that we seek.

22

Closeness to the Creator is a completely different concept. Once we have clarified to ourselves the principle demonstrated earlier - that the entire purpose of one's life is to be close and attached to the Creator - we must develop a clear concept of what kind of closeness this is. If the nature of this closeness to Hashem is unclear and one does not know what kind of closeness is meant, how can one find the way to acquire this closeness? If the goal of closeness to Hashem is undefined, then the way to achieve it will perforce remain unclear. A person should be prepared to pay millions - his entire fortune - just in order to understand this one point. For without it he does not know what he is supposed to gain from his entire life. What point is there in life if one doesn't understand what it is about, what its purpose is, and what is his task in life? Can a person achieve closeness to Hashem without any concept of what it is? Can it be achieved automatically, without needing to know its essence and the way to achieve it?

Only after a person knows clearly where exactly he needs to get, can he work to find out how to get there. Take for example a person who is traveling on the road from Yerushalayim to Bnei Brak. If he is not at all aware that he wants to reach Bnei Brak, how can he know which road to take? There is no point in his trying to work out the route, since he might not want to get to Bnei Brak, but to Tzfas, in which case, his task would be to ascertain the road to Tzfas. It follows that a person must first clarify where he needs to go, only then will his task be to ascertain the road that leads to the desired destination.

If we would consider that it is impossible to clarify this concept of closeness to Hashem, then we will have to conclude that Hashem expects us to do something that we cannot understand. Can this be? It must be that this is something that can be understood by anyone. Our task is, therefore, to clarify this concept of closeness to Hashem.

23

A person who has not yet reached clear understanding of true closeness to Hashem, is not just ignorant about a detail of a particular topic; he is ignorant about the very essence of life. Life in this world, and all human activity, whether it be Torah study, mitzvos, or worldly matters, exist only to enable one to attach himself to his Creator. If he doesn't know what cleaving to Hashem means, he has no clear understanding of the purpose of life, and no clear knowledge of the essence and inner purpose of all his deeds. He might learn Torah and fulfill mitzvos, but he does not know where these acts should lead him.

24

We will give an example: A man needs to buy a house. Over a period of twenty years, he saves a certain amount each month, until at the end of the period, he has enough money to buy a house. However, he does not know where to go to get some offers. He sits and thinks about it, but he cannot figure out where to turn to buy a house. He consults with friends, and they direct him to some real-estate agents. He ignores their advice, and instead, sits and tries to figure out how he can find a house for sale. He goes from place to place and accomplishes nothing. This man has all the money he needs to buy a house, but he ends up without one, because he does not know where to go to find what he is looking for.

This man's predicament is very similar to that of many people who keep mitzvos and learn Torah. They possess Torah and mitzvos, but they do not know how to use them to acquire the state of "In my heart, I will build a sanctuary." They are unsuccessful in creating within the recesses of their soul a place for the light of Hashem to rest and to have Hashem dwell in their hearts.

25

The yetzer hara allows a person to learn Torah and observe mitzvos, but he conceals from him the simple point: what is the purpose of all this? He does not even allow him to think about the purpose. Rather, he keeps the individual in a state of habit, in which he learns Torah and does mitzvos without giving any thought to the point of it all. That is the power of the yetzer hara. He gives a person everything but the main thing. The purpose of it all is lacking, chas veshalom. Even if he allows a person to think about the fact that the goal is closeness to Hashem, he conceals from him what this means. Alternatively, he portrays it in various guises, distancing a person from a true understanding. He might also convince a person that closeness to Hashem can only be achieved in Gan Eden and Olam HaBa, but in this world, it is beyond our comprehension. He plants in a person's mind the notion that there is no need to understand closeness to Hashem, and that it will come automatically to anyone who toils in Torah and fulfills the mitzvos. The person then imagines that when he leaves this world and ascends to Shamayim, he will immediately sense a great and wondrous closeness to Hashem, depending on his level; but this is not a matter to be involved with in this world.

The yetzer hara convinces the person that there is no need to be concerned with these hidden matters of Heavenly affairs, which is tantamount to desiring to know the future and the unknown. He tells a person that instead of being curious and looking into the hidden future, he should better use his time serving the Creator through Torah study and mitzvos in a simple way, and not get involved into the nature of closeness to Hashem. These and many such ideas are the arguments of the yetzer hara. They are innumerable, but the common denominator is that a person is kept away from the will and desire to understand closeness to Hashem, and from achieving in his heart a palpable sense of attachment to Him. May Hashem help us to ignore these suggestions of the yetzer hara, and to commit ourselves to completely clarify the nature of true closeness to Hashem and the way to reach it.

