

Bilvavi on Tefillah

1-45

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Editor's Introduction

Many wonderful commentaries are available on *Shemoneh Esrei* (the silent prayer), which explain the meaning of the words and what to have in mind. This is certainly necessary to understand what we are saying when we *daven*. But we can still be left with a void after we *daven*, wondering why we don't feel connected to the prayers, even though we know the meaning of the words well. And we can also get caught up in trying to concentrate and not space out when we *daven*, which makes us forget the basic essence of prayer- to stand before the King, aware of His presence, and to pray to Him from our heart.

In this unique series of *derashos*, the Rav explains concepts of serving Hashem which can come alive and receive greater meaning, through the words of *Shemoneh Esrei* that we say. It also draws light on many important issues of *hashkafah* (Jewish thought) today about current events, which further awaken in us the words we are saying and how they express various issues we face, both on a personal scale as well as on the communal and global scale.

The Rav begins each shiur by first explaining the simple meaning of the words, based on *Chazal*, and then explains a deeper meaning. A discussion about a certain important topic then ensues, and finally the Rav concludes by going back to the words of *Shemoneh Esrei* and explaining it with the deeper meaning.

These *derashos* are not “what to have in mind” as you are saying the words. Rather, the *derashos* here serve to awaken our inner world to us through the meaning of the words that we say, thereby enabling us to pray more from our heart and stand before our King with greater awareness.

If the lessons here are internalized, you will see changes in your *davening* – inner changes. And it doesn't necessarily mean that you will be “*shuckling*” more or swaying more when you say the words. Rather, you feel the words coming alive in your heart – an inner experience that cannot be described in the written word.

There are 170 classes in this series. In this PDF we have included the first 45 classes.

001 | *Before Shemoneh Esrei**Tefillah — A Ladder that Ascends to Heaven*

Tefillah (davening — prayer), in essence, is to ascend to the Heavens. It is something we do here on this Earth, but it reaches Heaven, like we find by the ladder of Yaakov’s dream: “A ladder placed on the ground, and its head reached the Heavens.”

We also see this from the statement of the Sages, that *tefillah* is “a matter that stands at the height of the world.”¹ *Tefillah* is to ascend to the Heavens.

This doesn’t mean, though that *tefillah* is only in Heaven! What it really means is that if one ascends to the Heavens, he will find *tefillah* there; in other words, just because *tefillah* is such a lofty matter doesn’t mean that we can’t reach it. We reach *tefillah* by ascending the “ladder” found even on our physical world, which we will see.

The Difference Between Torah and Tefillah

We have two major vehicles that bring us close to Hashem — Torah and *tefillah*. What is the difference between them?

The sefer *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that learning Torah is called “*achdus hamochin*” (unity of the minds). This means that Torah is all-inclusive, because it is a power that comes and unifies things. Torah is all-inclusive in that it unifies the Heavens with the earth. *Tefillah* is also all-inclusive — but from a different aspect: it unifies **Earth** to the **Heavens**. *Tefillah* is in essence a ladder that ascends to the Heavens, but it is footed on Earth. Torah was in Heaven, but Hashem brought it down to this world. *Tefillah*, however, is found on this world — but it ascends to Heaven.

Tefillah is like Yaakov *Avinu*’s ladder: we begin from its foot here on Earth, and we ascend up it, step-by-step — until Heaven.

Chazal say that *tefillah* “stands” at the height of the world — and standing is *Amidah*, which is another term for the silent *Shemoneh Esrei*. This doesn’t mean that *tefillah* stands in Heaven while the person praying remains here in This World. The opposite is true: *tefillah* is the ladder

¹ *Berachos 6b*.

that a person ascends on — until the person himself reaches Heaven. Through *tefillah*, a person climbs a ladder toward Heaven, and he is actually standing in Heaven and praying there!

This has to be. Only in Heaven can a person be standing “in front of the King.” When a person *davens*, he is actually standing in Heaven — “in front of the King.”

How do we get from Earth to Heaven?! If we are to climb the ladder toward Heaven, through *tefillah*, then our *tefillah* cannot just be a lip service we do. There must be a specific path to take through *tefillah* in order to get to Heaven, and it must be a step-by-step plan.

How do we ascend this ladder toward Heaven? Before we get to the top of the ladder — which is the *Amidah*, the silent *Shemoneh Esrei* — we have to climb the beginning steps of the ladder. These beginning rungs of the ladder are the first three sections of *davening*, before we get to *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Our *davening* (before *Shemoneh Esrei*) is split into three sections:

- 1) The morning blessings and recitation of *korbonos* (sacrifices),
- 2) *Pesukei Dezimrah*,
- 3) *Shema* and its blessings.

The “Actions” in Tefillah

There are three parts that make up a person — actions, feelings, and thoughts.

The actions are things done with your physical parts, like your hands. The feelings are in your heart. The thoughts are in your mind.

The three sections of the *davening*, as well, are made up of these human forces! The beginning of *davening* is action. One gets up, washes his hands, puts on *tzitzis* and *tefillin* — these are all actions. Then he sacrifices *korbonos* (which he recites). This is action manifest in our *tefillah*.

The better one’s actions are, the higher level his *tefillah* will be. It is written, “All my bones shall speak of You.” But if a person sins, the sins are entrenched in his bones, and his bones cannot speak of Hashem....

Pesukei Dezimrah, as well, consists of actions — the action of purifying oneself more and more. The purer one’s actions are, the more worthy his *tefillah* will be — and it can be said of him that his “mouth and heart are equal.”

The Arizal writes that one should do *teshuvah* before he *davens*. Why is this? The depth of this is so that when one *davens*, it can truly be said of him that “All of my bones speak of You,” because he has purified himself through doing *teshuvah* beforehand.

In *tefillah*, we make requests of Hashem. Why do we request something? Because we want to change our situation. This is actually the soul’s desire to change situations — a form of action. This force in our souls comes from the aspect of action within us.

This shows us that *tefillah* is not just saying words — it is in essence a desire for change.

The “Feelings” in Tefillah

The second section of *davening* is *Pesukei Dezimrah*. After we have hopefully changed our actions by purifying them, the soul now wants to change and purify its feelings. This is a desire for a “pure heart,” as it is written, “A pure heart Hashem created in me.” After purifying the actions, the next level is to break his “heart of stone” and to instead have a “pure” heart.

In *Pesukei Dezimrah*, we sing Hashem’s praises. In essence, this is the soul itself singing to Hashem. Why is the soul singing now? Because it now feels what it wants; we sing when we feel that we have attained what we wanted. *Pesukei Dezimrah* is not just saying over Hashem’s praises, saying one *Hallelukah* after another. It is the soul’s song to Hashem — an expression of purifying the feelings.

Pesukei Dezimrah also isn’t to reflect on Hashem’s praises. It is to reach a state that one’s feelings are dedicated to Hashem. When one overcomes bad *middos*, such as overcoming an evil desire or overcoming arrogance — the soul sings from this. The soul is singing because now Hashem can be found nearby, with the person who overcame the bad *middos* — the feelings have been purified.

To summarize: first, a person purifies his actions (by avoiding sin), which is in essence the soul’s desire to change. After this, a person sings a song of longing from his soul — *Pesukei Dezimrah*. Through this, a person sings the true song — a song of praise to Hashem.

The “Thoughts” in Tefillah

The third section of *tefillah* is *Shema* and its blessings. This is the aspect of the “mind” in *davening* — purifying the mind and thoughts. It represents the step that comes after one has purified his actions and feelings.

In this part of the *davening*, we ask Hashem to enlighten our eyes to the Torah, and we include the *Ahavah Rabbah* prayer — which speaks of Hashem’s love to our people. All of these prayers are, in essence, sanctifying our thoughts. We are not just mentioning here that we want to always think thoughts of learning Torah (we wish that too!). It is rather a different request — we are asking Hashem to help us live in the world of thought, which is in essence the Torah. It is written, “And you shall be immersed in it day and night.” This means to actually live in a world of thought — which is Torah.

The blessings that precede the *Shema* help us reach the level of sanctifying our thought — and to pray from there onward.

A person climbs this ladder of *tefillah* — first through actions, then through feelings, and then the person reaches the thoughts. These are thoughts that are in essence a desire, from our intellect, to long for Hashem.

Climbing the Ladder — Within

But one has to understand that he climbs the ladder within *himself*. Yaakov *Avinu*, who dreamed of a ladder, represents the ladder. This means that he himself was a ladder, climbing it within himself.

Thus, if a person’s actions, feelings, and thoughts are not worthy, and they don’t match up to his prayers, it is like what is written of Haman: “And he came to the king in sackcloth.” A person can’t stand in the King’s court wearing dirty clothing. Sins are like coming to the King with dirty clothing.

But if one’s conduct matches his prayers, it is then that he can enter the King’s court.

Shemoneh Esrei: Entering the King’s Court

If we accomplish these three steps, we can now proceed to the next part of our *avodah* here: *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Reb Chaim Soloveitchik² *zt”l* said there are two aspects of concentration in *tefillah*: 1) the actual meaning of the words, and 2) standing in front of the King.

Let us explain more the meaning of his words.

² *Chiddushei Reb Chaim HaLevi, Hilchos Tefillah*

Until now — the three sections preceding the *Shemoneh Esrei* — a person feels that he is here on this Earth, while Hashem is in Heaven.

But in *Shemoneh Esrei*, there is *amidah* — standing in front of Hashem! This is where a person actually feels that he is in front of Him. It is to literally be “*nochach*” — opposite of Hashem — as real as can be. In *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are not on this world — we are with Hashem, in Heaven, as we stand in front of Him.

002 | *Having Something and Missing Something*

Shacharis, Minchah, and Maariv – Three Different Kinds of Tefillah

In the *Gemara*, there is a discussion about whether *tefillah* was enacted by the Men of the Great Assembly or by our forefathers whether *Avraham*, *Yitzchok*, and *Yaakov* (the *Avos*).

According to the second view, *Avraham* enacted *Shacharis*, *Yitzchok* enacted *Minchah*, and *Yaakov* enacted *Maariv*. If that is the case, then each of the three *tefillos* of the day is unique. They are not similar to the other, for we know that each of the *Avos* excelled in a unique *middah* (personality trait).

Avraham was the *middah* of *chessed*, or *ahavah* — kindness, or love. *Yitzchok* is the *middah* of *gevurah*, or *yirah* — strength, or fear. *Yaakov* is the *middah* of *rachamim* — compassion.

Thus, *Avraham* enacted *Shacharis* through his *middah* of kindness/love, *Yitzchok* enacted *Minchah* through his *middah* of fear of Hashem, and *Yaakov* enacted *Maariv* through his *middah* of compassion.

The Essence of Tefillah — Closeness to Hashem

We need to understand what is the essence of *tefillah*. To whom are we *davening*? To Hashem. Why do we turn to Hashem in *tefillah*? It is clear why we turn only to Hashem — we can't turn to anyone else. But why do we turn to Him specifically through *davening*?

To know the answer to this, we need to clarify what exactly is the essence of *tefillah*.

Why do we *daven*? To ask Hashem our requests — or to get close to Him?

Obviously we need to request things from Hashem. But requesting of Hashem does not define what *tefillah* is! *Tefillah* is not about our requests.

What, then, is *tefillah* about?

Tefillah is the **actual bond** that we have to Hashem. There are many ways that can bring about this connection — and these are the three different *tefillos* of the day. But the purpose of these *tefillos*, however, is the **relationship with Hashem** that we achieve by our *davening*.

As we know, our soul contains many forces. Which force in our soul lets us recognize Hashem? The force of *ratzon* (will). We want to fill something that we lack. We lack this and

that, and because we want to fill the emptiness of what we don't have, we *daven* to Hashem to fill it.

This is in essence the meaning of “*He hears our prayer*” — how does Hashem “hear” our prayer? Through our very situation of lacking something. When we lack something, we want to fill what we are missing, so we turn to Hashem.

Shacharis — Feeling Full and Giving Myself Away For Hashem

Within the soul, there are two present forces that enable us to view situations. There is a force in the soul that makes us feel that we are lacking — “*chasser*” (missing). There is also a force that makes us feel that we have everything, and this is called “*miluy*” (full). When we feel that we lack something, and because of this, it brings us to *tefillah* — which then fills what we were lacking when Hashem gives us what we are lacking.

Avraham enacted *Shacharis* through his *middah* of *chessed*/love; when a person has love, he is feels “full” inside, because when a person truly feels loved, he feels like he lacks nothing. When a person is searching for love, he is searching for something he is missing. He is missing love in his life. But when he has love, he feels full. Thus, *Shacharis*, which was enacted by Avraham, represents feeling “full” inside, when a person feels that he lacks nothing.

Yitzchok, on the other hand, enacted *Minchah* through his *middah* of *yirah*/fear. When a person has a fear, he feels lacking in something. If a person would feel that he lacks nothing, he wouldn't be able to become afraid, so if he is afraid, it must be that he feels somewhat lacking.

What does this mean for us in practical terms?

When we *daven Shacharis*, it is a *tefillah* that comes from feeling “full.” When you are full, and lack nothing, what is the *avodah* you must do? When you are full and you lack nothing, you have what to give away. So when I *daven Shacharis*, I am supposed to feel that I am giving all my heart away to Hashem. This is the force of *ahavah*/love in one's soul, which we inherited through Avraham. It is also known as “*b'levav shaleim* — with an entire heart.”

Minchah — Feeling Lacking

The *tefillah* of *Minchah*, enacted by *Yitzchok*, is a whole different kind of prayer. It is the opposite of the *avodah* of *Shacharis*.

Of *Yitzchok* it is written, “*And he prayed in Ba’er Lachai Ro’ee.*” He was praying for a wife there — he felt lacking. This is a result of his *middah* of *yirah* (fear). *Minchah* thus represents the kind of *tefillah* in which a person feels that he lacks something, and because he is lacking something, he asks Hashem to help fill what he is missing.

Maariv — The Synthesis

Maariv was enacted by Yaakov. With what force in the soul did he enact *Maariv*? *Avraham* and *Yitzchok* already established *tefillos* through the natures of *miluy* and *chasser*. What, then, was left for Yaakov to do?

Yaakov is the *middah* of *rachamim* (compassion). This *middah* encompasses both of these forces mentioned above. Yaakov, who represented *rachamim*, is the synthesis between *ahavah/miluy* and *yirah/chasser*.

How do we see this? When a person is lacking, a person has the possibility of being in a state of one who “rejoices in his suffering.” In such a state, a person is lacking, but he is also full — because he is happy. This is the middle point between *miluy* and *chasser*. The person here is both full and lacking at the same time.

Rachamim comes from the word *rechem* (womb). In the womb, there was previously nothing, and now there is a baby, preparing to be born, there. The emptiness gets filled. When the baby is born, it is then revealed to us that what was previously lacking and empty was actually a means to achieve fulfillment.

Anything that is lacking in Creation can become filled. After we eat, we say *Borei Nefashos* — “... Creator of many souls, and their deficiencies.” We mention here that Hashem fills whatever any creation lacks.

First You Must Feel What You Are Missing

Many people are looking to get married, and they can’t find the right one. Why? It is not because they are not looking to “fill” their emptiness. That isn’t the problem; they do want to get “filled.” The problem with many singles is that they are jumping straight to “filling” themselves before they even realize what they are “missing.” A person has to first really feel what he is lacking in his life in order to sincerely want to fill the lack. Without this feeling, the person never really gets past the first stage....

The *Gemara* refers to finding a spouse as finding a “lost object.” But some people think that a wife is more like a “found object” — something you find — rather than something that you are missing. If a person isn’t married yet, really he is missing something in his life; it’s not simply that he hasn’t found a marriage partner. He has to feel this lacking in his life if he is to ever “find” a spouse.

Finding a wife is like recovering a lost object — it is filling one’s lacking situation. There has to be a feeling that one is lacking something in the first place — if he wants to fill it. If the situation isn’t getting filled — in other words, if one’s prayers aren’t being answered and he isn’t finding his spouse — it shows that there was no “lacking” in the first place: he never felt that he is missing something. If a person really wants to merit his *bashert*, he has to feel that he is missing something in his life in the first place, because you have to first be “missing” something in order for you to get “filled.”

Many singles put their biggest efforts to find a wife by the “*segulah*” of asking a *mekubal* on Tu B’Shvat to pray for them. What is wrong with such a practice? The problem here is the mentality. Such people, who rely on the *mekubal* to get married, are not really feeling that they are lacking, because they just want to have the *mekubal* take care of it for them. They never get to the feeling of missing something in their life, and thus they still don’t find a marriage partner.

That is one kind of problem: when people don’t know what they’re missing in the first place.

Are You Really Missing Something in Your Life?

There is another kind of problem, though. Let’s say someone sees something that his neighbor has, so he *davens* to Hashem that he should have it too.

He might think that he lacks something, but really he isn’t lacking anything. He has everything he is supposed to have, but he thinks otherwise; he thinks that he is really missing something in his life that he could use.

Since there are many situations in which a person really isn’t lacking anything, his prayers don’t get answered, because there is nothing to “fill” here. If he’s not getting “filled,” it shows that there was nothing lacking in the first place.

We are really referring to what it means to have *bitachon* (trusting in Hashem). *Bitachon* is the feeling that we are lacking nothing and therefore we don’t try to fill our situation with things we don’t really need.

Bitachon ... or Irresponsibility?

However, there is a kind of person who doesn't worry about anything, but it's not because he has *bitachon*. That is a person who is simply irresponsible and he has not a care in the world. What is the difference between having *bitachon* and being irresponsible? How can you tell the difference?

If a person never worries about anything at all, this is not *bitachon*; it's called being irresponsible.

Someone who has *bitachon*, though, definitely worries! But his worries come from a deeper place in his soul, and they are not worries that stem from the *nefesh habehamis*, the lower and animalistic level of the soul. He wants to fill what he is lacking, and the one who has *bitachon* possesses the true desire to fill what he lacks — a desire that comes from a true place in his soul: that what he is lacking will become full on its own!

