



Published on www.bilvavi.net

[Home](#) > Bilvavi Part 4 - Chapter 04 Making A Self-Accounting

Bilvavi Part 4 - Chapter 04 Making A Self-Accounting

Always Remembering the Goal

The Mesillas Yesharim compares life to a confusing garden-maze which we must navigate, and how only one who has already been through the maze can help us get to the goal of the maze, which is its center.

What is in that center? What is the center that we strive for?

The answer is: *Ain Od Milvado* - The recognition that "there is nothing besides for Hashem". There are many ways to get there, but what is it that we are searching for? The *Ribono shel olam*.

We will try delineate the proper paths to get to that center of the maze which we strive for, but we must always remember the goal that we want to reach. If we forget the goal, we will also lose the proper path to get there. We must all be very clear in this and remember at all times that all we search for is always Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

We ascend and we fall as we go. Our goal is not to increase concentration in our davening, not to sharpen our brains, not ruach hakodesh, nor to reach high levels. These are all wonderful things, but they are only ways how to get to the *Ribono shel Olam*. Whatever we comprehend is only a way to get to Hashem, and it is not a goal unto itself.

We need to repeat this at all times: the goal is to find Hashem. If one forgets this, there is no basis to any of our inner work here, and his path will be very shaky. If we remember constantly *Shivisi Hashem L'negdi Tamid* - Hashem is always beside me - then we will have a chance to grow and succeed. May Hashem help us get to the center of the "garden-maze" and then integrate with it.

Making Time for Self-Accounting

In the previous chapter we brought the amazing advice of the Ramchal on how to reach human perfection: that we set aside an hour every day for time to think into important matters. We will now explain how we can make this more practical. There are many people who make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) every day, but they don't get to the desired goal. It is a matter which needs guidance.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* explains that the *yetzer hora* is tricky and makes us too busy to reflect on important matters, and in doing so it is like Pharaoh, who increased the labor so that the Jews wouldn't have any time to think about important matters.

It is not only physical work which makes people forget about what's important, but even spiritual work can make a person forget about his priorities! It's possible that a person is so involved in spirituality that he forgets the main thing. You can have a person who is immersed in learning Torah, davening, and doing *chessed*, but it can all be superficial actions, and he is missing the inner point of it all. Torah without Hashem in one's life, davening without Hashem, *chessed* without Hashem – it's all just grabbing air. A person will still get rewarded in Gan Eden for these things, but they will never bring a person to a recognition of Hashem.

Often, "quantity" of deeds takes away from the "quality" of our deeds. Chazal state that "it is better to have at least a little concentration than to do much action with no concentration." This doesn't mean that one shouldn't be concerned about increasing the quantity of his deeds, but if we need quantity, how much more so do we need quality.

Thus we need to set aside time every day to reflect, because otherwise, we are bogged down by the busyness of life and we won't be able to reach our goal. The question is how much time we need to spend on this, and each person is different in how much time he will need for this. We can still give general rules that apply to everyone.

Bring Your Life to a Halt

One of the practices in the Yeshiva of Kelm was "Asiri Koidesh" – every ten days after Yom Kippur, they would make a "mini Yom Kippur" and have a day set aside for Avodas Hashem, *cheshbon hanefesh*, and self-examination.

This shows us something very important about how to serve Hashem. We are used to the humdrum of life, and there is very little order going in the way we live our life. We only have one day of the year in which we really reflect – Yom Kippur. But let's think about our situation.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* prescribe fasts for the ten days in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The *Sefer Chareidim* writes, however, in the name of the Arizal, that fasting is only for people who don't learn Torah, but if someone learns Torah, he doesn't have to fast.

What, then, will help atone our sins? Will our learning Torah atone for our sins? That's what it would seem, but that's not what the *sefer Chareidim* writes. He writes something else entirely: that once a week, a person should set aside a day to do Teshuvah, and that on that day, he should feel like it's Yom Kippur.

Once a week – not once a year – a person should make for himself a Yom Kippur. This advice is both easy and hard at the same time. From a superficial viewpoint, it seems easy to do, but in actuality, it takes hard work.