26

We shall now attempt to describe in simple words the essence of closeness to the Creator. What is this closeness of which David Hamelech said, "As for me, closeness to Hashem is my good"?

The first question that must be asked is: where is Hashem? When I wish to become close to a person, I must first identify his whereabouts. When I know his location, I can go there, stay near him, and be close to him. Likewise, when a person seeks and wishes to be close to Hashem, he must first clarify where is He to be found. If a person does not know where to find Hashem, how can he become close to Him?

Our Sages have clearly stated, "There is no place devoid of Him" (Tikkunei Zohar 122b). That is to say, He is present everywhere, as we say, "You existed before the world was created, and you exist after creation" (Morning Prayers). Just as before the world was created, Hashem was everywhere, so too, even after He created the world, although there is a world and created beings, Hashem is literally everywhere, and nothing prevents Him from being everywhere. To become close to Him, there is no need to leave the country or the city, or to even travel within the city. "For the matter is very close to you" (Devarim 30:14). Hashem is everywhere! Therefore, a person can find Him and be close to Him anywhere.

If one thinks about this, one may ask a simple question about David Hamelech's statement, "As for me, closeness to Hashem is my good." Why did he use the word "closeness"? After all, if Hashem is found everywhere, He is present wherever the person is, even where his body is standing. He is not only close to a person; Hashem and the person are completely together. The term "closeness" is relevant when one thing is next to another, but if they are completely together, it is not really appropriate to use the term "closeness."

But the truth is that such questions come from attempts to define intellectually where Hashem is. Then, one decides that the term "closeness" does not adequately express the closeness between Hashem and man from a spatial perspective. But since closeness to Hashem and deveikus to Him do not relate to physical space at all, the question is irrelevant. This idea will be explained later on. However the question itself ought to arouse a person to clarify the true nature of closeness to Hashem. After he clearly understands and his soul clearly grasps the essence of closeness to Hashem, it becomes possible to conceive and grasp the distinction between closeness to Hashem and unity with Hashem. May Hashem give us the privilege to genuinely grasp these concepts.

27

We have clarified that closeness to Hashem is not related to space, but is a deeper kind of closeness. Let us first think about the concept of closeness in this world, and thereby, try to understand more profoundly what closeness to Hashem is in the spiritual world. We shall begin with an example. A man is sitting in his house and speaking on the telephone. During his conversation, a friend enters the house. The host indicates to his guest that he should wait a moment until the telephone conversation is finished. After he finishes talking, he apologizes for having kept him waiting, explaining that he was talking to a close relative. The guest then asks, "Who is the close relative? Where does he live?" The host provides his full name, and adds that he lives abroad. The guest then asks in surprise, "If he lives so far away, how could you have called him a close relative?" The host answers, "I didn't mean that he is close from a perspective of space, but rather that he is closely related, he is my cousin." In the physical world there are two kinds of closeness, spatial closeness and familial closeness, such as a father, a son, an uncle, a cousin, and so on. The familial closeness of a cousin is totally unrelated to space. Rather, since they have a family connection, they have a deep bond based on their common ancestry, which makes them emotionally close. In other words, the closeness is more profound than spatial closeness, because it is a relationship based on their common source. Since they share a source, there is a deep emotional closeness.

28

Having clarified that there are two kinds of closeness, one spatial and one familial, which generates emotional closeness and bonding, we shall continue to contemplate whether the two kinds of closeness are in anyway dependent on one another. Clearly, spatial closeness does not guarantee familial closeness, and familial closeness does not guarantee spatial closeness. In other words, one could be standing next to another person and have no emotional bond with him. In fact, the spatial closeness might actually cause an emotional distance, due to differences of opinion that can create a rift between the two.

The same is true in the opposite scenario. Familial closeness that causes an emotional bond, or emotional closeness by itself, does not necessarily come with spatial closeness. Sometimes, the people closest to you, such as your father, son, or best friend, are spatially very far away, and yet that does not conflict with their emotional closeness in any way. Hence, spatial closeness does not guarantee familial closeness, and familial closeness does not guarantee spatial closeness.