Appreciating Even What We Are Missing

With the attitude of *bitachon*, a person appreciates the fact that he is missing things in his life.

Before *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Maariv*, we say, “*Blessed is Hashem, day after day.*” What does “day after day” mean? It means that we thank Hashem not only for what we have, but even for what we lack. This is because what we lack is really a means to get our needs filled, and thus it is also good to lack.

Sometimes we imagine that we lack something, but we are not really lacking at all, and we are just worried. Most of our worries are unjustified — they are about things that never end up happening.

When a person understands this — he knows that what he thinks he is lacking is really nothing — he becomes very relaxed, because that is the resulting feeling that accompanies *bitachon*.

This concept is brought out by the following: Adam was created on the sixth day. When he saw the sun beginning to set and darkness beginning to descend, he grew very afraid, saying, “*Woe to me that I have destroyed the world.*” Twelve hours later, the sun rose again and he realized that it was a new day. At first he saw only darkness; he thought it was over. But what he failed to realize was that what was missing here was actually a reason for a new day.

It is written, “*And to tell over in the morning Your kindnesses, and Your faith at nights.*” The *passuk* is saying that what appears to be night and darkness is really what can make us have

emunah (faith). In other words, what appears to us as darkness is really nothing to worry about, and it only serves to help us increase our *emunah*.

Emunah is a means to fill one's needs; it is from the word "*oimain*," as we find by Mordechai, "And he knew [*oimain*] Hadassah." Mordechai raised Esther; this shows how *emunah/oimain* is what help us realize that everything is a means for a greater purpose — that anything a person lacks is in essence a means to his completion and perfection. When a person has *emunah*, he realizes that even what he lacks is necessary to perfect him.

The moon keeps getting more and more diminished — until it can't be seen anymore. Just when it cannot be seen anymore, that is exactly when it reappears; this shows us again how the very "lacking" itself is a means to completion.

The Necessity of "Lacking" Something

Many people complain that their children aren't doing well academically, and it bothers them very much. But many times we see that the child's lack of brilliance is what spurs him on to try harder, leading him to achieve more results than his smarter counterparts. What was previously perceived as "lacking" here was actually the road to being filled with success.

When *Pharoah* asked Yaakov *Avinu* how old he was, he said, "*Few and bad were the years of my life.*" The Sages were bothered at this statement: How could he say such a thing and complain against Hashem? There are many explanations given. A deep explanation of the matter is that he was really saying that all of his life he was lacking, and that that was exactly what brought him to his perfection in life.

Thus, when we *daven Maariv* — the *tefillah* of Yaakov *Avinu* — we are essentially *davening* that Hashem should give us the ability to appreciate even what we lack, because what we *think* we lack is not really lacking anything at all. What we are missing is actually a means to achieve greater perfection. That is the third form of *tefillah*, *Maariv*, represented by Yaakov *Avinu* the synthesis of *Avraham* and *Yitzchok*: that really, we don't lack anything, because even what we lack is needed for us to perfect ourselves.

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003 | Hashem, Open My Lips

What Are We Asking Permission For?

In all of *Shemoneh Esrei*, there are no private prayers. We either praise and thank Hashem, or we ask for general requests that affect the public. But in the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*, there is a personal prayer — “*Hashem, open my lips.*”

We don’t start *davening* in *Shemoneh Esrei*; we *daven* as soon as we get up, saying *Modeh Ani*. So why do we have to ask Hashem in the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei* to open our lips, if we have already been *davening* as soon as we got up?

The answer to this is as follows: Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik *zt”l* said that there are two aspects of concentration in *tefillah*: to know the meaning of the words, and to “stand in front of the King.” We only stand in front of Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei*, and this is why *Shemoneh Esrei* is called the “*Amidah*.” This is a unique level, the level described by the Rema in the beginning of *Shulchan Aruch*: “

A person’s movements are not the same as when he sits in the King’s Palace.” Of course, Hashem hears us even when we aren’t actually standing in front of Him. But in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we stand in front of Him — we are in His place.

Before *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are talking, and Hashem is listening. We don’t need to be in Heaven in order to talk. But when we stand in front of Hashem, we are in His place — and it is really unbecoming for us to talk now. This is why we ask Hashem to open our lips — **to give us permission to talk**. We are not merely asking for permission to talk; we are asking for permission because really, this isn’t the place to talk.

“And Let My Mouth Speak of Your Praises”

Then we ask, “And let my mouth speak of Your praises.” We are asking that all of our talking now should come from a lofty place, not from ourselves. We are asking Hashem to “talk” specifically because of Hashem’s ability to let us talk here, and our talking now is not of the same source that we are used to.

We are not talking like we are used to.

Shemoneh Esrei Is to Daven for Klal Yisrael

When we *daven* for personal requests, we are *davening* from only a private aspect in ourselves. We are *davening* each for our own personal welfare. When we request things from Hashem for ourselves, we are only using the outer parts of our soul.

Shemoneh Esrei, though is a prayer for the public. It is a prayer that emanates from a deeper place in our soul. Even the *chazzan's* repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei* is not personal, because it is only to fulfill others' obligation. *Shemoneh Esrei*, by essence, is not personalized — it is about praying for others.

Why is there no requirement for the *chazzan* to repeat *Pesukei Dezimrah* and the blessings of *Shema*? It is because there are two kinds of praying with the public (*tefillah b'tzibbur*): Praying silently with the public, and praying loudly with the public. Even when one prays *Shemoneh Esrei* alone, he is still praying a public prayer; it's not individual. Every *Shemoneh Esrei* is a public prayer.

There are two kinds of *tefillah* we find in *Tehillim*: *tefillah l'oni* (the poor person's prayer), and *tefillah l'Moshe* (the prayer of Moshe). These are two unique ways of *davening*.

Pesukei Dezimrah, the blessings of *Shema*, and the *Shema* itself are like the prayers of a poor person, who prays for himself. But *Shemoneh Esrei* is like the prayer of Moshe — Moshe represents the entire nation of Yisrael. Moshe's prayer is in essence a prayer on behalf of all of Klal Yisrael; he didn't pray for himself.

If one only *davens* for himself and is only worried about himself, he cannot enter the King's Palace in *Shemoneh Esrei*, because he's not really utilizing the idea of *Shemoneh Esrei*. *Shemoneh Esrei* is to *daven* on behalf of the Jewish people, to think about others — and it is not about oneself.

“Hashem, open my lips.” What are we really asking? We are asking Hashem for help that the *tefillah* that we are now *davening* — *Shemoneh Esrei* — should be a prayer for Klal Yisrael, not for ourselves. It is not about me; it's about *Klal Yisrael*.

Summary of the “Hashem, Open My Lips” Prayer

We have mentioned two reasons why we ask Hashem that He open up our lips. 1) Because really we have no permission to speak in Heaven, and we are asking permission. 2) We are asking to be helped that our prayers come from a truthful part of our soul, an inner part - a concern for *Klal Yisrael*, not for our own self.

Two Ways to Understand How We Relate to Hashem

The kind of understanding of *Shemoneh Esrei* that we have just given applies to one who serves Hashem with *daas* — intellectual awareness of Hashem.

But there is an even simpler way to understand it: because we need to have a palpable kind of *tefillah*, a real sense of what it is.

Tefillah is how we perceive life! Hashem created the world and all of Creation. He created two kinds of ways in which we can perceive Him:

- 1) That He is “*Kel Mistater*” — a “hidden Almighty.”
- 2) *V'Shochanti B'tocham* — “And I will dwell among them.”

The fact that He is a “hidden Almighty” means for us that we know there is a Creator, and that He resides in Heaven while we are here on Earth. This represents the understanding based on our *daas*.

But there is also a view of “And I will dwell among them.” This means that one literally feels Hashem’s existence, and that he can feel it no less than the sunshine. It is a very real sense. This feeling is granted only to one who truly seeks Hashem.

Tefillah is not defined as requests from Hashem. What we need and request are merely a means to achieve a greater goal. *Tefillah* does not exist to thank Hashem for everything and give praise to Him; that is also just a part of what *tefillah* is.

The essence of *tefillah* is to utterly realize *Who* we are praising, and from *Whom* we are asking. Although we give thanks and praise to Hashem, “*lehodos u'lihallel*,” this is not the purpose. The purpose of thanking and praising Hashem is to realize to Whom we are thanking and praising.

When we request something of Hashem, or when we thank Him, it is only a means to a greater goal. It is not a purpose unto itself. The goal of all requests and thanks to Hashem is to come to a palpable sense of Hashem’s existence. This is really why we ask that Hashem open our lips — we are asking that we should realize that until now, all of our *tefillah* was only a means to a greater purpose, and that now in *Shemoneh Esrei*, all of our *tefillah* should come from a sense of Hashem’s existence, the level of “standing before the King.”

With What Mindset Are We Davening Shemoneh Esrei?

To give an example of this, when one *davens Refaeinu* — “Hashem, heal us” — what is the purpose? Is the purpose to ask that all of the sick be healed? Or to realize that Hashem is the true

Healer of all? The purpose of this *tefillah* is not that He heal the sick. It is to reveal to all who the true Source of healing is: Hashem. That is what *Refaeinu* is about!

Some people are *davening Shemoneh Esrei*, but they are still on the level of the morning blessings. They are not *davening* from an inner place in their soul; they are only *davening* for themselves.

The Intellectual Approach and the Simple Approach

A person needs to clarify for himself what life is. In the outside world, the meaning of “life” is hidden to us. But the meaning of life can be clarified in the inner place of the soul.

The holy *sefarim* mention that there are two general ways to serve Hashem — through *daas* (lit. intellectual awareness) or through *p’shitus* (lit. simplicity). The ways to serve Hashem with *daas* are mentioned in *sefer Derech Hashem* and *Daas Tevunos*. But there is another way to serve Hashem — through the way of *p’shitus*. This means to live with a real sense of Hashem’s existence.

How Do You Come to Really Feel Hashem?

The tools to achieve this are toiling to our utmost in Torah. When a person is connected to Torah and *mitzvos*, he will definitely come to have this real sense. But if one doesn’t really feel Hashem’s presence in life, it is a sign that something is missing from his learning and his *mitzvos*.

004 | *The Beginning and End of Shemoneh Esrei*

How Can We “Bless” Hashem?

The first word of *Shemoneh Esrei* is *baruch* — “blessed.” Why does the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei* begin with the idea of blessing?

The *Gemara* recounts a story in which Hashem asked Reb Yishmael to bless Him. This is a puzzling phenomenon. How can a person bless Hashem? Blessing is only when someone is missing something in the first place; so how can one bless Hashem, who lacks nothing?!

The *Rishonim* explain that the concept of blessing Hashem doesn’t mean that we actually bless Hashem; it means that we are continuing Hashem’s sustenance to the world. The way Hashem reveals Himself to us is through the concept of “blessing” — which is when we “bless” Him.

That is the concept, and we will try to explain it.

Shema — A Request for Perfection

In *Shema*, it would appear that we have already arrived at the highest level of perfection. In *Shema*, we proclaim that Hashem is One. This would appear to be total perfection, as we know that the purpose of Creation is to reveal the unity of Hashem’s Name in the world. It seems that we are describing the most perfect level possible, with *Shema*. How can there be anything more than this? What is there in *Shemoneh Esrei* that isn’t in the *Shema*? Why do we need *Shemoneh Esrei* after we have just come to the purpose of all of Creation?

But the truth is that *Shema* does not represent our ultimate purpose. What is *Shema* about? It is describing a level of the future; only in the future will Hashem’s Oneness be revealed to all. We are stating that in the future, Hashem’s Kingship will be totally revealed. But this is not yet perfection. The rest of the world doesn’t yet recognize Hashem as king, and that itself takes away from our own perfection. *Shema* is a request for perfection, the perfection of the future. But as we have already said previously, requesting is not the goal of *tefillah*. Thus, *Shema* is not yet the ultimate level we can reach.

Shemoneh Esrei: Reaching Perfection

Tefillah is like “a ladder that is footed on the earth, and its head reaches the heavens.” This is only through *Shemoneh Esrei*. The perfection of reaching the heavens is only expressed through *Shemoneh Esrei*.

The perfection of *Shemoneh Esrei* is thus not just one blessing after another blessing after another. It is the perfection we reach upon climbing to the top of the ladder, which is in Heaven itself.

“*Sof maaseh b’machshavah techilah* — The end of the matter is first in the thoughts.” First we need to understand the goal of *Shemoneh Esrei*, and only after that should we try to understand each of the levels described in each blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

The End of Shemoneh Esrei Teaches Us about the Beginning

Since the end of *Shemoneh Esrei* is the expression of our ultimate goal, we need to learn about the last blessing, *Sim Shalom*, in order for us to appreciate the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*. As we said before, *sof maaseh b’machshavah techilah*. We need to know about the goal of *Shemoneh Esrei* before we embark on the actual *Shemoneh Esrei* itself.

In this final blessing, *Sim Shalom*, we say, “For in the light of Your Face that You have given us.” This is referring to the time when we stood at *Har Sinai*, when Hashem spoke to us face-to-face. We were all prophets then; our souls were all present there and we all experienced the level of prophecy — the ultimate perfection. There is no better place to talk about perfection than in the blessing of *Sim Shalom*, the blessing of peace; *Chazal* also state that “Hashem did not find any other vessel for blessing other than peace.”

After knowing about our end goal, we will then be able to understand better the difference between the level expressed in the recital of the *Shema*, and the greater level we are aspiring towards, which is achieved by *davening Shemoneh Esrei*.

Knowing and Then Internalizing

In all of our *avodah*, we have two steps: “And you shall know today” — to know about Hashem, as well as “And you shall return the matter on your heart” — to internalize this knowledge in our heart.

“There is nothing else other than You.” First we must acknowledge that we know nothing other than the clear knowledge that only Hashem is in charge of Creation. This is the purpose of Creation — recognizing Hashem — and this describes the ultimate perfection. But how do we

come to recognize Hashem in our very souls? By entering the knowledge of Hashem into our hearts.

“Words that come from the heart enter the heart.” How is this done? It is done through the power of speech. It is written, “I believed, for I spoke.” Speaking causes believing. We are referring to speaking through *tefillah*. The way we internalize the knowledge of Hashem into our hearts is through *tefillah*.

A Heart Recognition of Hashem

There are two fundamental points about using our ability of speech, the essence of *tefillah*. First, we need to talk to Hashem like one who talks to a friend, as it is written, “And I poured out my soul.” Second, through speech, we internalize our recognition of Hashem in our hearts.

Generally speaking, internalizing our knowledge of Hashem can be done in two ways (mentioned in *sefer Chovos Halevovos*):

1) To see Hashem through the “eyes” of one’s intellect. 2) To recognize Him through the heart. We will clarify which way is the most practical for us to work with.

In the first way — seeing Hashem through “eyes” of one’s intellect — we are trying to recognize Hashem. If we already believe in Hashem, why do we need to recognize Him? The *Sefer Chareidim* answers that it is not enough to just believe in Hashem; we need to actually “see” Him. We “see” this through our intellect, which are like “eyes” that “see” Him. This is not so practical for us.

But the second way is closer to home by us. It is to recognize Hashem through our hearts. When someone loves another, he loves him even though he doesn’t see the other; he can love the other in his heart. Of course, love is complete only when they are face-to-face, and they can see each other. But there is most definitely love between them, even when they don’t see each other. If a son never saw his father, and he is informed that his father is alive — he is filled with a love for his father even though he never saw him.

Loving Hashem, Even Though We Can’t See Him

The final blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, *Sim Shalom*, is the love between *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem in its most perfect form. But the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei* is a love that is not as complete — a love only in the heart; we are not face-to-face with Hashem then.

To love Hashem in the heart — without “seeing” Him — is like what is written, “And in its love you shall go after.” All of us are able to feel this love for Hashem. This level of love is the level present in *Shema* and in the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

To summarize, there are three levels of *tefillah*: the level of *Shema*, the level of the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*, and the level at the end blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, the blessing of *Sim Shalom*.

Two Levels of Love

In *Shema*, we come to the recognition that Hashem is in control of everything, and this comes from an inner love for Hashem that we possess. This is a level of *daas* — an awareness of our love to Hashem. It is written, “Just as water reflects a face to a face, so does the heart of man reflect another.” When we show love toward Hashem in *Shema* — through our *daas*/awareness, Hashem reciprocates the love. From this, we proceed onward to the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*, which is the word “*baruch* — *blessed*.” In “*baruch*,” Hashem reflects His love back toward us.

“Blessed are You, Hashem.” We are not just asking for livelihood or health; we are revealing that Hashem is next to us, by declaring “*baruch*.”

So the first level we reach is in *Shema*. This is an awareness in the mind that comes from our love to Hashem — but it is only in the mind. In the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*, which is *Bircas Ha'avos* — we are utilizing the level of Avraham *Avinu*, who represents the *middah* of *ahavah*/love of Hashem. In the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we reveal a love toward Hashem, a love that is there even though we don't see our Beloved. It is like the level of “My back you may see, but My Face you may not see.” Although we cannot see Hashem face-to-face, there is still a love between us and Hashem.

We can also understand the two kinds of love based on the difference between the two types of giving — *tzedakah* (charity) and *ahavah* (love). In *tzedakah*, we give privately so as not to embarrass the collector; it is better if he doesn't know who the benefactor is. But the kind of relationship we are referring to is not the level of *tzedakah*; it is a relationship of *ahavah*/love, a love that exists even though we can't see our Benefactor.

Thus, the purpose of the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei* is to have a palpable sense of Hashem. It is to know Him more than in our minds; it is to internalize Him in our heart.

Sim Shalom: A Mind Changed by the Heart

After this, we can come to the pinnacle of *Shemoneh Esrei*, *Sim Shalom* — in which we return back to our minds. But this time, our minds can sense Hashem as well! Now even our intellects can feel Hashem — not just our hearts.

