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## 48 Ways - 018 Less Sleeping (1) Weakening Imagination

[In this chapter, the Rav is referring to weakening our negative imagination - dimyaon hashi'lilis]

### **Imagination Takes Over When We Sleep**

One of the 48 qualities we need for the Torah is “little sleep.” What does it mean to get little sleep? Simply speaking, a person has to lose sleep over the Torah. But there is a deeper meaning to this.

A person has the power of thought as well as the power of imagination. By day, we use our thought; by night, the imagination takes over when we sleep. *Chazal* are saying that we need to lessen our sleep at night in order to learn Torah – this means that we have to lessen what we do when we sleep, which is our imagination. We need to weaken our imagination.

The depth behind why we have to weaken our sleep in order to acquire the Torah is that we need to weaken our negative kind of imagination, which is a kind of sleepiness.

### **Imagination Throughout The Day**

When the Torah was given, we were given the power of the Torah, which is essentially the power of true thought. The power of true thought in a person is able to overcome our imagination.

All of the evil in the world has to do with imagination. When a person wants to sin, it is because his imagination has overcome his thoughts. *Chazal* actually call our imagination the *Yetzer hora*.<sup>[1]</sup> Our entire desire to do evil comes from the imagination!

Everyone has both thought and imagination. By night, imagination takes over in our dreams, but during the day, we have both. Usually, we are not aware during the day if we are using our thought or imagination. Our thought and imagination keeps switching back and forth, but we aren't aware which is in use.

For example, in the last hour, how many of your passing thoughts were real thoughts, and how much was just your imagination?

We are constantly passing from thought to imagination. When we aren't aware of this, this is like the curse that came from eating from the Tree of Knowledge, which was a mixture of good and evil. We aren't aware which thoughts are real thoughts (which are good), and which thoughts are the evil imagination.

Such a kind of life – a lack of awareness – is a sleepy kind of life. If we are aware of our thoughts, then we are kind of asleep, even during the day. In a sense, most people can be compared to a mentally ill person, of whom *Chazal* (Chagigah 4a) say has times in which he is sane and times when he isn't sane. This resembles the state of most people, who are sometimes thinking but sometimes just imagining.

This kind of life greatly damages us. A child often exaggerates – why is this so? It is because children are prone to their imagination, which leads them to distort information. There are even adults who are in their imagination – and most people fool themselves and are convinced that they don't imagine things. But if a person is convinced that he never imagines, it shows how much he lacks an awareness of himself.

When the Torah was given, we left our mixed up state of mind and returned to the state before Adam's sin, in which good and evil were separate. After the sin of the Calf, we became mixed up again with good and evil. Now we must return to the state that we were like at the giving of the Torah, in which there was no evil mixed up into our good – in other words, when our thoughts were free of our imagination.

This is really the depth behind *Teshuvah* – to “return” – to return to our clarity. The way we can become clear is by thinking and paying attention to what's going on in our mind.

### ***Paying Attention To Your Thoughts***

If a person doesn't listen to his thoughts, his life is all mixed up. His life will just be a mixture of thought and imagination.

But if a person wants to become more aware, he should review what he has thought about in the last hour and see which thoughts were about reality, and which were just his daydreaming.

Let's say a person is dreaming about what's going on right now in Tzefas. Is this thought or imagination? Sometimes it can be thought, but usually it's just imagination. If a person is sitting and wondering what's going on in the world, this is imagination! Our thoughts pass so quickly to our imagination that we don't even realize we have entered our imagination. Our imagination takes over very suddenly, and we don't even realize.

Sometimes a person wonders, “How did I get into thinking about this?” It didn't just “fall” into his head. It is because the imagination took over, and the person wasn't aware of it.

Let's say a person is sitting on a bus and lost in thought. This is a typical conversation that goes on all the time:

“What are you thinking about?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“What do you mean, nothing? Your brain is working, so you had to have been thinking about something! What were you thinking?”

“Oh...yeah...”

“Yeah, what? What were you thinking?”

“Something...”

“Why’d you think about it?”

“I don’t know, I just started to think about it....”