All of us have various responsibilities we need to take care of, and we all find that there is simply no time for this. A *Kolel avreich* has a *chavrusa* for three learning sessions a day, and he is tied to them. If someone has a job, he has to get to work on time, and he can't leave early. We all have responsibilities, so what are we to do? Yet, we have to worry that all of this makes us forget our mission on this world.

The truth is that even a day of introspection for once every week isn't enough to help us reach our goal in life. If so, what did the *sefer Chareidim* mean that once a week suffices? He did not mean to simply sit and think about what your deeds once a week. That is commendable too, but that is not the depth to his words. It is deeper than that.

What the *sefer Chareidim* was really getting at was that the very humdrum of life damages our

Avodas Hashem. Even an hour or two for *cheshbon hanefesh* is swallowed up by the rest of the week; it's not enough.

Time to reflect can only help a person if he does it for at least six, seven, eight, ten, or perhaps twelve hours a week straight. Only several hours straight of *cheshbon hanefesh* can bring the week to a halt. This is tried and tested, and for someone who lives this way, he transforms into a new person.

If someone cannot reflect throughout the hours of the day, then it will be more practical for him to set aside every Thursday night to reflect. He can start at 9 o'clock and end at *alos hashachar* (dawn).

What To Think About

And what should a person think about during this time for reflection?

It is not recommended for a person to learn *sefarim* that deal with the topic of *Teshuvah*. This defeats the purpose, because instead of actually doing *Teshuvah*, the person will be just "learning" about *Teshuvah*.

What a person should do, then, is to set aside a few hours in which he can think and examine his deeds. He doesn't have to go through every last detail of what he has done this week so far, but just to see how he is living his life in general. He should begin each week anew from the simplest point.

What is that simplest point? The fact that there is a Creator! We all know this, but a *baal teshuvah* is like a baby born anew. We need to renew ourselves and start from scratch. When a baby is born and he begins to grow up, he is first taught the *Aleph Beis*. The same goes for each person – we all have to begin again anew each week and start from the simple facts, such as: "There is a Creator, and we must listen to Him. What does He want from me? What is the goal, and what are its details? Am I heading towards the goal, or am I just caught up in the details?"

This is how you can reflect with yourself, slowly and patiently.

This appears at first to seem hard: "Why should I think so much about simple facts? I already thought about this for the last three weeks already. I already know it."

But this is the mistake. The Alter of Kelm stated that the heart of a person and the mind of a person are very far from each other, and they are more distant from each other than the heavens with the earth. We know a lot in our minds, but our heart is usually a "heart of stone". We need to soften out our heart into a heart of flesh. How can we do that?

We don't need hair-raising revelations or mind-blowing discoveries about life. We need simplicity! Rebbi Akiva changed because he noticed a very simple fact: a drop of water can break through a rock. There is a simple, small "drop of water" which we can all see: there is a *Ribono shel Olam*, and He wants me to draw close to Him.

We aren't speaking about intellectual knowledge. We are speaking about matters of our heart. Each week, you can add on more "drops" – simple points that can penetrate the heart.

How do we repeat to ourselves simple points? We can use a method of Reb Yisrael Salanter, who would stay up an entire night repeating just one statement of Chazal (Taanis 31a): "If one adds on (nights onto his days of learning Torah), he will gain more life, but if he doesn't add on, he will be gathered to die before his time."

Reb Yisrael Salanter was a brilliant genius; how much time did it take for him to understand this

statement? It didn't take a whole night. He probably came up with many novel interpretations of this statement of Chazal after one night, but what he was repeating was the simplicity of it, that if someone doesn't learn Torah at night, he will die before his time.

This is the main point – to repeat simple facts. If this is missing, whatever we will build after this will collapse, because it will have no basis.

If a person checks examines well into his heart, he will discover that in his heart, he doesn't really believe in Hashem! It's a chilling revelation. People think they for sure believe that there is a Creator, but if you speak to many people and see what's going on in their heart, you can discover that they're in doubt about Hashem. Of course, Hashem is found in every person's heart – that is, one the outermost part of the heart. The big question is, how much does a person simply recognize Hashem in the depths of his heart?