This concept — that we can now return our heart knowledge back to our minds, re-internalizing our sense of Hashem in our minds — is not new. The Rambam writes that in order to achieve *d'veykus* in Hashem, we first need thoughts of the heart — and then thoughts of the mind. *Sefer Hamaspik L'Ovdei Hashem* and *Sefer Habris* are all *sefarim* that can bring a person to the purpose of *Shemoneh Esrei* in the order that we have mentioned; it is imperative to learn these *seforim* if one wants to reach the purpose of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Tefillah Is Empowered through Torah and Mitzvos

The level of *Shema* — awareness of Hashem in the mind — is easier for us to attain. But the second level — a palpable sense of Hashem — is very far from us. What can we do to achieve it?

Our *seichell* intellect is a tool that we need to learn Torah. When we internalize our sense of Hashem back from our hearts into our minds as well, our intellect becomes a tool as well to store a palpable sense of Hashem's existence.

The Sages say, “If only a person would pray the entire day.” This implies that really, our whole way of life should be *tefillah*.

Tefillah is a ladder that ascends Heavenward; how do we climb it? We don't climb it through the Torah, or through the *mitzvos*, or through doing acts of *chessed*; that should not be our attitude. Our attitude should be that from the power of our learning Torah, *mitzvos*, and *chessed* — that is how we are enabled to climb the ladder upward until we reach the top of the ladder — a real sense of Hashem.

It is thus apparent that *tefillah* is not something we do just to understand what we are saying (although it is true that we must understand what we are saying). The first thing we must understand about *davening*, before anything else, is to get rid of the notion that *tefillah* is all about requesting what we need (although it is also true that we need to ask Hashem for our needs). *Tefillah* is in essence our bond with Hashem!

005 | *Revealing Hashem*

The first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* is called *Birkas Ha'avos* — we mention the blessings of our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Contained in this first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* is the entire concept of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

There is a concept in *sefarim hakedoshim* that everything is contained in its beginning point. For example, a son begins with his father. The Jewish people are contained in the three forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov; in them, we can find the entire essence of the Jewish people. In the same vein, the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* contains the entire *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Chazal say that each person should say to himself, “When will my actions touch upon those of my forefathers?” We are charged to aspire to go in the ways of our great forefathers. Simply speaking, this means that we have to touch upon the level of their great *middos*. We need to do *chessed* that resembles a spark of Avraham *Avinu*’s great *chessed*. We need to have *yirah* that resembles the *yirah* of Yitzchak *Avinu*. We need to touch upon the level of *rachamim* that Yaakov *Avinu* personified.

That is the simple meaning of the concept, but there is a deeper understanding. *Chazal* say that “the *Avos* are the holy chariot” — they represent all of Hashem’s handiwork, because they reached perfection. The entire purpose of Creation is for the Creation to recognize the greatness of Hashem, and the *Avos* succeeded in revealing this. They implanted the ability in the world to recognize and reveal Hashem. Because of the *Avos*, we are able to continue revealing Hashem into the world.

Avraham *Avinu* personified *chessed*. He didn’t just reach the most perfected level of *chessed*. Rather, he revealed Hashem in the world, through utilizing the *middah* of *chessed* to its fullest. Yitzchak *Avinu* had a different way of revealing Hashem onto the world: through the trait of *yirah*. Yaakov embodied the trait of compassion, but he didn’t just reach the most perfect level of compassion; he did this to reveal Hashem onto the world.

In other words, the *middos* that each of the *Avos* excelled in were just the tools they used in order to reveal Hashem into the world. The *Avos* did not just work on themselves to reveal these *middos* to their fullest; they revealed Hashem into the world by way of these *middos*. Their *middos* were the tool to bring about a greater goal, which was to reveal Hashem’s existence into the world.

Chazal say that if not for the Torah, we would learn good *middos* from observing the animals. What indeed is the difference between the good *middos* that the *Avos* had and the good *middos* that we can find in animals? If we would just learn how to have good *middos* from animals, we would learn simply how to have those good *middos*, and there would be no difference between the good *middos* of a Jew and the good *middos* of a non-Jew. Our good *middos* would just be “*derech erez*” — proper mannerisms. But the Torah taught us how to have good *middos* through the actions of our *Avos*. These are different kinds of good *middos*; they were *middos* that revealed Hashem into the world. This is the kind of good *middos* we strive to embody.

We must see the entire Creation and everything that goes on in it as a way to reveal Hashem in the world. Since the purpose of Creation is to reveal Hashem, it must be that everything in Creation somehow serves to reveal Him in the world. Our Torah learning must be seen as a tool that reveals Hashem. Our *middos* must be viewed as a tool that reveals Hashem. Our acts of *chessed* must be done with the awareness that we are trying to reveal Hashem into the world.

This is the meaning of the statement that the *Avos* are the holy chariot — the *middos* that the *Avos* personified held up the entire world, because each of their *middos* served to reveal the purpose of the entire Creation: to recognize Hashem.

These are really very simple words to anyone who lives a life in which he strives to reveal Hashem.

Chazal say that when a person *davens*, he should *daven* to Hashem, and not to His Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. Although Hashem has Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, we are not supposed to turn to His attributes, but rather to Hashem directly. We are not turning to the *chessed* of Hashem or to the *rachamim* that Hashem has on His Creation, but rather, we are supposed to turn to Hashem Himself. *Tefillah*/prayer is to “stand in front of the King.” We must strive to resemble Hashem in our *middos*, or else there is a barrier between us and Hashem as we stand before Him.

There are generally two kinds of barriers that get in the way between a person and his relationship with Hashem. One kind of barrier is when we are entrenched in materialism and sins. The other kind of barrier is when we have bad *middos*. Either of these two factors can hold back a person from feeling that he is standing in front of Hashem, and they act as barriers between the person and Hashem.

Our soul naturally senses Hashem, but these two barriers can put a hold on the soul’s natural senses. Before the sin of Adam, Adam was able to see from one end of the world to other, but after the sin, he lost this special power. This was because the sin dulled his spiritual senses.

We need to feel the spirituality that lays in something. For example, when we recite *Korbonos*, we need to actually feel that they are atoning for our sins. It is only after we actually feel spiritual realities that we can truly feel like we are standing before Hashem as we *daven Shemoneh Esrei*. When we *daven Shemoneh Esrei*, we need to feel that Hashem is actually here, in front of us, now, as real as can be.

Dovid *Hamelech* says, “And I will walk before Hashem in the land of the living.” In other words, even as we walk on this physical planet Earth, we can still feel that we are in front of Hashem, as long as we feel that He exists.

In our original state, when Adam lived in *Gan Eden* before the sin, there was no death in the world. There was only life, and that was the true “land of the living” that Adam walked in, where he felt utterly in front of Hashem. After the sin, death came upon the world, and this sense of feeling Hashem in front of us was ruined, but when we stood at *Har Sinai*, the impurity of sin was removed from us, and we returned to the pre-sin state. After the sin with the Golden Calf, we returned back to the post-sin state, in which we don’t always grasp the reality of Hashem in our life.

But we have a mitzvah to remember the day we stood at *Har Sinai*. The depth behind this is that we must remember the state of being at *Har Sinai*, which was that we felt totally how we were in front of Hashem. In fact, the only way we are able to stand in front of Hashem during *Shemoneh Esrei* is because we once stood at *Har Sinai* and felt as if we were standing in front of the King. That was engraved onto our souls, and it was really there already before, through the *Avos*, who bequeathed to us this inheritance — the ability to palpably feel and recognize Hashem.

The prophets were able to see a vision of Hashem, but it was like a cloudy kind of glass, not totally clear. Moshe *Rabbeinu*, however, saw Hashem through a clear kind of glass. When we *daven Shemoneh Esrei*, we are standing in front of the King — we need to feel Hashem in front of us as if we’re looking at Him through clear glass! We need to feel that Hashem is in front of us, without any dividers. This is when we realize that all of life is about revealing Hashem. Nothing in our life serves any other purpose other than to reveal Hashem.

Shemoneh Esrei is the time that is called “*tefillah b’tzibbur*,” when the entire congregation fulfills their obligation of prayer, in unison, through a quorum. *Tefillah b’tzibbur* is mainly defined by *Shemoneh Esrei*, because *Shemoneh Esrei* is the time in which we reveal Hashem — which the entire congregation is charged with.

What we need to understand is that *davening Shemoneh Esrei* is not about “me.” It is not about what “I” need from Hashem, what “I” *daven* for, etc. It is about revealing Hashem into the world. (On a deeper note, the *sefer Shomer Emunim* writes that a person should *daven* that he merit to become part of the “holy chariot” in Creation, just like the *Avos* did).

It is written, “All my bones speak of this [about Hashem].” In other words, all the bones of our body exist to reveal Hashem!

The entire *Shemoneh Esrei* is to stand in front of the King. This was a power that was implanted in us through the *Avos*. In *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are supposed to aspire to become like the *Avos*, who became the “holy chariot” of the world — by revealing Hashem into the world through their acts.

In all of our life we need to keep cleansing ourselves internally, but we must not lose sight of the goal of life, which is to recognize more and more the reality of Hashem’s existence. It’s not an “*avodah*” to recognize Hashem’s existence — it is rather the very perspective we need to have on life! When you breathe, it’s not an “*avodah*”; it’s necessary for your life. It is your very life, because it is reality. To sense Hashem is not an “*avodah*” — it is reality, and thus, we need to realize how it is reality....

006 | *Bowing in Shemoneh Esrei**Bowing and Standing in Shemoneh Esrei*

The *halachah* is that a person bends his knees and bows as he says the word “*baruch*” in *Shemoneh Esrei*, and he must be erect in his position upon saying the word “Hashem.”³ We bow three times during *Shemoneh Esrei* — once in the beginning, by the word “*baruch*,” in *Modim*, and in the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Let us reflect on the concepts of bowing and standing up erect in *Shemoneh Esrei* in a way that applies to our soul.

Why do we bow in *Shemoneh Esrei*? It is written, “*For to You, every knee bows.*” There are two root reasons why we bow. One reason is to show subservience, such as when we bow to a king, or when the *kohen* would bow in the *Beis Hamikdash*. Another reason is to bend ourselves down to someone who is lower than us, for example, when a person leans downward to be able to give to someone who needs something from him.

The *Gemara* says that when a person bows, he has to bend until his head is positioned opposite his heart. The depth behind this is that we have to integrate our “head” — our mind’s knowledge — with our heart; we must extend our mind’s knowledge *into* our heart. That is the message behind bowing.

Thus, when we bow in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are trying to impress upon ourselves two things: we want to nullify ourselves to the Creator in subservience, and we want to extend our mind’s knowledge into our heart.

Shemoneh Esrei is all about standing in front of the King. Now that we have explained the concept behind bowing, what is more important — standing in front of Hashem or bowing to Hashem? We find in *halachah* that some would have the custom during *Yamim Noraim* to bow the entire *Shemoneh Esrei*. So we see that there are two forms in which one can *daven Shemoneh Esrei* — to stand the whole time, and to bow the whole time. We will explain the two different forms of *tefillah*.

³ *Berachos 12a.*

Standing during Shemoneh Esrei: Spiritual Pleasure versus Recognition of Hashem

Standing the whole time during *Shemoneh Esrei* represents how one must constantly be connected to the Creator. The purpose of Creation is to come to recognize Hashem, in a palpable sense; however, the *Mesilas Yesharim* says that man was created to bask in the spiritual bliss of Hashem. If so, what is the purpose of the world — to recognize Hashem, or for man to have spiritual pleasure? The answer is that the spiritual pleasure is only a “garment” covering over the main goal; it is only a tool to reach the goal. When a person has true recognition of Hashem, he enjoys the connection, but that is not the goal. The goal is the actual recognition.

Usually, a person thinks that recognizing Hashem is the tool to get to a greater goal — to have the spiritual pleasure. People think that pleasure is the goal of life. But it’s really the other way around: the spiritual pleasure that one has from his connection with Hashem is merely the tool to get to recognition of Hashem.

Our soul is not really interested in the pleasure; it wants the recognition of Hashem. However, the soul cannot survive without spiritual pleasure, so it needs to get spiritual pleasure. Simply speaking, one should derive pleasure from spirituality, from his Torah and mitzvos, which will prevent him from searching for inappropriate kinds of pleasure that are forbidden. That is why we need spiritual pleasure — when we are satisfied from spirituality, we won’t search for pleasure elsewhere. For example, if a person does two acts of *chessed* each day, and he feels vitality from this, he has a good and healthy kind of pleasure and he is utilizing his need for pleasure in the right way.

However, spiritual pleasure is not the goal. It is written, “Those who grasp the Torah do not know Me.” The meaning of this is that even if a person derives pleasure from Torah and *mitzvos*, if he thinks that spiritual pleasure is the goal, he is really far from Hashem, because the goal is not about pleasure.

Thus, there are two kinds of people who stand in front of Hashem during *Shemoneh Esrei*. One kind of person does so because he has recognition of Hashem, while another person does so because it’s enjoyable. The first kind of person is the one who fulfills the goal.

What is the purpose of spiritual pleasure? It is because without it, a person wouldn’t be able to survive. He would learn Torah and do *mitzvos* simply because he has to, and he would never find pleasure in it; indeed, there are people who learn Torah and do *mitzvos* simply because “I have to,” and they don’t enjoy it. Thus, we need to have spiritual pleasure. Spiritual pleasure from our Torah learning and *mitzvos* enables us to continue our *avodas Hashem*. Without

pleasure in our *avodas Hashem*, we wouldn't be able to get very far. But we must be aware that it is not the goal.

So we need to have both pleasure from spirituality and recognition of Hashem — but we must be aware that pleasure is the tool to get to the goal, which is to recognize Hashem.

Examples of “Tools” to Get Closer to Hashem

So what are some of these tools that help us to get closer to Hashem?

When a person is born, he does not yet recognize Hashem. All he recognizes are his parents, and then his family. When a person gets older and he grows up, he begins to face difficulties in life, so he works on his *emunah*, and he *davens* to Hashem to save him from his troubles. He has a “little” *emunah* and “a little” bit of recognition of Hashem. After his troubles pass, he stops *davening* so hard to Hashem, and he loses the closeness to Hashem he had when he was going through the difficulty. Why? It is because he didn't realize the purpose of the difficulty. He didn't use it as a tool to deepen his connection with Hashem.

Here is another example that illustrates how people forget about how our situations are really a “tool” to get to Hashem. A person is *davening* very hard for something, and he decides to go to a *gadol* to get a *berachah*. Soon after he gets the *berachah*, he might stop *davening* as much, because now he's content that he has connected with the *gadol*, so he feels like he doesn't need to connect with Hashem as much. He doesn't understand that the *gadol* is just a tool to help him get closer to Hashem....

It's very possible that a person spends a large amount of the day immersed in *davening*, whether it's for a *shidduch* or for *parnassah* — yet he's still far from Hashem! How? It's because his whole attitude towards life is incorrect. He doesn't see his difficulties as a tool to get him closer to recognizing Hashem. Even if a person derives a pleasurable feeling from *davening*, this is not necessarily leading him to the goal of life; he must understand that the pleasure is only a tool that can help him reach his goal. When a person forgets the goal, which is to recognize Hashem, then he remains far from being close to Hashem even if he's *davening* all day, and even if he is aware that the salvation can only come from Hashem.

The *Mesilas Yesharim* states that man was created to bask in the spiritual pleasure of Hashem. When a person only has an intellectual awareness of Hashem, then he thinks that spiritual pleasure is the goal. But the purpose of spiritual pleasure is not to be in it for the pleasure, but to come to the goal, which is to recognize Hashem.

When a person reviews the Thirteen Principles of Faith (*Ani Maamim*), does he do this because it's enjoyable, or because it gets him closer to recognizing Hashem?

In the *Shabbos zemiros*, in the song of *Koh Ribbon*, it says, "Even if man would live for a thousand years, he would not be able to describe Your strength." It's possible for a person to go his entire life yet never understand what the purpose of life is, even if he is a person who learns Torah all day and keeps all the *mitzvos*.

The true kind of life is to derive vitality from getting closer and closer to recognizing the reality of Hashem. This will result in the true kind of pleasure as well. When a person seeks other kinds of pleasure, he has the "branches" of pleasure without the "roots." There are altogether three sources of spiritual pleasure. One kind of spiritual pleasure is to have pleasure from loving Hashem and the Torah. The second kind of spiritual pleasure is to have a deep connection with Hashem and the Torah. The third, deepest, kind of pleasure to have is the pleasure from having a palpable recognition of Hashem. [But even then, the pleasure is not the goal, as we said.]

The Depth of Bowing

Now we will explain the depth behind bowing in *Shemoneh Esrei*. Standing in front of Hashem requires us to first nullify ourselves to Him. If a person stands in front of Hashem, but he doesn't feel nullified to Him, he cannot really stand in front of Hashem. He is still full of arrogance, and of an arrogant person Hashem says, "I and him cannot dwell under one roof."⁴

Thus, the first step of our *avodah* is always to first make room for Hashem in our heart so He can enter. Our heart is the source of both our physical and spiritual vitality. A person who is brain-dead is still considered to be alive, but a person whose heart has ceased to function is considered to be dead. So too, if we make space in our heart for Hashem to enter, then our heart becomes a source of life thriving with spirituality.

So when we bow, we are trying to impress upon ourselves that we need to extend our mind's knowledge into our heart [as we explained before]; this is how we make space for Hashem to enter our heart. We can then stand in front of Hashem.

"To stand in front of the King" in *Shemoneh Esrei* is a life-giving act. In *Shemoneh Esrei* there are eighteen blessings, and the number eighteen is the numerical value of the word *chai*, which

⁴ *Sotah 5a*.

means “alive.” A person can gain life-giving vitality from the very fact that he is standing in front of Hashem during *Shemoneh Esrei*.

When a person lives life cognizant of recognizing Hashem, all his Torah learning and mitzvah performance come as a result of this recognition.

In the *sefarim hakedoshim* it is explained that *Gan Eden* and *Olam Haba* are two different kinds of spiritual reward. *Gan Eden* is the place where a person gets rewarded for his good deeds, while *Olam Haba* is the place where a person gets rewarded for how much he recognized Hashem in this world.