Such a person, if he wants to become aware of what’s going on his mind, needs to retrace his thoughts and see how one thought led to another.

Even when a person is learning Torah his imagination can be at work. Let’s take a person sitting and listening to a *shiur*. Does he even listen for a half hour without spacing out? If a person says, “Yes, I do concentrate for more than a half hour,” he is obviously fooling himself and he is not aware of himself.

We must listen deeply to what’s going on in our mind. Take a minute or two and review what you just thought about. It’s hard to do this at first, because there is a lack of awareness. But a person can get used to listening to his thoughts and see how fast his thoughts wander to the imagination.

This is a way for a person to reach the depths of his soul. When a person is in his imagination, he doesn’t have the tools to gain from any of his Avodas Hashem. Imagination doesn’t let you be calm to understand anything, and it also affects the level of how well you grasp something; because if you’re only understanding something through your imagination and not through your real thoughts, then you aren’t really understanding it.

In order to stop your imagination from controlling you, you must get used to checking your thoughts and seeing which of them were real thought and which of them imagination was.

Although so far we have been discussing the problem of imagination in regards to being an impediment to learning Torah, which applies to men, imagination is a problem for all areas of life, because if we don’t do this then we will be disconnected from ourselves. The solution we are giving here is essentially how you can become connected to yourself.

Therefore, both men and women need to weaken their imagination through this solution - to get used to checking your thoughts.

### ***Imagination is the Root Behind Bad Middos***

Imagination is behind all that is evil. *Chazal* tell us that three evil traits remove a person from this world - jealousy, desire and honor.

Really, the imagination in a person is what causes these three evil traits.

Let’s take jealousy as an example. Why is a person jealous of another person? It’s only because of imagination. Why should Reuven care about what Shimon has? It’s only because Reuven imagines that he is supposed to have it. When a person is jealous, he leaves his world - “Jealousy, desire and honor take a person out of the world.” It takes a person out of his world into his imagination!

The problem with imagination is a very broad problem that greatly affects *the entire spectrum* of one’s soul. It’s not a side issue - it is *the root issue of all our issues!*

Of course a person needs to work on his *middos*, but it will be much easier if a person uproots the bad *middos* from their source - by uprooting his imagination. We are used to working on branches of a problem, like each individual bad *middah* we discover in ourselves. But we often don’t get to the root of our problem - and that root is imagination, which we must work on getting rid of.

## ***How To Become More Aware***

If a person wants to really enter Avodas Hashem, he should take two minutes a day and see where his thoughts wander to. He should see what led him to think about one thing to another; he should wonder: "How did I get into thinking about B when I was just thinking about A?"

The more a person does this, he will discover something he was never aware of until now: often, our imagination takes something and compares it with another thing, tricking you into thinking that two different things are the same.

What happens when you notice your imagination? Use your *seichel* and see how your imagination has led you to compare things that are different and make them appear the same – and you will see how your comparisons were totally off-base. It was your imagination which led you to make an inaccurate comparison.

## ***Fighting the Yetzer Hora before it attacks***

This is essentially the battle a person has with his Yetzer hora.

The Yetzer hora, during the actual time of difficulty, makes a person forget about his Yetzer Tov. So how does a person fight the Yetzer hora? The battle starts before the difficulty. The battle takes place between one's thoughts and one's imagination. We must fight the Yetzer hora before it attacks – not when it attacks. We need to uproot its power when we are calm and thinking; it is then that we can separate our thoughts from the imagination.

Take some quiet time and review your thoughts: how did you get from A to B, and how are the two thoughts similar? The more you do this, the more you see how your imagination misled you to think how things are the same, and you will slowly weaken your imagination more and more if you practice this.

The inner way to prepare to accept the Torah is to check our thoughts and wonder: are we weakening our imagination?

## ***Seeking Friendship Is Rooted In Imagination***

*Chazal* say that "Every person was created individually." Really, we are fine if we are alone and don't seek friends. But it is a person's imagination tricks him into thinking that he isn't good by himself, and that he must seek friends.

The more you rid yourself of imagination, the less social needs you will have. Imagination makes a person want to be dependent on others for companionship. When a person rids himself of imagination, he will enjoy his own existence and actually crave solitude.