Now, there is a distinction between the two. When we say that two people are spatially close, it is a condition that is present right now. However, with emotional closeness, even though there is closeness in their souls, it might not be evident each moment. One may love his relative or friend, and be very attached to him, but the feeling is not always in the forefront of his mind. At specific times, it comes to the fore, such as at times of celebration or, *chas veshalom*, the opposite, when a person shares an experience with people who are close to him.

29

Now that we have clarified the essence of closeness in this world, we shall return to consider closeness to Hashem. Is it in any way similar to the kinds of closeness we are familiar with in this world?

As far as spatial closeness is concerned, we have already pointed out that nothing is as close to a person as Hashem, since "There is no place devoid of Him." If so, Hashem and a person are constantly really together, and they do not separate at all from each other. There is nothing else in this world that a person is always so close to. And even if there is something to which he is always close to, they are not actually in the same place. But Hashem and the person are always close to each other with an unparalleled degree of spatial closeness.

With regard to familial closeness or friendship, the passuk states explicitly, "You are children to Hashem, your God" (Devarim 14:1). The passuk, "Do not forsake your Friend and your father's Friend" (Mishlei 27:10), refers to Hashem as a "friend". Hence, we are both the children of Hashem and his friends."

Consequently, a person is already close to Hashem from a spatial perspective ("There is no place devoid of Him"), from a familial perspective ("You are children to Hashem"), and from a perspective of friendship ("Do not forsake your Friend and your father's Friend").

In what way, then, do we lack closeness to Hashem?

The main point is missing! In this world, when someone is close to something, he senses that he is close to it. If one is related to someone by virtue of being his father, son, uncle, or cousin, he senses the closeness. If one has a dear friend, he senses it; the soul feels it clearly. But the big question

about the various kinds of closeness with Hashem that we have - space, family, and friendship - is: Do we feel that Hashem is close to us through all these ways? When we say that, "There is no place devoid of Him," do we merely know this fact intellectually, or do we actually sense that Hashem is with us everywhere? If we would sense it, it would be a constant awareness, since He is constantly with us. As to familial closeness, do we merely know in our minds that we are His children, or do we clearly feel it in our hearts, with a deep, permanent love like that of a son to his father? Likewise, when a person considers that Hashem is referred to as "your Friend", is this merely a fact the he knows, or is this friendship a real live feeling?

30

We have seen that we are already close to Hashem in every kind of way, but the problem for most people is that this is merely a piece of information. The real feeling of closeness, the feeling that Hashem is always near us and within us, the feeling that we are really His children and His friends, is what is lacking. We are close, but we don't sense it. When we are physically close to something, we sense it, but when the closeness is spiritual, we might know of it, but we don't always feel it all that much.

31

To gain a better sense of this idea, we will explore the issue and see how even in this physical world, not every kind of closeness can be felt. We will provide examples of both spatial and familial closeness, showing how a person might not be aware of them.

If, before the microscope was invented, we would have approached a person and asked him if there are any germs a few centimeters from his face, he would have categorically denied it. He would be willing to swear to that effect without any feeling of guilt whatsoever. In truth, he is mistaken, and there are germs very close to him, but since they cannot be seen by the human eye, and one can look and look and not find them, he is sure they don't exist. But this is certainly a mistake. So we see that one can be spatially close to something and yet be totally unaware of it.

32

Let us take another example in the realm of familial closeness. Many people arrived in Israel after the Holocaust with almost no relatives. The loneliness of being without family distressed them terribly. Some of them invested great effort to locate some kind of relative. Let's imagine that a person is living in a building with a neighbor above him, and there is no bond of friendship between them, to say the least. Each of them has been searching for a relative for many years. After twenty years, they accidentally discover that they are cousins, and that they have no other relatives in the country, or anywhere in the whole world. Here we had a person who lived right next to his only relative, someone whom he knew well, but since he didn't know that they were related, he lacked emotional closeness to him.

We now have two clear illustrations of spatial and familial closeness, in which a person can be very close to something, but yet feel far, because he doesn't realize the closeness.