Making this Practical

This is the question that a person needs to ask himself: “When I *daven Shemoneh Esrei* and I am standing in front of Hashem, do I feel more alive from this?”

Take some quiet time every day, for just a half a minute, and think about the purpose of life: that the purpose of life is to come to deepen our recognition of Hashem more and more. And we must realize that anything else besides this is from this “world of falsity” (*alma d’shikra*).

007 | *You, Hashem*

In the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, the *halachah* is that a person straightens up after he says the word *atah* so that he is erect when he says the word “Hashem.” There is an argument in the *halachah* whether a person has to bend with his head or with his entire body. Let us try to understand the concept that lays behind the word *atah* — You.

The word *atah* (You) implies that Hashem is an open reality. According to the *Rashba*, it can also mean to be face-to-face with Hashem in first person, which means to be “*nochach p’nei Hashem* — opposite in front of the Face of Hashem.” According to this interpretation, *atah* is really another term for *nochach*, to be “opposite” Hashem.

Throughout *Shemoneh Esrei*, we say the word *atah*. We say *Atah gibor*, *atah kodesh*, and *atah chonein*. In addition, we also say at the end of each blessing, *Baruch atah Hashem* The simple understanding is that every time we say *atah*, it means the same thing every time — “You, Hashem.”

Atah implies facing Hashem in first person. There are two ways to have a vision of Hashem — one is through an unclear kind of glass [which is what most of the prophets saw] and the other way is through a clear kind of glass [which is what Moshe *Rabbeinu* saw]. *Atah* implies facing Hashem directly, through a clear kind of glass. It implies closeness. The closer a person is to his friend, the more he speaks to him in first person.

There are many levels to *atah*. The highest level of *atah* is when a person clearly recognizes Hashem, as is it written, “*Atah hu mishenivre ha’olam* — You existed before the world was created.” But we live in the lower plane of Creation, and thus there are many barriers that get in the way of this recognition. The more we purify our heart and intellect, the more we recognize Hashem as *Atah*.

Each time we find the word *atah* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, it is revealing a different facet of recognizing Hashem, reflected in the essence of each of the nineteen blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* — so there are really nineteen different ways of revealing how Hashem is *atah*. There are different forms of recognition of Hashem. There is a kind of recognition of Hashem in which a person recognizes His simple reality, and there is a kind of recognition in which a person realizes *hashgachah peratis* (Divine Providence), how Hashem runs the world. But *atah* is always about

revealing the Face of Hashem, which is the concept of *he'ras panim*, the “illuminating countenance of Hashem,” when Hashem shines His Face upon us.

There are different levels to how much we reveal Hashem’s Face. To illustrate, in the physical world, the more you recognize a person, the more you get to know him. The less you see his face, the less you recognize him. The recognition you have toward your friend deepens the more you get to know him and recognize him; the way you recognize him a year later is much more clear than the way you recognized him a year ago. In the same way, there are levels to how much we recognize Hashem. It keeps deepening, and there are more levels we can uncover.

For example, in the fourth blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, *atah honein*, a person is revealing Hashem’s Face through the means of asking Him for understanding. Each blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, when we say *atah*, we are revealing a new facet of recognizing Hashem, through the means of that particular blessing.

Chazal say that when a person sees the blue color of *techeiles*, he is reminded of the sea, which reminds him of the sky, which reminds him of the Heavenly Throne. Is the Heavenly Throne the apex of recognition? No, the point is not about the Heavenly Throne. It is rather because by being reminded of the Heavenly Throne, one is able to keep ascending higher in his recognition of Hashem — his perception of the concept of *atah* keeps deepening.

The *Mesilas Yesharim*, in the chapter about *yiras cheit* (fear of sin), writes that to purpose.

The purpose of every request in *Shemoneh Esrei* is to realize how each request can bring us to a greater perception of *atah* — “You, Hashem.” We must realize that all spiritual growth must be directed toward this purpose — to deepen our sense of *atah* towards Hashem.

And when we say a *berachah* over food, the purpose is also to be able to say “*Baruch atah, Hashem.*” Besides the fact that the purpose of a *berachah* is to give thanks to Hashem, we should know the purpose of why we have to give thanks in the first place: we are giving thanks to the One who created this fruit or vegetable. The purpose is always *atah* — You, Hashem.

008 | *Standing in Front of the King*

The *halachah* is that a person bends his knees upon saying the word *baruch*, straightens upon saying the word *atah*, so that he can be erect upon saying the word *Hashem*.

We find that on *Yom Kippur*, the *Kohen Gadol* would pronounce the Name of Hashem, when he was totally spread out on the ground. If so, why do we do differently when we *daven Shemoneh Esrei*? Why are we erect by Hashem's Name in *Shemoneh Esrei*?

The answer lays in the following. When we say the word *Hashem*, it is brought in *halachah* that one needs to have in mind that Hashem was, is, and always will be the “*Adon Hakol* — Master of everything.” What does it mean that Hashem is the Master over everything? There is a kind of master who rules over his slave, but this is not the kind of master Hashem is. “Master over everything” implies that He is the King, because it is impossible to rule over everything without being the king.

So when we bear in mind that Hashem is the *Adon*/Master of the world, it is because we are declaring His kingship. *Adon Hakol* simply means “Master of the world,” but the purpose of saying this is to realize that we are His servants.

The depth behind recognizing ourselves as “servants” of Hashem is not just limited to when we bear in mind by the word *Hashem* that Hashem is the Master of everything. Being a servant of Hashem means that we are constantly cognizant of this. The *halachah* is that a person must have a set place where he *davens* every day — the depth behind this is that a person has to show consistency in being a servant of Hashem, that he is always in the same place to stand in front of Hashem.

Now we can understand why we must be erect by the time we say Hashem's Name. It is because we need to recognize that we can only stand erect due to Hashem's allowing it. A person is able to talk to Hashem like a friend, as the *Mesilas Yesharim* states, and this is the special quality that Hashem endows man with, as opposed to animals. Ever since the Snake sinned, animals cannot stand erect; only humans can stand erect. Why? It is because man is created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in the image of G-d. Because we were created with a *tzelem Elokim*, Hashem let us stay “erect” — and this is also why we stand erect in *Shemoneh Esrei*. Just like Hashem “stands,” so did He create us with the power to stand — because we are created with a *tzelem elokim*.

This is the depth behind the concept of “standing in front of the King.” In order to stand erect in front of the King, we first need the ability to stand. We need to be prepared, constantly, for Hashem. “Hashem, Yisrael, and the Torah are one” — if we recognize ourselves as being “one” with Hashem, we then have the ability to always stand in front of Him.

We make this preparation, practically, by saying the blessing of *Ahavah Rabbah* right before *Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei*. In the blessing of *Ahavah Rabbah*, we express our deep connection with the Torah, and we become one with Hashem and His Torah — and we are then able to stand in front of the King in *Shemoneh Esrei*.

When we say “*Baruch*,” we bend our knees and bow, to nullify ourselves to Hashem, as we explained previously. But we have an additional deep power in our soul, which is to “stand in front of the King.” Standing in front of Hashem is not the same thing as nullifying ourselves. Rather, standing in front of Hashem reflects a different aspect of our *avodah*, which is that we were created with a *tzelem Elokim* — we connect to it in the *Ahavah Rabbah* prayer, where we connect ourselves with the Torah.

In order to stand in front of Hashem, we need these two aspects — we need to be nullified to Hashem, which is called *bittul* (nullification), and we need to identify ourselves as being one with Hashem, which we accomplish through learning Torah. If someone learns Torah, but he doesn’t want to nullify himself to Hashem, he is the epitome of a *baal gaavah* (haughty person). But if a person goes in the opposite extreme and he is always nullified to Hashem, but he isn’t connected enough with learning Torah, then he also cannot really stand in front of Hashem. He is not one with the Torah, and thus he does not have the power to become one with Hashem.

It is written, “Even those who grasp My Torah do not know Me.” This is referring to a person who does not want to feel nullified to Hashem. Even when such a person straightens himself up so he can be erect when he says Hashem’s Name, he is not straightening himself up for Hashem out of awe — rather, he is doing so out of arrogance.

These are the two sides of the coin in our *avodas Hashem*. We have two abilities in our soul that we need to make use of, and one without the other will not suffice. We have the ability of *bittul*, to be nullified to Hashem, through *tefillah*. And we have the ability to connect to learning Torah. Both of these are equally important.

Chazal say that “there is a time to learn Torah, and a separate time to *daven*.” Simply speaking, there is set time for learning, and a set time for *davening*, so we can’t learn while we *daven* or *daven* while we learn. However, ultimately our Torah and *tefillah* must work together.

Our *tefillos* require us to purify ourselves internally, and they also require us to develop our minds properly, through learning Torah.

For this reason, before *Shemoneh Esrei*, we forge a deep connection with the Torah when we say the blessing of *Ahavah Rabbah*. Only after we have a deep connection with Torah can we truly “straighten up” in *Shemoneh Esrei* when we say Hashem’s Name — to straighten up for Hashem because we recognize our humility as we are in front of Hashem (and not out of a feeling of low self-worth).

009 } My G-d

When a person says “*Elokeinu* — Our G-d,” the *halachah* is that he is supposed to have in mind that Hashem is an all-capable Being.

The Vilna Gaon writes that “Our G-d” means that Hashem foresees everything in the world, which is the concept of *Hashgachah Peratis* (Divine Providence). The word *Elokim/Elokeinu* thus does not just mean “G-d,” but it implies man’s relationship with G-d.

What indeed is the personal relationship that a person has with Hashem? There are different terms for describing how we relate to Hashem. *Elokeinu* means “Our G-d,” which implies that He watches over us with Divine Providence. We also find the term “*Keili*,” which means “my G-d.” As Esther said, “*Keili, keili, lama azavtani* — My G-d, My G-d, why do You abandon me?”

The name *Keil* is referring to a kind of relationship with Hashem in which Hashem is revealed in a person’s heart. “This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him.” Each Jew by the splitting of the sea expressed it: *Keili* — *My G-d*. If each Jew expressed it, it must be that *Keili* is a kind of personal connection with Hashem. It is referring to how much of a relationship I have with Hashem, and thus it is a different level of awareness with each person.

The word *Elokim* refers to how much Torah has been revealed in one’s heart, because only upon revealing G-dliness can there be a true revelation of Torah. If a person only has Torah learning but he does not have G-dliness revealed in his life, this reflects what is written, “Those who grasp the Torah do not know Me.” Upon revealing *Elokim* — upon revealing G-dliness in one’s life — only then can there be true revelation of Torah. The first commandment is “I am Hashem your G-d,” which hints to us that first we need to have Hashem revealed in our life, and then we can have Torah.

Before the giving of the Torah, however, it was possible for a person to have a relationship with Hashem even without the revelation of Torah. This we see from the *Avos*, our forefathers. This reflects the term *Keili*, when it forms a personal attachment to Hashem. The *Avos* of course were connected to the Torah, but because the Torah hadn’t been revealed yet, they had the relationship of *Keili* towards Hashem, and not yet *Elokim*. Only their children, who received the Torah, had the completed revelation of Hashem, because they had the Torah revealed to them.

The giving of the Torah did not just take place by Har Sinai. Every generation needs to accept the Torah anew. This is through connecting oneself to the concept of revealing G-dliness.

It is written, “The Torah of Hashem is his desire.” When a person understands that Torah is *Toras Hashem* — Hashem’s Torah — upon that he can receive more and more revelations of Torah.

But there is a kind of person who can “remember” lots and lots of facts of Torah, yet he has no revelation of Hashem in his life. He learns the Torah only superficially. In order to really know the Torah, to merit *daas Torah*, a person has to connect himself to Hashem. This is the implication of *Elokeinu* — Our G-d — to connect to Hashem through the Torah.

When we all stood at Sinai, each man stood with one heart. The meaning of this is that in order to accept the Torah a person needs a true heart, and this one achieves through revealing G-dliness in one’s heart — through attaching oneself to Hashem.

Another implication of *Elokeinu* is not about “what to have in mind” when we say *Elokeinu*, but rather, about what our soul feels deep down as we say *Elokeinu*. When we say *Elokeinu*, we need to feel how Hashem is our G-d — my G-d — and through revealing Hashem in our life, we have revelation of the Torah. “It is our desire to see the King.”

It is written, “All day, it [the words of Torah] is my conversation.” When a person constantly converses in Torah, this is called *sichah*. We find two terms in Hebrew that can mean “speech” — *sichah* and *dibur*. What is the difference? *Dibur* is when a person talks with purpose. *Sichah* is when a person talks freely. Normally, *sichah* is a mindless kind of talking; for example, *Chazal* say that “there were ten *kavin* [measurements] of *sichah*/talking that came to the world, and the women took nine *kavin*.” Here we find “*sichah*” to mean chatter. But if we constantly converse in words of Torah, our *sichah* becomes holy, and it becomes a kind of loose talking that is holy.

This is also the depth behind the concept of *emunas chachamim* (to believe our Sages). To believe in a Torah scholar’s words is not just to believe in him as a person, but to believe in the G-dliness that is revealed in him, for he is a true Torah scholar and thus a transmitter of Hashem’s word. When a person doesn’t know what to do and he goes to a *rav* who is a *talmid chacham*, he has to trust his *rav*, but not just because he must believe the “*rav*”; rather, because he should believe that the word of Hashem is revealed in the *rav*. We find this hinted to in the *passuk*, “And she [Rivkah] went to find out the word of Hashem.” When Rivkah went to Shem to ask about what will be with her childbirth, she went with the understanding that she is going to find out the word of Hashem, which is revealed through the wise.

Keili means for one to realize that life is about revealing Hashem. *Elokeinu* is for one to attach himself personally to that revelation. Everything in Creation is called *davar*, which is from the word “*devar* — word” — alluding to how everything in Creation contains the word of Hashem.

In order to hear the “word of Hashem” in each thing, we need to connect ourselves to the concepts of *Keili* and *Elokeinu*.

Chazal say that one should *daven* for every detail in his life, “even for a shoelace.” This reflects the meaning of *Elokeinu* — to form a personal connection with Hashem, that Hashem is not just “our” God by “my” God, and thus, one can *daven* to Him about anything.

010 | What Our Matriarchs Revealed

Mentioning The Matriarchs In Shemoneh Esrei

After we say **אלוקינו** (Our G-d), we say **ואלוקי אבותינו** “And the G-d of our forefathers.” First we say that Hashem is our G-d, and then we mention that Hashem is the G-d of our Avos as well. The first term **אלוקינו** implies the universal acknowledgment that Hashem is G-d, and it implies that Hashem is G-d of all the nations of the world. The second term, **ואלוקי אבותינו** is more specific, in which we declare that Hashem is the G-d of our forefathers.

Shouldn't we first say that Hashem is the G-d our forefathers? Why don't we first say **אלוקי אבותינו** and then **אלוקינו**? The whole reason that Hashem is “Our G-d” is because we are His nation, through our forefathers. If so, we should first say how Hashem is G-d of our forefathers, and only after that we should say that he is our G-d. So why do we say it the other way around?

Another question is that after we say **ואלוקי אבותינו** we say that Hashem is G-d of Avraham, G-d of Yitzchok, and G-d of Yaakov. Wasn't this already contained in the words **ואלוקי אבותינו**? Why we must get specific and say that Hashem is G-d over each of our three forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, when we just said that He is the G-d of our forefathers?

The answer that the commentaries give is that the word **אבותינו** does not mean our “forefathers”, but that it can mean both our patriarchs and our matriarchs. Thus, **ואלוקי אבותינו** is including both our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, as well as our matriarchs – Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel and Leah. The fact that we make specific mention of the Matriarchs in *Shemoneh Esrei* is a novelty; let us explain why. Our Avos were the ones who established the three *tefillos*.⁵ The *Imahos* (our Matriarchs) did not establish the *tefillos*. If so, why do we include the *Imahos* in *Shemoneh Esrei* (in the words **אלוקי אבותינו**, as we explained from the commentators), when the *Imahos* had nothing to do with the *Tefillos*? [The answer lays in the following].

Tefillah Can Change Reality

We know that *Chazal* say that Leah was originally destined to marry Esav, but she cried so much in prayer to Hashem that she merited to marry Yaakov instead. The actual soul-mate of

⁵ Berachos 26b

Leah was really Esav! Leah did not only *daven* that she should get a good *shidduch*. She *davened* so that she could change the entire course of her destiny. She changed her very essence!

From Leah's *davening*, we learn an awesome lesson, a great revelation about what *Tefillah* can do. Leah was really destined for Esav. In those days, everyone said, "The older one [Leah] will go to the older one [Esav], and the younger one [Rochel] will go to the younger one [Yaakov]." But because Leah *davened* so much, she merited to alter her very destiny, through *Tefillah*. She revealed a whole new aspect through *Tefillah*: that through *Tefillah*, a person can revolutionize reality and change destinies.

Two Ways of Recognizing Hashem

In the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we mention two different ways of how to recognize Hashem. One is through **אלוקינו** and the other way is through **ואלוקי אבותינו**. Avraham *Avinu* could not say **ואלוקי אבותינו** because he did not come from any of the forefathers; his father was the wicked Terach. He had no real "father". He achieved a recognition of Hashem even without having any one to father him, and all of us in our souls have a power of "Avraham *Avinu*" within, which can recognize Hashem even without having a father to teach us.

The other kind of recognition of Hashem is expressed through **ואלוקי אבותינו** – when we express how Hashem is the G-d of our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. Yitzchok *Avinu* was the first to be able to say **ואלוקי אבותינו** because he had Avraham *Avinu* has his father, and thus is recognition of Hashem came due to his father's upbringing.

So there are two forms of recognizing Hashem. One kind of person recognizes Hashem because he already has a source from which to recognize Hashem; this is like the recognition of Yitzchok *Avinu*, who was able to recognize Hashem because he was raised by Avraham. When a person learns Torah in-depth, he can come to deepen his recognition of Hashem from his learning, and this is the recognition we express in **ואלוקי אבותינו**.