Why does a person want lots of friends? It is really because he isn't connected to himself. His imagination causes him to compare himself to others and think, "Maybe I am like that person or like this person." He wants something outside of himself and thus loves to always be around those who he feels are similar to him.

But when a person frees himself from the imagination, he is happy being on his own – not because he is lonely, but because he has discovered an inner world within himself. A person who discovers his inner world is not doing so out of a lack of love for other people; it is not because he doesn't like people, but it is because he doesn't need them to be happy.

This is not arrogance – it is rather a self-discovery. It is to realize your very worth; the more a person rids himself of imagination, the more he will enjoy being alone with himself, because he will realize his own self-worth.

When a person never seeks time alone for himself and only desires to be friends with others, he overdoes it, and he is around people too much. Although *Chazal* say that we should get along with people (*da'ato me'ureves im ha'beriyos*), that is only true for one who has reached the desired state to be in – to be clean of imagination.

We see that children love to play with friends. This need that children have comes from their imagination, which is very dominant in a child. What is the connection? Children view everyone else as similar to them, which is the work of the imagination; imagination convinces a person that someone or something else is similar. Because children think everyone else is similar, they befriend everyone. As a person gets older and matures, he sees that not everyone is the same, and he is able to pick and be choosy who his friends are.

The more a person cleanses himself from imagination, the less of a need he will feel to connect to others. He might have other reasons why he wants to connect to others, such as the need to love others or the need to bestow goodness upon others, but such needs are healthy, because they do not come from the imagination.

### ***The Only One Who You Can Resemble***

When you get rid of your imagination, you will see how less and less people are similar to you, and you will discover that there is only One who you can truly resemble – Hashem.

Maybe one will ask on this that this is a lack of *Ahavas Yisrael* (love of Jews) if a person doesn't seek to be friends with everybody. But actually, having lots of friends is not the meaning of *Ahavas Yisrael*. It is just a tendency in a person to compare himself to others – which leads him to want to always connect superficially to others.

When a person seeks friends, really it is because he loves himself and he loves to feel his own imagination working, when he has lots of friends. In order to really have *Ahavas Yisrael*, a person needs to discover *himself*.

In order to uncover our true self, we all need time alone to quietly contemplate our thoughts. This will enable our power of thought to overpower our imagination.

Otherwise, a person will just want to seek others' company, since he compares himself to them, due to his imagination that controls him.

The more a person weakens his imagination, a person will find that the less of a need he has for friends. We can see this from a child, who by nature always seeks to make friends; a child is led by his imagination and thus always compares himself to others, and that is the reason why the child likes to be around other friends.

But the stronger our power of thought becomes – the more times of quiet a person spends, in which he can sift out the imagination from the thoughts – the less of a need a person has to seek friends.

There are people who are very popular and are they can always be found surrounded with lots of friends, but this doesn't necessarily mean these popular people have *Ahavas Yisrael*. It is usually because these 'popular' people are being led by their imagination – and therefore they seek to compare themselves to others, always seeking others' company to for this feeling of security.

There are, however, people who don't seek friends, but not because of the mature outlook we are describing, but rather for a different reason: because they are simply being haughty, feeling that they are better than everybody else. But we do not mean to imply this. We are referring to one who wants to live an inner kind of life and enter the inner world of Avodas Hashem, and that the way to do it is through realizing that you don't need others for security, because you have a vast inner world within yourself that contains all your happiness.

This sounds very different from what we would think, but the truth is that only when we discover our true self - and become connected to it - can we really come to love others as we should.

The less and less a person has to do with his imagination, the more he will seek a life of solitude, not needing others, because he is attached instead with closeness with Hashem.

*Chazal say hevay domeh lo, "You should resemble Hashem."* The only one who you should try to resemble is Hashem. A person must discover how he can best resemble *Hashem* (by perfecting his character), and not to resemble other people. And there is really no one who you can really ever come to resemble other than Hashem.

This is the inner way to prepare for the Torah, and from that, to come to connect to the Creator.

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**[1]** Sukkah 52a

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