33

The same is true with the various ways in which a person is close to Hashem. We mentioned that a person is spatially close to Hashem, but since he cannot see Him nearby, as it says, "No person can see Me and live" (Shemos 33:20), he does not sense this closeness. He knows that Hashem is his Father, but he doesn't feel it properly in his heart. He knows that Hashem is his Friend, but he doesn't feel that in his heart. If a person would be informed that his father, whom he had long assumed to be dead, is still alive, and that he can see him, his whole heart would be filled with joy, since he can now see him and have a relationship with him. His original assumption that he would never again feel his father's love turned out to be a complete mistake.

34

Anyone who has not toiled extensively to know Hashem, his true Father, does not truly know his Father. He might know that He exists, but he does not recognize Him. This is similar to someone who knows that he has a father who lives overseas, but has never seen him. Here too, a person who has not toiled much to recognize his Creator - not through mere intellectual analysis, but through the heart - might know that he has a Father, but he hardly recognizes Him. One who has truly toiled and has merited to recognize his Creator, his Father in Heaven, realizes that previously, not only didn't he realize that Hashem was next to him, but he didn't even understand the meaning of a Father in Heaven. He had no means with which to understand that what Hashem is, what the words, "You are children to Hashem, your God" (Devarim 14:1), express, and what is implied by the term "child of Hashem."

This is not intellectual knowledge, but a perception of the soul. Even the example of the father-son relationship cannot portray the depth of what it means to be a child of Hashem. It is beyond human thought and rational definitions; it is the soul's recognition of its Father. You must understand that if a person takes literally the Torah's saying, "You are children to Hashem, your God," thinking, "Just as I have a physical father, I have a spiritual father" (and Hashem should give everyone the privilege to at least recognize that), he is only grasping a superficial point, not the depth of the matter. The depth of this concept can only be grasped when one feels it in his soul, not through attempts at abstract definitions.

35

Let us consider a meeting between father and son described in the Torah, namely, the meeting of Yaakov and Yosef. When they met, it says, "And Yosef harnessed his chariot, and went up to meet his father, Yisrael, in Goshen, and he appeared to him and fell on his neck, and cried profusely on his neck" (Bereishis 46:29). Let us think: for how long did Yosef maintain this posture of "falling on his neck"? Chazal say that Yaakov did not fall on Yosef's neck or kiss him, because he was reciting the Shema. For how long was Yaakov reciting the Shema? A half hour or an hour, perhaps somewhat longer. But after that reunion, even though they had not seen each other for a long time, the kind of bond described as "and he fell on his neck," was not maintained. They did not spend the next seventeen years with this level of bonding. Yaakov remained very attached to Yosef and Yosef to Yaakov, but the strongest expression of their attachment was short-lived.

If one wants to get a sense of the nature of a son's attachment to his Father in Heaven, he should learn from this example. However, in this case, the son can be in a state of "and he fell on his neck" at

all times. In other words, he can achieve a condition in which he is always attached and bound with Hashem (there may, of course, be setbacks, but this could be his general attitude in life). One cannot constantly embrace his physical father and fall on his neck, but one can be bound with Hashem, his Father in Heaven, literally at all times. When a person attains the level of, "I will dwell in their midst" (Shemos 25:8), that is to say that he actually experiences that Hashem openly dwells in his heart, he is then bound with Hashem at all times to a degree analogous to the meeting of Yosef and Yaakov, and even more. This is the soul's inner bond with Hashem. This is the condition of a Jew who is in touch with his true inner self.

36

Let us imagine that while Yosef was being reunited with his father, his cell phone would have rung. Would he answer it, or would nothing have interested him at that time? Yosef was in a foreign land, all alone for many years, and finally, the moment comes when he escapes this loneliness and meets his father. At that moment, would he have time to get involved in other things? Likewise, a true Jew lives in a state of being attached literally at all times to the Creator. Inevitably, he lives in a material world, and he must deal with it at least somewhat, but his soul is always tied to the Creator. Whether he is involved in spiritual or material pursuits, his soul will never be detached from the Creator. Even when answering the cell phone, he is attached to the Creator, and is never distracted or inwardly disconnected from Him.

This is the way a Jew must live. This is the one true bond a person has in the world. One day, he will leave his family and remain all alone. The only bond one can sustain both in this world and in the next, an unseverable bond, is the connection he has with Hashem. In Gan Eden, there is no guarantee that one will sit near his father, son, or uncle, but he will be close to Hashem. This is a bond one must develop for himself in this world and the next. Family ties are strong, but they will be severed one day. The bond with Hashem, though, is eternal, and will never break. If one desires a true friend, he should take Hashem as his friend, and He will be his friend everywhere - in this world, in Gan Eden, and in the World to Come, never abandoning him, even for a moment.