But there is another kind of recognition of Hashem: even when a person has no previous source from which to recognize Hashem from, even when he is surrounded by darkness, he can still find the inner strength to recognize Hashem. This is the kind of recognition which Avraham revealed; he had no father to show it to him. He recognized Hashem even though he came from unsavory beginnings. This is the kind of recognition which is expressed in **אלוקינו** – that even through Avraham didn't have any forefathers of his own to guide him, he was still able to recognize Hashem.

In actuality, we need both forms of recognition – we need both the understandings of **אלוקינו** and **אלוקי אבותינו**. Esav had a great father Yitzchok; he was able to say **ואלוקי אבותינו** which means that he had the recognition of Hashem based on his upbringing. But he was missing the recognition of **אלוקינו**. He was trained to recognize Hashem from having a good upbringing, but he did know how to recognize Hashem amidst darkness. He was like a *Yisrael mumar*, “an apostate Jew”. At the giving of the Torah, the recognition of **אלוקינו** was revealed to the Jewish people, and only the Jewish people possess it.

What We Inherited From Our Avos and From Our Imahos

Our *emunah* – our recognition of Hashem – was implanted in us through Avraham *Avinu*. But from Leah *Imeinu*, we received a different kind of inheritance. Leah was the one who truly revealed the power of *Tefillah*, that through *Tefillah*, one can change her current reality. Through *Tefillah*, she annexed herself to become a fourth Matriarch, to become one of those who could say **ואלוקי אבותינו**. In a way, Leah resembled Avraham *Avinu*, who came to recognize Hashem entirely from within himself, as *Chazal* say, “Avraham *Avinu* learned Torah from himself.”

The novelty concept which Leah introduced to the world – altering your current reality – was revealed as well to the other nations of the world. A non-Jew can convert and become a completely new being, a whole new reality, because of what Leah introduced onto the world – the power to alter one’s current situation. A convert goes from being a non-Jew to become a Jew, to change your very reality, which was what Leah revealed. This concept has the following ramifications.

Repairing Our Internal Evil of the Eirav Rav Through Revealing G-dliness

When the Jewish people left Egypt, the “*Eirev Rav*” came with them. Whenever the redemption is imminent, the *Eirev Rav* is always present. There is a part in us which is affected by non-Jewish influences, a part in us which is not yet rectified. We all have a part in us which was inherited from our Avos, but we also have a part in us which contains *Eirev Rav*’s influences.

Even Avraham *Avinu* was fathered by the wicked Terach, which implies that there are traces of evil in the Jewish people, which we need to get rid of. In order to rectify the evil within our soul, we need to reveal G-dliness and let it fill our entire being, and let it penetrate into the evil and unrefined parts of the soul.

How? Through revealing Hashem from within ourselves, just like Avraham *Avinu* recognized Hashem from within himself! This is the power that can dispel all our inner evil.

The *Eirev Rav* clings to our soul – how? All of us have times in which we have doubts in our *emunah*. That is all due to the *Eirev Rav*'s influence. Sometimes our soul doesn't accept *emunah* as an answer - this is the *Eirev Rav*'s influence on the soul.

How do we rectify it? Through revealing our power of “Avraham *Avinu*” within us. Avraham *Avinu* revealed G-dliness in the world by converting those who did not believe. So too, we can convert our own, personal “non-Jew” within us, by revealing G-dliness in ourselves.

In the future all will know about Hashem, but as for now, each person has a personal avodah to rid of his personal “*Eirev Rav*”. That part of the soul can be rectified within oneself, when one lets the light of *emunah* shine upon his entire soul. [Soon, we will explain how].

When one reveals this power in his soul, he essentially reveals “Leah Imeinu” in the soul. Leah avoided Esav. This hints to the fact that when one uses “Leah Imeinu” within his soul, he ducks Esav - the “non-Jew” within the soul.

To illustrate, we have a windpipe and an esophagus. Through our windpipe we breathe, and through our esophagus we consume food and nourish our body. These are our two sources of vitality. One kind of vitality we receive from our outside, and another kind of vitality we receive from within ourselves. This applies to our spirituality as follows. Our outer vitality comes from the *mesorah* (tradition) of *emunah* which we received from our forefathers, passed down from generation to generation. Our inner vitality comes from *emunah* that we reach from within ourselves.

If we have thoughts from within ourselves that are going against the way of our fathers, it is a sign that are thoughts are incorrect. All of the knowledge and belief we have received from our forefathers; but even if we believe in the words of our forefathers, we need to get to it from within ourselves as well. If one only has *emunah* because that's the *mesorah* of our forefathers - then he has *emunah* only because he knows that it is our tradition, but he is missing the other kind of *emunah*, which are represented by our Imahos. Our Imahos represent the kind of *emunah* which we uncover from within ourselves, because our Imahos did not come from good homes, yet they reached their *emunah* within themselves. From all our Imahos, it was especially Leah who reached *emunah* from within herself.

The inner kind of *emunah* is that even if you were to have been raised in a non-Jewish home, you would still be able to arrive at *emunah* from within yourself.

If a person truly works on his *emunah*, through deep reflection, in times of quiet (as the Chazon Ish writes to do), he should ponder simple facts of *emunah* and conclude them on his own, and not simply because he knows that he must believe in them. He should reflect on *emunah* privately and come to feel them within himself.

Of course, we don't mean to imply that *mesorah* isn't good enough for us. We definitely need to believe in our *mesorah*! It is just that if we don't seek to ingrain the *emunah* we know about, then we don't feel our *emunah* as real. For that reason, it is not enough for us to believe in the truths we received from our *mesorah* simply because it's our *mesorah*; we need to come to realize the truth from within ourselves, so that all the *emunah* we know about can become ingrained in us and palpable to us.

There are many mistakes and misconceptions that people are making today, things that are not in line with the *mesorah* we received from our forefathers. But a person on his own can realize how many of these mistakes are not in line with our *mesorah*, and not simply because he knows "it's against the *mesorah*". These days, if someone doesn't realize from within himself and conclude on his own how all that we know from our *mesorah* is true, it's highly doubtful if he will be able to keep anything from our *mesorah* at all!

When we have both the *mesorah* of *emunah* from our forefathers as well as the ability to realize within ourselves what the truth is, the concept here becomes clearer. If someone only acts from his individuality and he doesn't believe in *mesorah* unless he can understand it, then he is not going in the way of the Jewish people. On the other hand, if someone only believes in *mesorah* but he doesn't try to ingrain it deeply in himself and realize how our *mesorah* is true, he is missing the power of Avraham *Avinu*.

In Conclusion

So on one hand, we need to nullify our understanding to the *mesorah* of our fathers (*Elokei Avraham|Yitzchok|Yaakov*), yet we also have a power to understand truths from within ourselves (*V'elokei Avoseinu*).

When we combine these two powers we inherited – our ability to nullify ourselves to the *mesorah* of *emunah*, [which comes from our Avos], as well as our ability to recognize the truths from within [the ability of Avraham *Avinu*, which was also reflected by our *Imahos*, and especially Leah] – then we can reach the perfected level of *emunah*, and then we will shine the understanding of both *Elokeinu* as well as *Elokei Avoseinu* upon our soul.

011 | Giving Myself Up For Hashem's Will

Each Of Us Has A Different Middah From The Avos

In the beginning of the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we say **אלוקי אברהם, ואלוקי יצחק, ואלוקי יעקב** – that Hashem is the G-d of our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov.

Each of our *Avos* (forefathers) possessed a special quality. Avraham was the epitome of the trait of *chessed*\kindness, which is also known as *ahavah*\love. Yitzchok personified *gevurah*\strength, which is also known as *yirah*\restraint. Yaakov personified *rachamim*\compassion.

We received these good traits as an inheritance from each of the *Avos*. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, we also received traits from the *Imahos*, and this is hinted to when we say **ואלוקי אבותינו**.

We all possess the traits of our *Avos* and *Imahos*, but each person tends to be drawn towards a particular *middah* more than the other *middos*. There are people who are more drawn towards *chessed*, the *middah* of Avraham. Others excel more in the area of *dikduk hadin* (being careful with *Halachah*), the trait of *yirah*. Others are drawn towards taking pity on Creation, which is Yaakov's *middah* of *rachamim*.

When we only have a superficial perspective towards things – the perspective from our body's viewpoint – then we disdain the *middah* which we aren't drawn towards. For example, if someone is very drawn towards *chessed*, he will tend to look down on others who are very exacting when it comes to keeping *Halacha*; he sees *chessed* as the most important thing in the world, and that *dikduk hadin* shouldn't be as important. He looks at someone who is drawn towards *dikduk hadin* as someone who lacks love, due to the emphasis on strictness over love that the person with *dikduk hadin* is placing.

When a person disdains people who are drawn towards *middos* that are opposite his personality, he considers those other people to be missing the point of life.

Haman complained to Achashveirosh that “there is a nation which is spread out and apart from the nations”, that we do things differently than the other nations. We are all directed towards the same goal, following the *Shulchan Aruch*. Yet, a person has a nature to disdain others

who are not like his personality and to give them the bad eye, even though we are all keeping the *Shulchan Aruch*.

Chazal say that the Avos all looked similar. But that was only physically. Spiritually, the Avos were all different from each other. They had different soul roots, and in fact, the avodah of Yitzchok *Avinu*, which is *yirah*, was a completely different perspective on things than the avodah of his father, Avraham *Avinu*, who personified *ahavah*. We have in ourselves the *middos* of all our Avos, so we are able to harmonize them together.

Each of the *middos* which the Avos personified was only a tool to a greater end. For example, the middah of *ahavah* which Avraham had – “*Avraham is My beloved*” – existed for a greater goal, which is: to use love for Hashem as a way to become attached with Hashem. The purpose of *yirah* was also not a purpose unto itself, but as a way to reach Hashem.

Haman saw us a nation that is apart from the other nations, but he made a mistake. He didn't see how all that we do is really to be united in one goal, which is to come close to Hashem.

Our Ability To Have Mesirus Nefesh

Although each of the Avos personified a different quality, there was one trait which they all possessed: the ability of *mesirus nefesh*, to be self-sacrificing.

Avraham *Avinu* once had to give up his own life and be thrown into a fire. Later on in his life, he was tested with even greater *mesirus nefesh*, that he has to kill his son. Yitzchok *Avinu* as well was prepared to give up his life for Hashem.

After Avraham passed the test with the *Akeidah*, Hashem said, “*Now I know that you fear G-d.*” Avraham *Avinu* is praised for his “fear” of Hashem; this needs explanation, because Avraham personifies *ahavah*, not *yirah*. But the answer is, the *middah* of *ahavah* that Avraham *Avinu* had was not just to have *ahavas Hashem*. It led to a greater purpose, which was to have *yiras Hashem* – to fear Hashem. His *ahavah* was like a garment over his *yirah*. It was all because he understood that his life was a life of *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

Through the ability of *mesirus nefesh*, we reveal how all qualities are but a ‘garment’ of a greater goal.

Indeed, all people are different; *Chazal* say, “Just as all faces are not equal, so are all opinions not equal.” But we all have a common denominator – we all possess the ability of *mesirus nefesh*.

Avraham *Avinu* had to exercise *mesirus nefesh* twice in his life – once with his body, when he was willing to get thrown into the fiery furnace, and once again with his *middos*, in which he was

tested to overcome his love for his son in order to fear Hashem. We are not faced with the test of *mesirus nefesh* on our bodies; only Rabbi Akiva awaited the day in his life in which he can get killed *al kiddush Hashem*. Most of us cannot be on this level. But each day, we face a test of *mesirus nefesh*: with our *middos*. Our *middos* are always being tested.

Each of us possesses a certain outstanding quality. As we know, there are four elements in our soul – earth, water, wind and fire. Each of these elements are the roots of our various *middos* [earth is the root of sadness and laziness; water is the root of desires and jealousy; wind is the root of forbidden speech, flattery, lying, and mockery; fire is the root of conceit, anger, seeking control, seeking honor and bearing grudges]. Each of us possesses one element that is particularly dominant over the other, so each of us excels in certain *middos* more than in other *middos*, as well as being weaker when it comes to certain *middos*.

But if we have *mesirus nefesh*, we can **give up our very will** to be drawn towards certain *middos* that we are naturally drawn towards, and we can then understand that our good *middos* serve a greater goal. Through uncovering our ability of *mesirus nefesh*, we can realize that we must ultimately do things because it is the will of Hashem, whether we are drawn towards doing it or not. We can give up our very *ratzon* to Hashem, and surrender ourselves to Hashem's Will.

When we have *mesirus nefesh* to do Hashem's will – whether we want to do it or not – it's not because we should want to do this, but rather, because **Hashem** wants us to do it – regardless of whether “I want” to do it or not. (If Hashem doesn't want something to be done, then there is no concept of having *mesirus nefesh* for it). The elementary level of this concept is to give up our desires that are meaningless, but the concept of *mesirus nefesh* applies as well to even our spiritual desires. Even our spiritual desires we have to be prepared to give up, if Hashem would want us to do so.

To illustrate the concept, there are people who act very spiritual, but they act brazenly with all their spiritual desires, and Hashem does not desire their actions at all. These “spiritual” hotheads are not interested in doing the *ratzon Hashem* – they are only interested in doing their own *ratzon*... The secret in all our *Avodas Hashem* is for us to realize that all our *middos* are only a tool to be used for what Hashem wants from us. If Hashem doesn't want us to use a certain *middah*, that is what we must be prepared for. We must be prepared to give up our will, and this is how we exercise *mesirus nefesh*. All of our *middos* are a tool to reveal one single goal – to “stand before Hashem.”

Chazal say that in the future, each *tzaddik* will point to Hashem and say, “*This is my G-d.*” The depth behind this is that each *tzaddik* will have his own unique recognition of Hashem, “My G-d”, because each *tzaddik* utilized a different way to get to Hashem. This will connect us all together, because it will show us how we are united in one goal, although we each had our own way of getting there.

In Conclusion

If a person has aspirations for holiness, and he wants to grow in Torah, in holiness, in prayer, etc. – but he’s steeped in pursuing his own potential as an individual - this alone is not enough. One must connect himself to the collective whole of the Jewish people, and this is reflected in that *Tefillah* must be prayed together with a *minyan*.

Of course, each person needs to find what his unique path of how he can serve the Creator, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* says that one must find our “his” obligation on this world; but along with this as well, a person needs to connect himself to the Jewish people.ג

012 | Integrating The Mind With The Heart

The Beginning Of Our Avodah: Using Our Power of Holy Thought

In the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we say **אלוקי אברהם ואלוקי יצחק ואלוקי יעקב** – that Hashem is the G-d of our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov.

As we mentioned previously, each of the Avos personified a particular trait. Avraham represents *ahavah* (love), Yitzchok represents *yirah* (restraint), and Yaakov represents *rachamim* (compassion). The simple understanding of this is that these were each three separate *middos* which they personified, and that these three *middos* have no relation to each other.

Each of the Avos were the “father” of the particular *middah* which they embodied. A father is obligated to teach his son Torah (Kiddushin 29a), and thus each of our Avos taught us how to have the particular *middah* which they embodied. *Chazal* enacted 18 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei*, parallel to the 18 vertebrae in the spine. These 18 vertebrae extend from the brain and end by the *Bris Kodesh* (the reproductive organ). However, we can ask: *Tefillah* is called “service of the heart”, so why didn’t *Chazal* instead use the heart as a metaphor for *Shemoneh Esrei*, as opposed to the spine? Heart in Hebrew is *lev*, which has the numerical value of 32. Why didn’t *Chazal* enact 32 blessings in *Shemoneh Esrei* instead, parallel to the numerical value of *lev*\heart?

From this we see that the heart is not the beginning point of our avodah, in spite of the fact that *Tefillah* is called “service of the heart.” Our avodah begins in our brain – in our power of holy thought (*machshavah*) which is reflected by the 18 vertebrae that run along the spine; which begins in the brain and ends by the *Bris Kodesh*.

The beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei* begins with the blessing of our Avos, who represent the power of holy thought. *Shemoneh Esrei* ends with *Sim Shalom*, which represents the spiritual power of *Bris Kodesh*.

Fixing Our Middos: Putting Mind Over Heart

We have in us the good *middos* which we inherited from Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov – the *middos* of *ahavah*, *yirah* and *rachamim*. How do we fix our various bad *middos*, though?

Avraham *Avinu* personified the trait of *ahavah*\chessed. In using the power of love for holiness, he rectified the power of love, because sometimes love can be evil; he succeeded in taking this

trait and using it for holiness. We possess the good *middos* from our Avos – the three traits of the Jewish people, which are kindness, bashfulness and compassion – but how do we fix our bad *middos*? “The mind controls the heart.”⁶ It is our mind which can fix our *middos* – our power of holy thought, which is reached through learning Torah. The depth to fixing our *middos* lays in developing a holy mind, through Torah.

However, not everyone who learns Torah merits fixing their *middos*. This we can all see clearly. If someone just learns Torah to “remember” its facts or to “know” it just intellectually, the Torah does not purify his mind, and his Torah learning will in turn not be able to fix his bad *middos*.

A Heart Based Upon The Mind

This is the meaning of “Prayer is the service of the heart.” The fact that *Tefillah* is “service of the heart” does not mean that *Tefillah* is an ‘emotional’ thing. Emotions are temporary and fleeting; they are impermanent. We can’t build our life upon our emotions. When we are younger, emotions play a role, and they help keep ourselves enthusiastic to serve Hashem, but we cannot remain our whole life dependent on our feelings. It is an unstable approach.

How, then, must we go about our *Avodas Hashem*? Prayer is called the “service of the heart” - this means that we need to build a **heart based upon our mind**, that our heart’s feelings are mature and developed through learning Torah, which builds the mind. *Tefillah* is about “standing in front of the King.” Is this an emotional matter? It cannot be based on emotions. Sometimes a person feels inspired when he *davens*, and on other days he does not. So it is not an emotional thing. [It is rather a service of the “**heart**”, a heart developed by our mind, which can function even when we don’t feel emotional].