The innermost point of one's heart is the point of simplicity. *"Pour out your heart, nochach (opposite) Hashem."* When a person cries, this is not out of his intellectual knowledge, but from simple facts one realizes. In order to dig down into ourselves and reach the innermost point of our heart, the point of simplicity, we need to approach it with simplicity. When a person thinks about something he knows intellectually but he doesn't review the simple points, it is just information to him, and he is missing the main point.

A person has to get used to this and be able to review simple points, and practice for even two or three hours going over simple facts. He should say them with contemplation and feeling as well, as much as he can muster. The words he should say are: "There is a Creator!"

Someone who never tries this will look at this as something foreign and weird. But if someone is internal, he knows that going over these three words can break the walls over his heart and reach great closeness to Hashem through it.

If someone can't do this for so long, he should at least say it for a few minutes and then take a break for five minutes, and then start again. This is the beginning step – that one should say these simple words: "There is a Creator."

After practicing this for some time, a person can then begin to do *Teshuvah* and think into his deeds. How can a person examine his deeds? There are two parts to this. One step is to see if one is acting according to *Halacha*. The other step is to see how much thought he puts into what he does; he should ask himself, "Do I think before I do something that I am doing this to get close to Hashem, or am I just acting by rote?"

In order to work on these points, a person will need to take upon himself certain reminders that will help him think more before he does something, that he is doing it to become closer to Hashem.

"For We Are Your Servants"

After a person has worked on these points every week, and he has bettered his actions as a result from this self-introspection, he can now proceed to the next step, which is to remind himself of the basic point: that one has to serve the Creator. *"For we are Your servants."*

How can we work on this point? It's very simple. When you repeat the words "There is a Creator", like we mentioned before many times, you can repeat with them, "I am Your servant."

A person can talk to Hashem for two or three hours in this way, and just say these three words: "I am Your servant!" These words should be supposed penetrate your heart. You don't have to analyze

what it means to be a “servant” of Hashem; this is not an intellectual discussion. That will be the next step – to think into what it means. But now is the very first step, which is to review the simple facts. Repeat to yourself, “*Ribono shel Olam*, I am Your servant.”

Repeat it again and again to yourself until you realize it as a simple fact, that you are Hashem’s servant, and that serve the Creator.

Repeat these two simple facts again and again, week after week, for two or three hours at a time. This is the first stage: once a week, make a *cheshbon hanefesh*.

This is Teshuvah!

It should be very clear: without doing this once a week (for at least seven hours), it will be very hard to get to our goal, which is closeness to Hashem. It’s not that it’s impossible to be close to Hashem without this, but it’s very difficult.

We have to always remember the words of Chazal (Berachos 17a), “The purpose of *chochmah* \wisdom is *teshuvah* (repentance) and *maasim tovim* (good deeds). We must know that without the goal of Torah, which is to come to *teshuvah*, then even our Torah will be sorely lacking. Don’t consider this to be a waste of time, because this is the whole direction that the Torah is supposed to lead us to – Torah is supposed to lead us closer.

A person should take note of his schedule and find time once a week for this introspection – a time span of about seven to twelve hours of doing *teshuvah*.

There is not one of us who thinks he can fast like how they fasted in earlier generations. The Arizal was the one who prescribed how many fasts one needs to fast for each sin, yet he was the same person who wrote that one who doesn’t have the strength to fast, he should do *teshuvah* for an hour a day. If we don’t do either method, our soul will remain full of damage from our sins, and we will never be able to reach Hashem.

Daily Reflection

Until now we have spoken about doing *Teshuvah* once a week; now we will speak about doing *Teshuvah* once a day. This consists of two parts. Every person has to carry out the words of the *Mesillas Yesharim* which we mentioned before, that a person should set aside at least an hour a day for *hisbodedus* (meditation) and *hisbonenus* (reflection) on his deeds. This has to be a full hour of the day in which you do nothing except *teshuvah* and *cheshbon hanefesh*.