37

As long as a person is not truly attached to Hashem, in a way similar to the familial bond we described before, he cannot properly sense the spatial closeness either. Hashem is indeed spatially close to a person. But only to the extent that one is tied to Hashem from the depth of his heart can one really feel inwardly that Hashem is right next to him at all times, in each and every location. The greater the soul's closeness with Hashem, and the more the person is tied to Him with the deepest fibers of his heart, the more will he sense that Hashem is next to him. The opposite is true as well, chas veshalom.

38

In our discussion so far it has become clear that the purpose of life is closeness to Hashem. We have also described (somewhat) the attitude to life of a person attached to Hashem. This attachment is not some minor detail of his life, rather his entire life is a process of bonding with Hashem. A person must now decide if he wants to live that way. Perhaps it is easier to live in an illusion, in which one thinks he has a peaceful life without the trouble of deveikus, so to speak. Each person must decide for himself, if he really wants to be attached to Hashem all his life. If he has verified to himself that he

does want this, he is fortunate that he has understood what has been said. Yet if he sees that he still doesn't want it, he must pray to Hashem to help him want true life, so that he can escape the unbridled life that masquerades as life, and choose to live true life, of which it says, "And you, who cleave to Hashem, your God, are all alive today." (We are not yet discussing the method how to become close and attached to Hashem, only the will to be so.)

39

We will try to inspire the reader to want to become close and attached to Hashem.

Each of us knows that the day will come when he will take leave of this world, as it says, "Every man dies eventually." (Berachos 17a). Everyone wants to be spared from Gehinnom and to merit Gan Eden. What does one do in Gan Eden? The Ramchal writes in the beginning of Mesillas Yesharim, "Man is created solely to find delight in Hashem and enjoy the radiance of His Shechinah." This is the primary enjoyment in Gan Eden. Consequently, if one does not become truly attached to Hashem, there will not be much for him to do in Gan Eden. "Gan Eden" in reality is a state of deveikus to Hashem. If a person, chas veshalom, does not want to cleave to Hashem, what will he do in Gan Eden? If a person claims that in this world, he wants to benefit from this world, but when he leaves this world, he will want to cleave to Hashem, one must realize that this is a ridiculous idea. The sefarim hakedoshim have written that the way a person thinks and feels in this world is the way he will be in the next world. Therefore, if in this world, a person's mind and heart are not attached to Hashem, but to other matters, so too will they be in the World to Come. Even if in his mind he will want to cleave to the Creator there, he won't be able to. Against his will he will continue to desire whatever he was attracted to in this world.

In other words, a person cannot create a dichotomy, to be unattached to Hashem in this world, but cleave to Him in the next. Either he will cleave to Hashem both in this world and the next, or not in either one, chas veshalom. (Of course a person who has not used his life properly can be rectified eventually, but here is not the place for that discussion.) Hence, one must understand that if he is not attached to the Creator in this world, he will not be so in Gan Eden and the World to Come, and he will not have what to do there. One must consider deeply the fact that he is losing eternity by not achieving deveikus to Hashem in this world. The World to Come is called "the world which is completely good." What is the goodness there? The Ramchal has written, "'As for me, closeness to Hashem is my good.' Anything else deemed good by people is vanity and deceptive emptiness." You see that there is no goodness other than closeness to Hashem. So if a person is not close and attached to Hashem, he has no connection to the world that is completely good. Of necessity, to merit this good in Gan Eden and in Olam Haba one must live with deveikus to Hashem, an appreciation that "closeness to Hashem is my good" even in this world.

40

In this world, a person running a business takes an inventory once a year. He closes the store for a day to take stock of what was sold and what wasn't and assess his progress. A person must do the same with his life. This is not merely a short self-accounting for fifteen minutes, a half hour, or even an hour. He must halt the whole course of his life and ask himself: Do I want to be close and attached to the Creator, or not? If I do, am I treading on the path that brings me closer to feeling this palpable closeness I seek? Or perhaps my path of learning Torah with the mind only and performing the mitzvos with minimal inspiration, will not bring me to true closeness to Hashem. One should take as much time as he needs to reach this recognition, but he must emerge with an awareness and a clear

will to live his life solely for the sake of closeness and deveikus to Hashem. Then, his task will be to identify a definite path that will bring him there. But again, first of all, it must be clear that this is the entire true purpose of life - closeness and deveikus to Hashem.