The Balance Between Mind and Heart

There are people who live solely in their Torah learning, and they do not develop their world of *Tefillah*. Others are immersed in *Tefillah*, but they do not learn enough Torah. Each of these ways are extreme approaches in *Avodas Hashem* that are incorrect.

If a person is strong in the area of *Tefillah* but he doesn’t learn enough Torah, he is acting too emotional, and he has not acting sensibly. He won’t be able to really *daven* properly either,

⁶ *Tanya in the name of the Zohar*

because since Tefillah is “service of the heart”, and the heart is developed through the mind, without learning Torah properly a person doesn’t develop his heart.

Chazal say that one’s heart and mouth must be equal with each other. The meaning of this is that the heart’s emotions must be in line with what one says with his mouth – the heart must be developed.

Similarly, in order to build the *Beis HaMikdash*, one had to be a *chacham lev*, “wise of heart” – one had to have a heart that was developed through the mind’s wisdom. The heart’s wisdom is not about being intellectually bright; it is about having a palpable sense for the wisdom. [This was the quality that Betzalel possessed].

The Inner Contradiction

When a person learns a sugya of Gemara, he encounters contradictions. When it comes to learning Torah, we all know what contradictions are. But when it comes to *Avodas Hashem* as well, there are also contradictions.

There are contradictions between our mind and heart. Our brain has one kind of knowledge, while our heart has a different kind of knowledge. That was the difficulty in building the *Beis HaMikdash* – it required two kinds of knowledge to build it, mind knowledge and heart knowledge, and thus there was a contradiction in how to make it. Only one who possessed the quality of “*chacham lev*” knew how to combine the two kinds of knowledge.

When Rivkah was pregnant with Yaakov and Esav, they clashed within her, and she felt a contradiction growing inside of her. She knew that there were two opposite forces going on inside her. In the same way, a person can feel an inner contradiction going on in himself as well – he can feel how there is a contradiction between his mind and heart.

Two Kinds of Knowledge Within Us

What exactly is the nature of this inner contradiction between our mind and heart?

To understand it simply, it is because our mind can know something, but our heart feels differently, and then we encounter an inner turmoil between what we **know** with what we **feel**. But the contradiction between our mind and heart goes further than that: our mind ‘**knows**’ one kind of knowledge, while heart ‘**knows**’ a different kind of knowledge. We really have two kinds

of knowledge going on at once inside us: ‘mind knowledge’, and ‘heart knowledge’. Our mind and heart have different ways of going about things.⁷

Our True Heart

Thus, our heart’s knowledge doesn’t mean the “emotions”. Our heart – our true heart – is really a combination of both intellect and heart; in other words, our heart can feel the knowledge of our mind in a very real sense.

Most people are far from grasping how *Tefillah* is “service of the heart” because they think that “service of the heart” means to be “emotional” in *Tefillah*. People generally equate the heart with emotions. But the truth is that the true “heart” is not the emotions. The heart can feel knowledge in a very real way, no less than when you touch fire and you feel its heat.

If we achieve an integration between our mind and heart, our heart’s emotions become elevated, and the heart is then able to feel the knowledge of our mind in a real sense. So the heart – “service of the heart”, which is *tefillah* – is when our intellect and heart are combined, when our heart can feel the knowledge of our mind as a reality that can be sensed.

A true *tefillah* emanates from a developed heart, from the place in our heart that is called “*daas* of the heart” [which is when the intellect and heart are integrated], and when we reach *daas* of the heart, our *daas* can offer us clarity on matters.

This is the meaning of how *Tefillah* is the “service of the heart” – that when *tefillah* comes from our real heart, we gain clarity, and our *Avodas Hashem* is then vastly improved and clearer.

Chazal say that “An ignoramus cannot be devout.” We need both our intellect and heart; when we combine our intellect with our emotions – when our *daas* balances out our emotions – this is what it means that *Tefillah* is called “the service of the heart.”⁸

⁷ For more on this concept, see *Bilvavi Part 9 – Understanding Suffering and Tragedy*.

⁸ For more on this concept, see *Getting To Know Your Feelings: Part 2: Chapter 2*.

013 | Yitzchok Avinu's Path

הגדול והנורא – Hashem is “Almighty, great, strong, and awesome.” The term הגדול – “great” – was reflected by the avodah of Avraham Avinu, which was *chessed*. The term הגבור – “strong” – was reflected in the avodah of Yitzchok Avinu, which was *yirah*\awe or *gevurah*\strength. הנורא was exemplified by Yaakov Avinu, which was *emes*\truth.

Let us reflect into what each of the Avos revealed onto the world.

Avraham Avinu revealed *ahavah**chessed*\loving kindness. What was the *avodah* of Yitzchok Avinu? We find different terms for the avodah of Yitzchok Avinu: his trait of *yirah* (awe), *gevurah* (strength), “*pachad*” (fear), and also the term *din* (judgment). What is *yirah*? What is *gevurah*? What is *pachad*? We will try to explain.

Yirah: Spiritual Fire

Yirah comes from the word *reiyah*, to “see”, alluding to when a person sees something fearful, he becomes afraid. A person fears punishment; this is the lowest level of *yirah*. A higher kind of *yirah* is *yiras haromemus*, when a person fears to be in the presence of the King, out of awe of the King’s exaltedness.

The trait of *yirah* is rooted in the element of fire in the soul. Fire has a nature to rise, and it can keep rising higher. This is the trait of *yirah* – a person wishes to ascend spiritually, when he sees that he needs to go higher.

However, in order to one to ascend properly, he first has to destroy his previous level, because if he wishes to remain with his previous level, he won’t be able to get higher.

There are people who wish to grow spirituality and they have high aspirations, but they don’t want to get rid of their previous levels. They want to grow, but they would like to remain with some of their old antics that they were used to having. For this reason, many people don’t progress in spirituality, even though they aspire for growth. It is because they aren’t willing to give up their desires from the past.

It resembles the spiritual form of suffering known as “*Kaf HaKela*” – the person is being flung around. He wants to ascend spiritually, but at the same time he is being drawn downwards

towards his various desires that he can't get himself to let go of. He is both ascending and descending at once, and this is a painful ordeal.

We are charged with the obligation to exert ourselves in Torah. But first, *Chazal* say that one has to “make himself like a desert.” First we need to desert our various desires, and then we can begin to really exert ourselves in Torah. Our previous levels need to be destroyed in order for us to take the spiritual ascent.

Seeking Truth and Being Willing To Make Sacrifices

Yirah is that I recognize that I need to ascend spiritually, and I want to get to a higher place than where I am now. It really comes from a desire to seek the *emes* (truth). When a person learns Torah, either he learns it superficially, and it only affects his external layers – or he learns it out of a desire for the truth, to let the Torah affect his inside layers.

This is also the power known as *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice). When a person has *mesirus nefesh*, he is ready to give up anything in order to seek the truth. *Mesirus nefesh* is thus identical to the concepts of *yirah* and *emes*.

Two Different Kinds of ‘Mesirus Nefesh’

Both Avraham and Yitzchok exercised *mesirus nefesh*, but they each accomplished a unique kind of *mesirus nefesh*. Avraham *Avinu* let himself get thrown into the furnace. After this episode, he went to other places – such as Gerar and Mitzrayim. Yitzchok, however, after being willing to give up his life by the *Akeidah*, became an “*olah temimah*” (a perfect sacrifice). In other words, he kept ascending higher and higher.

Avraham *Avinu* represents giving up one's life in order to have *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem, while Yitzchok represents an ongoing life of *mesirus nefesh*. This is reflected in the fact that Yitzchok did not leave Eretz Yisrael after the *Akeidah* [for he had become an *olah temimah*] – he continued to live his life with *mesirus nefesh*.

Yirah: Constant Ascension

Yirah is for one to keep ascending in spiritual growth, and to avoid the constant ups and downs of *Avodas Hashem* that people go through [when there is no *Yirah*.] It is to live in a permanent state of *gevurah* (strength over the evil inclination).

How can a person keep ascending spiritually?? Don't we all have a *yetzer hora* which bothers us and causes us to fall?

There are two ways for a person to enter a state of permanent spiritual growth, where he can leave all spiritual failures behind. One way was Avraham *Avinu's* path, and the other is Yitzchok *Avinu's* path.

The path of Avraham *Avinu* was *ahavah*. A person can only be sure that his *ahavah* will protect him only if he is constantly immersed in Torah, though. Most people are not like this, and therefore, most people will have to come on to the other path, which is the path of Yitzchok *Avinu*.

The path of Yitzchok *Avinu* is *yirah*, which is achieved through active *mesirus nefesh* in one's life. What causes a person to fall in his spiritual situation? It is all because he has various desires. If a person would give up his desires, he would never fall once he begins his spiritual growth.

Disconnecting From Indulgence

What kind of desires are we referring to here? We are not referring to the desires for committing certain sins, *chas v'shalom*. That is already obvious. We are referring to "permitted" kinds of desires, the kinds of desires which people indulge in that are permitted, which are really detrimental to a person. This is the concept of "A disgusting one who permits his behavior within the guidelines of Torah."⁹

There are many desires which are permitted, but a person knows good and well that indulging in these desires does not bring him to leading a truthful kind of life. It is these kinds of "permitted" desires which we need to get rid of, if we ever wish to see progress in our spiritual improvement.

Yitzchok *Avinu* is also the trait of *din*\judgment. A judgment clarifies the truth of a situation. We must live in "clear world" – and in order to live in a "clear" world, we need to be very clear that we must disengage from the indulgence in permitted desires. With *yirah\gevurah\pachad\din*, a person gains clarity. He lives in a clearer kind of world, a life in which he actively uses his power of *mesirus nefesh* – by giving up his various desires for this world.

⁹ See Ramban to Parshas Kedoshim (19:1) who expounds this concept, with particular regards to the lusts for food and for marital relations.

Our Main War On This World: Giving Up Our Desires

In the world, there are many wars. It seems that most of the wars take place on this world of action that we see. But the truth is that most of the wars are taking place in our own internal world, in our own hearts: we have an inner fight about what our heart wants.

With using the power of *yirah* \ *mesirus nefesh*, we can get rid of these various desires.

Our *avodah* on this world is not mainly about bettering our **actions**; it is more about fighting with our various *retzonos* (desires), which are the motivating factors behind our actions.

By giving up our various worldly *retzonos*, we are enabled to live a life of *mesirus nefesh*, which will enable us to get very far.

014 | *Balanced Compassion*

וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב – “And the G-d of Yaakov”, refers to the trait which Yaakov *Avinu* embodied – the trait of *emes*, truth. “Give truth to Yaakov.”

Avraham *Avinu* had two wives – Sarah Imeinu and her maidservant, Hagar. Yitzchok *Avinu* had only one wife – Rivkah. Yaakov *Avinu* had four wives – Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah. The children of Yaakov, the 12 *Shevatim*, did not all come from just Rachel and Leah; they also came from the maidservants Bilhah and Zilpah. Here we see the following novel concept: besides for the *middos* which we inherited from our *Avos* and *Imahos*, we also inherited *middos* from the maidservants.

The maidservants (Bilhah and Zilpah) do not come from Avraham *Avinu*'s family, yet, a third of *Klal Yisrael* comes from the maidservants! What do we have to do with the maidservants??

We find that our forefathers Avraham and Yitzchok had differing approaches. Avraham is called *av hamon b'goyim*, the “father of the nations”; he fathered Yishmael, and he wanted Yishmael to remain in his household. If not for Sarah's pressure, he wouldn't have sent Yishmael away. [This is because Avraham is the *middah* of *ahavah\chessed*.]

Sarah, however, came with *din*. She wanted Yishmael out of the house. Yitzchok *Avinu* was like his mother Sarah – he represented *din*, because Yitzchok's trait is *yirah* and *pachad* (awe and fear). Sarah wanted all evil to be expelled from the home, and this is like Yitzchok's *middah* of *pachad*, which is to sift out the bad from the good.

Yaakov, however, combines the two approaches. On one hand, Yaakov is the trait of *emes*, which goes with *din*\judgment. Truth cannot stand falsity, and it demands that the bad be sifted out from the good and expelled. On the other hand, Yaakov is also the trait of *rachamim*\compassion. The ability of compassion comes to bring harmony. He combined both the approaches of Avraham and Yitzchok and harmonized them. On his outside, he showed *emes*, strict truth and judgment, but Yaakov's inner essence is *rachamim*\compassion.

Chazal say that “Yaakov is the choicest of the *Avos*.” Yaakov is the paradigm of perfection, for he possesses the trait of compassion. When Hashem created the world, originally He created it with *middas hadin* (judgment), and He saw that the world could not survive, so He created it with *middas harachamim* (compassion), and then Creation was complete. Thus, the trait of

compassion completed and “perfected” Creation, and therefore Yaakov is the most “perfect” of all the Avos, because he possessed the quality of *rachamim*\compassion.

A person cannot survive with just *emes* alone (except for a few rare individuals who can). If a person would live his life purely based upon *emes*, he would disassociate himself completely from the world. To live with just *emes* alone would also cause a lot of disagreement and strife with people.

On the other hand, if a person goes on in the opposite extreme, and he is being too compassionate with people, he will compromise on the truth. He will become too naïve. If someone steals from him, he will judge the person favorably and think, “The stealer took what was rightfully his.”

We must be balanced in our *Avodas Hashem* – we need to harmonize the traits of *emes* and *rachamim* together.

The first part of our Avodah is that we need to clarify what the truth is. After we are burning for the truth in life, we can then develop our trait of *rachamim*, and the *rachamim* will be a balanced kind of *compassion*, because it is built upon truth.

We must know what the *emes* is and clarify it - and burn with it.

If not, a person is in mortal danger. “The *yetzer hora* is evil from a man’s youth” and he continues to get worse and worse each day – unless a person clarifies what truth is, he will succumb to the *yetzer hora*, without a doubt.

Yaakov exercised the trait of *emes* on his outside, but his essence is *rachamim*. The outside protects the inside – so when a person has *emes*, his *rachamim* is protected. If a person seeks *emes*, he will have protection.

Our actual essence, though, is to strive for *ahavah*\love and *achdus*\unity with Creation. It is just that *emes* is the protection that we need in order for our *rachamim* on Creation to be balanced.

May we merit to combine both *emes* and *rachamim* – which is expressed through the words
וְאֵלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹב.¹⁰

015 | *Inheritance From The Avos & Dovid HaMelech*

Our Avodah – Revealing G-dliness On The World

הא-ל – Hashem is called “Keil”, (Almighty), and this is referring to His *middas harachamim* (attribute of mercy). As Esther said, “Keili, Keili (My Almighty, My Almighty), why do You abandon me?”

Hashem is also called *Keil Sha-dai*; the word “dai” means “Enough”, which hints to how Hashem created the world until He said “Enough”, whereupon He stopped expanding Creation. What is the understanding of this concept?

Hashem created us with His *tzelem elokim*, In His form. This implies that man needs to reveal from within himself how he is a *tzelem elokim*. Man is a *tzelem*, a form, which exists to reveal Hashem. This is entire *avodah* – to reveal our *tzelem elokim*, to reveal Hashem on this world.

What We Inherited From The Avos

Our good *middos*, which we all share, is the part in us which we all received from the Avos. These are the *middos* of kindness (received from Avraham *Avinu*), shame/fear (Yitzchok *Avinu*), and compassion (Yaakov *Avinu*). These *middos* are the embodiment of the Jewish people.

Our Individual Role

We inherited good *middos* from each of the Avos, but we are not the Avos. All people are different from each other, as *Chazal* say, in spite of the fact that we all come from the Avos and that we all possess the *middos* of the Avos. The fact that we all differ from each other in our ways of thinking is the part in us which we did not get from the Avos.

Each of us thinks differently, thus, each of us has our own individual role. Although we all come from the Avos, we are also 600,000 different souls.

Therefore, each of us reveals Hashem in a different way. There are 3 Avos, and the 12 tribes branched out from the three Avos. The rest of us are the 600,000 souls who branch out from this.

Our Two-Fold Mission

Our avodah is to reveal how each of us are really all one and the same, since we all come from the Avos and possess the good middos of the Avos. But each of us also has an individual role in revealing Hashem. The name *Keil* of Hashem refers to the individual aspect, for *Keil* alludes to how Hashem said “Enough” to the general whole of Creation - a hint to how each Creation must uncover its own individuality.

What We Received From Moshe Rabbeinu

In addition to the Avos, we also inherited a power from Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe Rabbeinu was the one who aroused compassion for the Jewish people by the sin with the Golden Calf. He beseeched Hashem and evoked the 13 Attributes of Mercy. This reflects a concept that even when there is sin going on, we are still deserving of Hashem’s mercy. *Chazal* say “A Jew, even when he sins, is still a Jew.” This concept is reflected through the 13 Attributes of Mercy which Hashem arouses to forgive us from our sins. Moshe Rabbeinu was the one who revealed this power onto the world.

This is a power that can be revealed even when a person is in a lowly situation – that no matter how low of a situation a person is in, even if he is in the lowest state of *shiflus* (lowliness), he can still arouse Hashem’s mercy.

Dovid HaMelech also expresses throughout *sefer Tehillim* that a person can reveal Hashem precisely from his lowly situation, from his *shiflus*. Dovid HaMelech came from Rus, who was from Moav, the lowliest nation. People questioned his status; people suspected that he wasn’t even Jewish, or that he descended from *mamzer* status. He was in a lowly situation, yet, he praises Hashem amidst the lowly situation he is in. Dovid HaMelech revealed how even amongst *shiflus*, a person can reveal Hashem. Also, Dovid HaMelech came from Yehuda, whose mother was Leah, and Leah was the one who revealed Hashem amidst her painful situation of feeling unimportant.

The Avos revealed the traits of *chessed*, *yirah*, and *emes*. Dovid HaMelech revealed how a person can reveal Hashem even from amidst a lowly situation. The Avos revealed Hashem through a situation of spiritual ascent, while Dovid HaMelech revealed Hashem even amidst lowliness, even amidst when we feel lowly in our personal situation.