If a day that goes by without this hour of introspection, it is very doubtful if that day was spent properly. One must be very careful to keep this hour every day. Set aside a time every day in which you free yourself from all of your busyness and designate it as time with the *Ribono shel Olam*. During this time, examine your deeds and think about why you came onto this world.

Besides for remembering one’s deeds and repenting for any wrongdoings, one also has to remember simple points, as we mentioned. He can say to himself, “Who gave me this day? The *Ribono shel Olam*. For what reason did He give me this day? So that I can serve Him. Have I done that or not?”

The answer to this is either yes or no. Each person must inspect himself truthfully if his day was spent on doing the will of Hashem or not. After a person knows the answer, he should awaken from within himself a simple desire to have a better spend day tomorrow.

Every day, a person should talk to Hashem anew and say to Him: “I had a fallout today (really, every

day has failures). *Ribono shel Olam*, tomorrow I want to be better and serve You better than I did today. I am begging you for this; the *yetzer hora* gets stronger every day, and if not for You helping me, it is impossible to overcome it. I know that if You don't help me, I will fail the entire day. I am begging You that You help me serve You, and that You awaken in me a true desire to serve You. Guide me on the right path how to serve You, and give me the tools I will need."

This is how a person should speak with Hashem; it should be like how a friend talks to another friend. At first this is hard, but slowly as a person gets used to it, he will feel as if he's actually talking to Hashem naturally, and he will realize that Hashem listens to our prayers.

Don't be flustered by any failures from the past. That is normal; "*A righteous person falls seven times and then gets up.*" He doesn't just fall seven times – he keeps falling another seven times, and another seven times, and Hashem helps him up after each time! But if a person is in a situation of failure, he has to strengthen himself anew each day. He should go to sleep with a strong feeling in his heart that tomorrow, he will get up with one goal: To serve the Creator. If a day goes by that a person goes to sleep without this aspiration, from where will he draw the strength for tomorrow?

If a person doesn't simply speak with Hashem and he doesn't do Teshuvah every day (we are not referring to Teshuvah for one's sins, but Teshuvah to be on the general, proper path – a simple desire to serve Hashem and be close to Him, he will not receive any Heavenly assistance for the next day.

The way a person goes to sleep is the way he gets up. If a person goes to sleep with a decision to get up in the morning and serve Hashem, Hashem should help him do this.

In any case, a person should have an hour every day in which he brings the day to a halt and he reflects into his deeds, and he awakens himself to have an inner desire to serve Hashem, by repeating simple facts.

Reflecting Throughout The Day

The next step of our Avodah is to stop and reflect throughout the day.

If a person only reflects at night, then the twelve hours of daytime are spent without any thought. What can he do about this? He has to catch himself throughout the course of the day. It is hard to set rules for how to go about this, but once every hour or two, a person should take five minutes and remember simple facts: There is a Creator, He created me and sustains me every second. Every second He gives me life to serve Him and fulfill His will."

In five minutes, it is impossible to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* and examine one's deeds. But what a person can do is simply remember that he has to serve the *Ribono shel Olam*, that He lives for Him and needs to serve Him.

If a whole day goes by and a person never thinks about any of this, he will forget even simple facts.

Let us not think that this is a new path to take in Avodas Hashem. The Vilna Gaon did the same thing – he would learn a few hours, then stop to learn Mussar, and then he would return to his learning. This practice is also written in the *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*, a close student of the Vilna Gaon: that a person should stop every so often during his learning and reflect about fear of Heaven.

Our thoughts are wandering about throughout the day anyway. Why not take our thoughts and use them to think about what's important in our life? For just five minutes every hour or so, review simple facts.

To summarize, we have given three fundamental practices: to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* once a week for several hours, to make an hour of *cheshbon hanefesh* each day, and to reflect every day for five minutes every hour or so into simple truths.

If a person continues to do this, Hashem will assist him to reach the truth, and he will attain closeness to Hashem, Who is the Source of all truths. But a person has to persist with these matters and be stubborn about it, and he shouldn't get flustered by any failures. One should daven to Hashem and cry for assistance to implement all this, to understand these matters properly and to find the proper path that is for him as an individual.

Source: <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-4-chapter-04-making-self-accounting>