41

Once it has become absolutely clear that the sole purpose of life is true closeness to Hashem, and a person feels a real will to live that kind of life, the time is appropriate to try to understand and reflect upon the path that brings him to this kind of life. He might think that since he is immersed in Torah and mitzvos, the day will certainly come when he will suddenly feel closeness to Hashem in his heart. This, however, is an error that many have fallen into. They think that closeness to Hashem just comes automatically to anyone who learns Torah and keeps the mitzvos, but this is not at all the case.

42

Chazal have said, "Even the emptiest of them [the Jewish people] are filled with mitzvos like a pomegranate" (Berachos 57a). The obvious question is: why, then, are they called "empty" if their mitzvos are as numerous as the seeds of a pomegranate? The Gaon HaRav Dovid Povarsky, zt"l, gave a wonderful answer. He said that one might have many mitzvos to his credit: Torah, chessed, and many more. However, he will still be defined as empty. Why? Because a pomegranate has many seeds, but each one is distinct from the others. It is not like an apple or pear that is one unit. Rather, each seed stands alone. Similarly, a person can learn Torah and perform many mitzvos, but he will still be considered empty, because his deeds are separate from each other, with nothing unifying them.

Torah and mitzvos must be performed as parts of one unit, not as disconnected acts, chas veshalom. They must all participate in the building of one's inner spiritual edifice. If he has not achieved that inner element that unites all his Torah and mitzvos, a person might learn Torah his entire life and fulfill many mitzvos, but still be among "the empty ones among them".

What is that inner element? Deveikus to Hashem! The Torah must be studied in harmony, bearing in mind the principle that "Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one" (Zohar 3:73). Through the Torah, one must cleave to his Creator. The term mitzvos is based on the word tzavta, referring to a bond with Hashem, as mentioned above. Consequently, both Torah and the mitzvos have one inner goal, which is closeness and deveikus to Hashem. If one is working to reach this goal, all the Torah he studies and all the mitzvos he performs will be interconnected, for they all will bring him to a common goal. But if Torah and mitzvos are not performed in a way that brings a person to this closeness, and there is nothing to unite them, they will remain disconnected from each other. When one's heart is empty of the Creator, and there is no realization of "I will dwell in their midst" in his heart, this unifying element is lacking. There may be Torah and mitzvos, but there is no unified heart devoted to our Father in Heaven. There is no inner element attaching him to Hashem.

Every person must take stock of his spiritual situation and ask himself: "Do my way of life, my Torah, prayer and mitzvos, bring me to palpable, true deveikus to Hashem, or perhaps, chas veshalom, my deeds are like those of "the emptiest of them," lacking an inner element that unifies all the Torah and mitzvos I perform?"

43

This point needs to be considered carefully. Many confidently think that their way is true, and that over a period of many years, they will merit closeness to Hashem. But this is not necessarily so. Instead this reasoning could be an excuse to avoid adopting a more difficult and truthful path. It's easy to believe that one's path is correct and will bring one to palpable closeness to Hashem. But what will he do if at the end of his life, he discovers that his path was incorrect, and did not grant him to experience closeness to Hashem? It will be too late. He will not be able to turn the wheel back and try to live his life differently. It is certainly difficult to prove to a person that his way will not necessarily lead to palpable closeness to Hashem. (Of course, there are many valid paths that achieve this goal. We are discussing those who mistakenly believe there is no need for any method.)

One must, therefore, examine oneself well and be very suspicious, whether his way is genuine or not. He should not rely on the fact that many others have done the same and succeeded. One must examine each approach closely with the aid of a person who has great understanding. Do not rely on hearsay from here and there. Every person must examine his way very carefully, and beseech Hashem at length that He help him and direct him to the true path that will bring him close to Hashem.

Even if one has a true approach, he must pray to have the privilege to understand it properly. Often, the approach is true, but it is not understood properly. The bottom line is that each person must choose a definite path that will bring him to a condition of deveikus to Hashem, and ask Hashem constantly to help him find the correct path that is suited for his needs.

Source: <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-1-section-1-clarifying-purpose-life>