Of course, the Avos also had difficulties. But they revealed Hashem amidst their qualities. But Dovid HaMelech revealed Hashem in spite of the fact that he was considered lowly.

We inherited both of these qualities – we inherited the quality to reveal Hashem from our inherent *middos of chessed, yirah, and emes*, which come from the *Avos* - as well as the ability to reveal Hashem even when we are in a dismal period.

Our generation is the lowliest situation there ever was. Yet, precisely in a low generation like this, we are able to reveal Hashem more than ever! This is because Dovid HaMelech revealed that Hashem can be revealed even when we are amidst lowliness and sin. The power of Dovid HaMelech – revealing Hashem amidst lowliness – is the power we can use to get by this dismal period we are in the history of *Klal Yisrael*.

Right now, we are in the lowest situation there ever was. At the same time, there is no generation which cannot reveal Hashem, and in fact, it is precisely our generation which can reveal Hashem, even more than in the previous generations.

Revealing Hashem In Today's Lowly Situation

How, indeed, are we able to reveal Hashem in a lowly situation such as nowadays?

The *Avos* had 3 *middos*, and Moshe revealed the 13 *middos of rachamim*, after the sin of the Calf. The depth of this is that precisely from our lowly situation of sinning with the Calf - which was a great fall from our spiritual level – we are able to arouse Hashem's mercy.

An older person tends to be more compassionate on others than a younger person; *Chazal* say, "An elderly person is full of compassion." The simple understanding of this is that a younger person is more excitable. But the depth is because a young person feels like he is a part of this world; he feels that this world "Is everything." But an older person can feel already that he is not part of this world, that his existence transcends this physical planet earth we are on. (This is referring to a person who is old and mature in his *daas*, not just in his years.)

A young person sees life from the prism of his physical life, while an older and wiser person sees life from *above* life. "A prisoner cannot free himself from jail" – but a person who has matured in his soul can see life from above himself. An older person doesn't get excited so easily about things he used to get excited about when he was younger, because he has a different perspective on things now.

When a person thinks that he lives for this world, he cannot free himself from the immature perspective. But when a person gains a deeper perspective, he can stand on the outside of his life and view from his "outside" perspective, and have a whole different perspective about life. If a

person thinks that he is a part of this world that he lives in, he will not be able to mature in his spirituality.

The lifestyle of today's generation is not a kind of life which we should be connected to. It is a very lowly situation. But as we know, we can reveal Hashem even amidst lowliness. Dovid HaMelech was from Rus, a convert, from the nation Moav, a lowly nation. But he also comes from Yehuda, and he is the ancestor of Moshiach. Dovid HaMelech's lowly situation is the root of redemption – that greatness can be revealed from amidst lowliness.

Dovid HaMelech is both from the Avos as well as from Rus; he needed to come from both in order to reach his potential. On one hand, Dovid comes from our Avos, and he was the fourth leg in Hashem's Throne, next to the three Avos. On the other hand, he has humble beginnings – he comes from Rus, a convert and Moabite, as well as from Lot.

Balancing These Two Aspects Together In Our Life

We need to combine both our abilities we received from the three Avos as well as what we received from Dovid HaMelech [and Moshe Rabbeinu]. On one hand, we must separate from the lifestyle of the generation, and in this way, we can resemble the Avos. At the same time, we can reveal Hashem in spite of the lowly situation going on today, which is the power of Dovid HaMelech.

We need to balance out these two aspects of life; the fine balance between these two aspects is the true kind of life. This world is a mixture of good and evil, and it is mostly evil. Therefore, we must separate from its lifestyle. But at the same time, we must have a deep love all Jews. This is the way our life is supposed to look like. (How exactly to do this is a different discussion. But this is the general outline.) This is the meaning of לֹא-אֵהָיֶה in *Shemoneh Esrei* – to be able to say “Enough”, just as Hashem said “Enough” to stop creating the world.

By the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu *davened* for the Jewish people to be saved. He was willing to get erased from existence, unlike Noach, who is criticized for not *davening* to save the generation. At the same time, he commanded the people to kill out everyone who committed the sin with the Calf. This was because he was balanced. He had a deep love for the entire Jewish people, yet he was also able to separate himself from evil when he had to and expel it.

May we merit to live with both of these deep abilities simultaneously – the ability to reveal Hashem amidst the lowly situation of today's world, along with our ability to remain individual and separate from all the evil surroundings, “alone” with Hashem.

016 | True Aspirations

Greatness of Man – A Spark of Hashem's Greatness

When we say הגדול (Great One) in the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, simply speaking it is referring to Hashem, Who is great, but it is also referring to the *middah* of Hashem which Avraham Avinu exemplified. Avraham Avinu was called the “great one amongst the giants.”

Hashem's greatness is endless. Hashem is endless, and therefore He is in essence Great, since He is endless. Avraham Avinu was the person in the world who reflected “greatness”, and thus he came to resemble this particular *middah* of Hashem, that Hashem is *Gadol* Great. Man can somewhat reflect the greatness of Hashem, when he matures in his spirituality and he reaches greatness - as opposed to remaining with primitive and immature understanding, which would deem him “small”.

When Man Is 'Great', and when Man is 'Small'

In our **mind**, there are two levels of thought. The lower mode of thought is called *mochin d'katnus* (the small, “immature” state of mind), and the higher mode of thought is called *mochin d'gadlus* (the “mature” state of mind).¹¹ These two modes are present in our **heart** as well – there can be ‘*gadlus*’ (greatness) in our heart, or there can be ‘*katnus*’ (smallness) in our heart.

What is *katnus* \smallness of mind? This is when a person has no aspirations in life. There are people who are very happy with little and they don't demand much in their life, but this doesn't necessarily come from having good *middos*. It can be simply because the person has no aspirations in life, and it comes from his aspect of *katnus* in the soul.

To illustrate, people from Africa are very ‘humble’ and they will gladly become slaves, but it's not because they possess the worthy trait of humility. It is rather because they have no aspirations from themselves. They view themselves with *katnus*. This is an example of someone who has *katnus* in his heart – the aspirations are present in the heart, so when a person has no aspirations, he has an immature heart.

¹¹ For a more in-depth look at this concept, see *Getting To Know Your Thoughts: Chapter 006: The Two Modes of Thought*.

We will give another example, which takes this concept further in its ramifications. There is a kind of person who might know the entire Talmud Bavli very well, and he even takes tests on them and gets excellent marks on these tests. Yet, this very same person might have no idea about how to live his life. He might be very immature about how he views life; he lives life through his lower aspect, *katnus*. This is an example of *katnus* in the mind.

Katnus of the **heart** is when a person lacks aspirations to grow in holiness. *Katnus* of the **mind** is when a person is immature about how to live life (even if he's very knowledgeable in Torah).

Most people have aspirations on this world only for materialistic matters. It is hard to find people who have aspirations to become mature in their spirituality. So most people today have *katnus* in their heart. *Katnus* of the mind (or *mochin d'katnus*) is also the state of most people. We see this from the fact that people gain their perspective on life by learning "history". History is informative, but it does not help you gain the perspective on how you need to live your life. Yet, most people base their understanding about life through learning history, and this is an example of *mochin d'katnus*.

Reaching Gadlus\Greatness

In order for a person to access *mochin d'gadlus* – the higher state of mind, the mature outlook on life – a person needs to observe what's really going on in Creation - from beginning until the end – and to see the greatness behind all in it. This is not the study of history, but rather to see the path of Creation from beginning until now, to see its underlying message. *Chazal* say, "Who is wise? The one who sees what will come." A fool only focuses on the present moment, while a wise person takes into account the past and future, in order to understand what's going on in the present.

There are people who have many wonderful aspirations in spirituality – such as the aspiration to finish Shas (the entire Talmud Bavli), or to fix all their *middos*, or to open up a prominent organization that will help people. Yet, these very same people might be sorely lacking in their very attitude towards life. Many of these high-aspiring people are still at the level of *mochin d'katnus*! Aspirations for holiness don't necessarily give a person a more mature outlook on life...

How does a person reach *mochin d'gadlus*? It is not through having more *yishuv hadaas* (a settled, relaxed mind). It is rather through seeing how each thing in Creation is really big, vast, deep, and complex. It is to see the "*gadlus*", the "greatness" of Creation – that everything in Creation is really deep and complex. That is how you reach *mochin d'gadlus*.

Every person has alternating times in which he experiences *mochin d'gadlus* and *mochin d'katnus*. This is because when a person sins, he loses the *tzelem elokim* (likeness of Hashem) which he was created with, and then his mind falls to the level of *mochin d'katnus*.

If a person directs his life towards always thinking about Hashem, though, he lives a life of *mochin d'gadlus*. If all he thinks about is himself, then he lives a life of *mochin d'katnus*.

When a person makes sure to see the *Hashgachah Peratis* (Divine Providence) going on all the time in Creation, he sees the greatness of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* – he can get in touch with the Endlessness of Hashem. He can see an endless love and endless compassion coming from Hashem, through the many acts of *Hashgacha Peratis* that Hashem does.

If a person can only tell when there is *Hashgacha Peratis* from ‘big’ events such as the exodus of Egypt and the splitting of the sea, he is still viewing life through a ‘small’ lens. But if a person can see every day how supposedly ‘small’ acts contain Hashem’s Divine Providence, he is one who truly sees Hashem’s greatness, and he lives a life of *mochin d'gadlus*.

Avraham Avinu – The Epitome of Greatness

Thus, *Avraham Avinu* is the one who personifies *הגדול*, the “Great One”, because he reached the highest level of man’s greatness, by recognizing the Creator from seeing the Creation. He observed Creation and saw how even the tiniest details were being run by a Creator. He saw a Greatness from amidst every ‘small’ thing he saw. That was the depth of *Avraham Avinu*’s *gadlus* greatness.

When a person wants to really change and better himself, he takes upon himself various resolutions. We know that it is insensible for a person to take on resolutions that are beyond his current level. Such resolutions are unrealistic and they are ineffective for self-improvement. The proper approach a person should take is, instead of taking upon yourself major changes to your lifestyle, is to just see daily *Hashgacha Peratis* in even seemingly “small” episodes. Begin to recognize Hashem in everything that goes on in your life, even the “small” things.

To illustrate, a person often views Torah learning as something big, while doing a mitzvah seems to be something of “smaller” importance. When he does the mitzvah, he will involve himself with it, but he will view the mitzvah as only a “small” thing, in comparison to Torah learning, and therefore the mitzvah won’t have much of an effect on him. But if a person gets used to seeing how even “small” things are really “big” and important matters (for everything in Creation is vast), he will then become affected by the mitzvos he performs.

017 | *Living With Clarity*

הגיבור – We express how Hashem is the “Mighty One”. This will also be subject of the next blessing, אתה גיבור, “You are Mighty”, in which we devote an entire blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* to describe Hashem’s might.

Man can also attain the *middah* of *gevurah*\might and come to resemble somewhat the mightiness of Hashem. It is written, “Praiseworthy is the man [*gever*\gibor\mighty] who suffers.” *Chazal* say that on average, a person lives for 70 years, and if a person is “mighty”, he lives to be 80 years. Hashem’s *gevurah* is expressed in that each day, He overcomes his wrath. Another opinion in the Gemara is that each day Hashem overcomes His *ratzon* (will). Soon, we will see how this is not the same thing as when Hashem overcomes His anger.

In a person, there are two kinds of *gevurah*\might. There is *gevurah* in our **mind**, as well as *gevurah* in our **heart**. Our mind exercises *gevurah* when we use it to overcome the emotions of our heart. “The mind controls the heart.” The Rambam describes our *middos* as “*Hilchos De’os*”, the “laws of *daas*”. What is the difference between our *daas* and our *middos*? Our *middos* (character traits\emotions) are present in our heart, while our *daas* (knowledge) is present in our mind.

When a person only lives superficially, he is only aware of the *middos* of the heart, and he is unaware of the difference between *middos* and *daas*. But when a person gains the inner perspective, he realizes that the inner essence of all our *middos* is “*daas*”. As *Chazal* say, “An ignoramus cannot be pious” – without the proper knowledge of our *daas*, it is not really possible to have good *middos*. Thus, *daas* is really the basis for having good *middos*.

“The mind controls the heart” – simply, this means that a person can use his *yetzer tov* (good inclination) to overcome his *yetzer hora* (evil inclination). But the deeper meaning is, that even Hashem overcomes His *middos*, as we brought before from the words of our Sages. Hashem’s desires are only good desires – He has no evil desires, *chas v’shalom*. Yet, Hashem overcomes His *middos* anyway, even though they are always good *middos*. This shows us that there is a higher use of *gevurah*.

A Torah scholar is personified for having the trait of *gevurah*. The *gevurah* of a Torah scholar reflects somewhat the *gevurah* of Hashem. A Torah scholar doesn’t just use *gevurah* to overcome his *yetzer hora*. He uses *gevurah* to give himself an inner order to his soul. A Torah scholar has inner **clarity** – he knows how to direct each power of his soul and use each of his soul’s abilities

in their proper place. That is the higher use of *gevurah* – when a person uses his *daas* to gain **clarity** in matters.

If a person has good *middos*, but his mind is not so developed, his mind is not directing his emotions. What will happen? He is destructive to the world. The Sages say that there was a scholar, Rav Zecharya ben Avkulas, who was very humble, yet he is blamed for the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, because he was too humble.¹² Our *middos*, even our good *middos*, need to have boundaries. The power which directs our *middos* is called *daas*. Through *daas*, we access our higher kind of *gevurah*, which gives us inner order and clarity, to know how to direct each of our good *middos*.

One of the Sages said to another, “You see a clear world.”¹³ This defines the essence of a true Torah scholar – a person who receives an inner clarity on matters. The depth of a Torah scholar’s wisdom is that he has the higher kind of *gevurah*, which is that he knows how to give himself inner order to his soul’s abilities and thus have clarity. The kind of lifestyle in today’s generation is a lifestyle that lacks clarity; we do not live in a clear world. This is the situation of exile – we lack clarity. This is the meaning of the statement, “*Torah, Torah, wear a sackcloth*” – we are missing the clarity to go about life, so it is if the Torah is in mourning.

The power of *gevurah* is thus to live a life of clarity. There are all kinds of doubts that fill the world – doubts when it comes to our Torah learning, doubts in how to behave, doubts in how to live our life entirely. All of us are filled with various kinds of doubts. In addition, our priorities are often mixed up; things that are supposed to be secondary of importance have become first priority, while things that are really supposed to be more important have become only second priority. Often, acts of *chassidus* (piousness) are considered to be obligatory and more essential than the actions which are required according to *Halacha*. This is the opposite of a clear kind of world.

Hashem is the epitome of *gevurah* \might, as we say in the next blessing of אֵתָהּ גִּיבוֹר. Our power of *gevurah* can only come from Hashem. It is the power to disconnect from all surroundings and instead look at everything through a lens of pure truth, an inner place in the soul that is clean from any impure interests.

We live in an *alma d’shikra*, a “world of falsity.” Rav Dessler zt”l explained that the entire reality we live in on this world is a false reality, an illusion. Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt”l said that there are many people who don’t even know what they want at all in their life – that is the kind of false world we live in.

¹² *Yoma 9b*

¹³ *Pesachim 50a*

018 | *To Live In A Perfect Place**To Desire Perfection*

והנורה – Hashem is the “Awesome One”. Yaakov *Avinu* was the one who said this term, “*Nora*”, “awesome”, when he exclaimed at the future site of the Beis HaMikdash - “*How awesome is this place.*”

The word *nora* comes from the word *yirah*awe, which is the trait of *Yitzchok Avinu*. However, *nora* is referring to a more specific kind of *yirah*, and it personifies Yaakov *Avinu*. What is the difference between *yirah*, which is the general concept of awe, and *nora*, which is a more specific kind of awe?

With *yirah*, a person is afraid of something bigger than him. This can be a physical kind of fear, or it can be to fear something spiritual, such as to fear punishment. As it is written, “*When the lion roars, who is not afraid?*”

But *nora* is when a person expresses awe because he realizes that he is looking at perfection. Yaakov *Avinu* said, “*How awesome is this place*” – he was expressing his awe over the site of the *Beis HaMikdash*, the place which revealed perfection on this world.

Thus, *nora* refers to *yiras hashleimus*, “awe of perfection”, and since it was expressed by Yaakov *Avinu*, it is the trait of Yaakov *Avinu*. Similarly, we find that the word *Yerushalayim* comes from the word *yarei shalem*, to “fear perfection”.¹⁴

Praying For The Redemption: Longing For Perfection

Each day in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we *daven* for the Redemption. We *daven* for the revival of the dead, in the blessing of **אתה גיבור**. We *daven* for the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash, in the blessing of **ולירושלים**. We *daven* for Moshiach, in the blessing of **את צמה דוד**. What is our intention as we *daven* for these things? From what point in our soul do these prayers emanate from?

It is because we long for a better world than the one we are in now, so we *daven* to Hashem for the redemption. Each of us has a yearning, deep down, to live in a world of complete purity and holiness.

¹⁴ See *Tefillah* #0122, “*Aspiring For Perfection*”.

We are not referring to the nature of the soul to ascend spiritually; that is a different point. Spiritual ascension, *aliyah*, implies that we are climbing the rungs of a ladder, and that we wish to keep ascending upwards – this is a different point in our soul, and it is a lower point than the one we are discussing. Rather, we are referring to a more inner point in the soul - the soul's desire that there should be *shalom*\peace in the world – world where there are no wars, just peace.

Ascension and Perfection

A person searches to be close to Hashem. What is the root behind this search?

It is because our soul wants to live in a world of complete perfection; it wants to dwell in a situation of *shleimus* – a world of *shalom*\peace, a world in which all is good. So when we ask for the redemption in *Shemoneh Esrei*, it is really because we desire to live in a perfected kind of world.

The lower point in our soul is the point that seeks spiritual ascension, but it does not have a longing to live in a perfect world. There is a more inner point in our soul, a higher point, which seeks to live in a perfect world. This is a deeper ability in our soul than the part in us that seeks to ascend. This is the deep point in us that seeks perfection. It is reminiscent of the “suffering of Iyov” – Iyov wanted to reach perfection, so Hashem gave him suffering which would enable him to reach his aspiration.

Yaakov *Avinu* is the one who said “*nora*”, and thus, he sought perfection. He is also the one who was *tam*, “wholesome” – a term that can also mean “*shalem*, “perfect.” Yaakov *Avinu* is also called the “choicest of the Avos.” From Yaakov *Avinu*, we received the power in the soul to seek perfection.

Our Nefesh HaBehaimis Vs. Our Neshamah

There is a contradiction going on inside our soul. The lower part of our soul is called our *nefesh habehaimis* – the “animal” part of the soul, our external layer; it is the part in us which seeks to improve, but it does not seek self-perfection. The inner layer of our soul (our pure *Neshamah* – our Divine essence), however, wants to reach total self-perfection.

The Sages state, “Whoever mourns Jerusalem, will merit to see it in its rejoicing.” A person is able to merit the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash in the current reality – it becomes revealed to his soul.

If someone doesn't know about the inner layer of his soul (his “*neshamah*” dimension), he has no happiness, inner peace, or holiness. But if someone does recognize that inner part of himself and he is in touch with himself, he seeks perfection, and this is how our soul can express, “*How awesome is this place*”, just as Yaakov *Avinu* expressed about the site of the future Beis HaMikdash.

Two Ways How We Can Reach The Point of Perfection

There are two ways how we can reveal the inner layer of our soul.

One way is through **yearning** for perfection, to have aspirations for perfection – to shed tears over it.

A second way is to recognize the “hidden depths of our heart”, as the *Chovos HaLevovos* describes it. This is when our heart becomes a place where the Shechinah can dwell, when our heart becomes like a Mishkan within. It reached when we **recognize, in a palpable sense, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu***.

If we reach this place in our heart, we will live in a place where there is only peace – the place of perfection in the world. In our own soul, we can reach a place in which we can express, “*This is nothing except the House of G-d.*” It is a place in the soul which is entirely pleasure, happiness, and perfection.

Life, on average, is seventy years. How do we get by life, which is full of so much suffering and troubles? The answer is, we live in two worlds. We live on the physical planet earth, which is full of suffering, but at the same time, we can also live in a world which is completely peace.

Life on this physical world is actually not real life – it is death! But if a person penetrates into the depths of his heart, he can merit to reveal Hashem in his soul, and then he will receive an entirely new kind of life. He will be able to live internally, in an inner world of purity and perfection, while at the same time his body is here on this earth, the “world of action.” We all have the free choice to choose to live in the inner layer of reality; we are able to connect to it.

The way a person can do this is: to accept upon himself the yoke of Torah. When the Jewish people were given the Torah, Hashem said, “If you accept the Torah, good; if not, you will be buried under this mountain.” In other words, life without accepting the Torah is like being buried alive. It is a life that is not a life, but a deathlike kind of existence.

When the Jewish nation stood by Har Sinai, they were told that they would be *there* under the mountain if they don't accept the Torah. Nowadays, it can be said that if a person doesn't have the Torah in his life, he is buried right *here*, in the very place he stands...

A person can live life with his physical body being on the physical earth, doing what he has to do in this "world of action", while at the same time remaining connected to his heart inside. Such a person will be able to survive life and all its painful situations.

May we all merit, with Hashem's help, to connect our minds with our hearts.

019 | *Revealing Oneness**Introduction*

In *Shemoneh Esrei*, after we say **הגדול הגבור והנורא** which are each unique revelations of Hashem in a person's life, represented by each of our Avos we say **קל עליון** "The Almighty One On High."

Keil Elyon is a higher aspect of His G-dliness. It is revealed through the next words of *Shemoneh Esrei* **הגומל חסדים טובים**, "He who bestows good kindness."

What is the meaning of *Keil Elyon*?

Chazal say that Hashem is always arranging matches in Heaven. Everything in Creation has opposing forces; for example, heaven and earth, man and woman, etc. Hashem pairs matches in Heaven, meaning, He takes opposite forces and combines them, even though they are opposites.

The depth behind this is that each day, Hashem combines opposite forces in Creation and unifies them together.

We, as well, have an avodah to unify Creation, just as Hashem unifies His creations together. Obviously, we cannot unify Creation like Hashem can, but since we have an avodah to resemble Hashem, we have an avodah to bring a degree of unity to Creation.

Let's make this concept simpler. The *Mesillas Yesarim* writes that all of life is a test, no matter what situation you are in. The depth of this is that every situation we are in somehow opposes us, and that is the difficulty of our test. We are always being challenged and opposed by various forces in Creation.

Every day, people are being blessed with *Chiddushei Torah*; new *sefarim* are printed each day. There is an abundance of holiness that is being poured down onto the world.

But along with this, there is an equal amount of evil that comes to the world to oppose all the holiness. The more spirituality that becomes revealed, the more evil and impurity comes to counter it. That is the rule of Creation – holiness and evil are constantly equal with each other in strength. The same is true for all the evil that is going on in the world. Since there is much evil going on in the world, more opportunities for holiness are given to us, so we can counter all the evil.

If holiness and evil are always equally powerful, why then is it so hard for us to withstand the difficulties in our spiritual situation? It is because a spiritual light that enters Creation can only work for the day it comes in. Today we can't use yesterday's spiritual light, because now more evil has entered the world, since yesterday.

Fighting The Yetzer Hora In The 20th Century

In today's generation, there is an abundance of Torah each day. Each day there are chiddushim; there is a lot of revelation of Hashem today. There never was a generation like today, in which there is much Torah going on; look how many sefarim there are

But because there is so much holiness today coming into the world, there is an equal amount of evil that comes into the world to counter it. There is a lot of *hester panim* (concealment) today; we don't know when Moshiach will come. We are very far from the state of Adam HaRishon.

Do we have enough holiness and good revealed in the world to counter all the evil facing us?

If one has a superficial perspective, he focuses solely on the positive points of today's times, that there is a lot of Torah going on, etc. But if one has an inner perspective, he realizes what is going on. He understands that since there is much holiness being poured into the world, there is an equal amount of evil coming into the world to counter it.

Every person knows he has difficulties. If he doesn't, his feelings are deadened. The average person knows that he has spiritual difficulties. These are difficulties which our Avos did not face – they are difficulties which were never here before in the world.

Do we have enough good to fight all the evil we face?

There is a great amount of evil and impurity in today's world. But we have a great, huge light we can use to counter it. It is within reach to each and every Jew. True, we have difficulties which were never here until now. But we have a huge spiritual light as well in our arsenal that we can use to counter all the evil. If not for it, we can't survive spiritually.

Hashem brings both light and darkness to each generation. The darker our situation, the more light Hashem gives us to dispel the darkness.

If one doesn't understand what kind of situation we are in today, all he will see is the difficulties of today, and he will despair. Many, many people are grappling with how to survive spiritually in these generations, with all the new evil influences that keep coming into the world.

The yetzer hora that was around even 2 years ago is not the same yetzer hora as today. We face a whole new yetzer hora each day!

How do we deal with the new *yetzer hora*?? This is an age-old question, and it was asked 2 years ago as well. But now we are faced with a new *yetzer hora* entirely! The yetzer hora today is constantly a new kind of *yetzer hora*!

Of course, we know that *Chazal* say that Hashem said, “I created a *yetzer hora*, and I created a Torah as the remedy.” Torah learning is the remedy, but we need to understand *how* it can be the remedy. There is no exact guidance from *Chazal* on how to defeat the *yetzer hora* of each generation.

Let us try to understand the depth of the war between good and evil that is going today, where our free will is in all this, and based upon that, we can then understand the meaning of “*Keil Elyon*” and how that makes Hashem into the *Gomel Chassadim Tovim*.

The Difficulties of The Current Generation Vs. The Previous Generations

Any sensible person knows that the kind of impurity going on today in the world, in the recent years, is not just “a lot” of bad influences we are facing. It’s a whole new kind of impurity that has never been here before! It is because we are in the generation of the “footsteps of Moshiach” (*ikvesa d’meshicha*), and evil is at its strongest peak.

In previous generations, each generation had a particular hardship that they faced. The Generation of the Flood acted evil in a particular way, the Generation of the Tower of Babel (the *dor haflagah*) had a problem when it came to believing in Hashem, and the city of Sodom acted evil in a particular way. The Vilna Gaon writes at length about this; the generation of the flood was judged with water, the generation of the Tower was judged with wind, and Sodom was judged by fire, and each of these punishments were parallel to the particular kind of sin which each of these generations were rampant in. Those were different manifestations of evil, but at least it was just one kind of evil in each generation.

In the previous generations, there was the Haskalah movement, the Inquisition, etc. But it was only a test for that particular generation. In today’s generation, *all* of the evil in the world - since the start of Creation – are all here at once!

The evil today in the world is not just ‘another’ kind of evil that has entered the world. It is rather all of the evil together all at once!

To give an example, in today's generation, a person can hear news going on at any place in the world, wherever he is. He can hear all the filth and all the evil going on in any place in the world. The kind of evil that exists today can connect a person to all of the evil in the entire world - all at once.

We are speaking here about the entire avodah of our soul in this generation.

There was always a *yetzer hora*. *Chazal* say that each of our Avos had a particular *yetzer hora* in their generation. In the generation of Avraham *Avinu*, the desire for idolatry was rampant. In the time of Yitzchok, there was a desire for murder. In the time of Yaakov, the desire for adultery was dominant. But in our generation, all the evil is here all at once!

Adam had a test which he had to choose between good and evil, and it was an all-inclusive kind of difficulty which included in it all the kinds of evil together. He failed the test, and ever since then, as the generations went one, each generation received a certain test of evil they faced, but only one kind of evil at a time. But now, when we are in the final generation, our test is similar to Adam's test: all of the evil is facing us all at once.

Holy Unity Vs. Evil Unity

Now that all the forces of evil have joined together, evil has unified together, and this is a disturbing and cataclysmic kind of unity. Why are we being faced with such a test? It is all being orchestrated of course through a higher wisdom: Hashem's plan.

When we say *Shema Yisrael*, the Jewish people declares how Hashem is One and His Name is One. Currently, only the Jewish people are aware that Hashem is the One. In the future, even the non-Jews will recognize Hashem as one; His name will become one upon the entire world, as we say in the end of *Aleinu*. We don't know when the redemption will arrive; no one knows, because "matters of the heart are not revealed by the mouth", but what we know for sure is that He will reveal Himself on that great day of the future.

But the *echad* which will soon be here in the future is currently being countered by an evil kind of *echad*: the fact that all evil has come together and unified together to challenge us. This evil kind of *echad* is responsible for why there are Jews in the world who don't even know how to say *Shema Yisrael*.

Good and evil are forces created by Hashem that counter each other. In the final generation, we are not faced with another kind of evil – we are faced with a bond of all kinds of evil that have joined together.

The words here are relevant directly to your personal soul; they are not only meant for certain people to hear. The words here apply to every person, to what the avodah we have in the final generations.

Baseless hatred destroyed the Beis HaMikdash, and it still dances among us, as the Sages state¹⁵. This is the total opposite of the concept of *echad*.

The test in this generation is a war of *echad* vs. *echad*. It is also a test of baseless hatred and strife. The unification of evil fights our holy power of *echad*, and the forces of disparity (hatred and strife) are also preventing us from having *echad* on this world.

If one does not understand what kind of evil we are facing, he isn't aware of how much impurity we face. Good and evil are warring against each other now; darkness and light are fighting each other.

Our Inheritance From Dovid HaMelech

The avodah of each our Avos are represented by *HaGadol* (Avraham), *HaGibor* (Yitzchok) and *HaNora* (Yaakov). But “*Keil Elyon*” represents the power of Dovid HaMelech, who is called the “head” of the Avos by our Sages. Dovid *HaMelech's* ability is what can enable us to survive the final exile and merit the redemption.

The Avos built our people with their unique *middos*; Dovid HaMelech revealed to us the power of *echad*, which can help us survive the final exile. Dovid revealed *echad* because he was the head of the Avos, and there is only one head. The Avos were three, but Dovid was one.

The only way we can succeed in these days is to utilize the power of “*echad*”. This is our avodah.

When people wonder why Moshiach hasn't come yet, there are all kinds of answers: we are lax in *lashon hora*, *tzniyus*, etc. It's true – we can discover that we are lax in all 365 sins of the Torah. But that's not the root of the problems; those are all just branches of the problems. Those are all examples of the general *hester panim* (concealment of Hashem) that we are in today, but they are just the details; they do not describe the root of the problems.

Of course, there are many statements of *Chazal* in which we can see why Moshiach's arrival is being prevented. Those are all true. But those are all branches of the real problem we have; we

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have to find out what the root of the problems are, and that will solve all the branches of the problem with it.

The root of all the problems today is because we are missing the power of *echad/*oneness, *giluy ha'echad* – to reveal the oneness of Hashem. The words “*Keil Elyon*” alludes to the revelation of G-dliness which each person can do.

Living A Paradoxical Kind of Existence

In the heart within us – and only in the heart, because the heart is where truth resides – is where *echad/*oneness can be revealed. The heart can reveal a unity amongst the entire creation – between person, plant, animal and rock.

Practically speaking, when it comes to our actions, we must separate very far from the evil of this world. But at the same time, deep in our soul, we must desire that there be oneness in Creation. Our soul can connect it all together. Our body, though, must be separated from evil, because it is not capable of revealing oneness within Creation. Therefore, our soul can desire unity in the world, but we must distance our physical body from coming into contact with any of the evil on this world.

Oneness means to look at every Creation as being a creation of Hashem, thus, there is no such thing as a bad person. Hashem wants every person to exist, so we must see each person as someone whom Hashem loves. This is the oneness which our heart can realize. However, when it comes to how we actually associate ourselves with the world, we must distance ourselves from all the evil on this world. It is just that deep down in our heart, we should desire that all of Creation be united, that G-dliness be revealed in everything.

Keil Elyon is this power of unity with the world that is unique to a Jew's soul; a non-Jew does not have this deep power. Even when we see a fly, we should not dismiss it as some worthless creature, but as a creation of Hashem.

The depth of the avodah of this final generation, as the Gemara says, is “Break the barrel, but save the wine.” On one hand, when it comes to how we act, we must separate from most of the people of the world right now, who mostly act evil. But deep down we must still desire *echad*. *Echad* means that you want everyone in Creation to become united together. Although you must distance yourself from people for the time being, deep down you should wish that all of us would be united.

What's the advice we have to survive this generation? People make *asifos* (gatherings) for *chizuk* (inspiration), but this isn't enough. It is commendable of course, and it is wonderful that G-d fearing people are gathering together to discuss what to do. But it doesn't help. They will get rewarded of course, but it doesn't help!!

What, then, can help us? It is when we realize that the test of this generation is that we need the power of *echad* to counter the united forces of evil that have joined together; the holy kind *echad* can win against the evil kind of *echad*.

As we mentioned, we must be very cautious in how we use *echad*. We must physically separate from the evil people of this world, but deep in our heart we should want that everyone become united together and realize the purpose of Creation, which is to reveal the oneness of Hashem.

May we merit help from Hashem to realize that just as much as there is a tremendous of evil going on in the world today, so is there an equal amount of good and holiness as well which we can use to fight it; and that we should merit to withstand the difficulties and see Moshiach really soon. Amen.

020 | *The Longing For A Smile**The Difference Between “Chessed” and “Gomel Chessed”*

"גומל חסדים טובים." - We daven in *Shemoneh Esrei*, “*Gomel Chassadim Tovim*.”

What is the meaning of *chassadim* (kindness) and what is *chassadim tovim* (good kindness)? If Hashem is kind, why do we also say that He does kindnesses that are “good”? Are there any kindnesses that aren’t good?

The answer to this lies in the following.

The Gemara says that the Jewish people contain three good *middos* (character traits) – compassion, shame, and loving kindness (*gomlei chassadim*). It is understandable that compassion and shame are called *middos*, but how is kindness a *middah*? Kindness are **acts** that we do, but how is it a *middah*? Yet, the Sages say that kindness is a *middah*, not merely an act.

What does it mean to be “*gomel*” *chessed*? There is *chessed*, and then there is “*gomel*” *chessed*. *Chessed* implies when we simply do an **act** of kindness. But to be *gomel chessed* is to use the *middah* of one’s soul that is *chessed*. When a person is *gomel chessed*, it is a deeper *chessed* – it is to do something for another person with the understanding that “Whatever is mine, is also his.”

A person must know that whatever he has is not only here for himself to use. Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes (in the introduction to *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*) that “A person was not created for himself, but only in order to help others.” This described what It means to be “*gomel chessed*” – to realize what life is about: that life is entirely about helping others. The *chessed* that Hashem does for us is thus *gemillas chessed*, not just *chessed*. This is because whatever Hashem does for us, He has no intention of receiving anything in return. He is kind to us unconditionally. This is the meaning of גומל חסדים טובים.

Living For Others

In our own soul, there is a power to have *gemillas chassadim* – to realize that whatever a person has must be used to help others. It is a trait of our soul, not just an act that we do.

Some people think that the depth of *chessed* \ kindness is about love, *ahavah*. This is true, but there is a deeper reason of why we should do *chessed*; according to this understanding, a person can only give to others when he loves them. This is true, but there is more depth to kindness.

The depth of kindness goes even further than love. It means for a person to feel that one's entire existence was created in order to help others! It is an attitude of "What's mine isn't mine" - therefore, I must be kind to others.

It is written, "*I am asleep but my heart is awake*" – the Sages said that the words "I am asleep" applies to the *mitzvos* (that people are asleep from doing the *mitzvos*) and "my heart is awake" applies to doing *chessed*. This especially applies to our generation: our hearts are very awake in this generation to doing *chessed*. There is a lot of *chessed* in the world. Baruch Hashem. What is motivating us to do all this *chessed*, however? Are we doing it mechanically, or to get reward? This is not real *chessed*. It's self-serving.

Real *chessed* seems to come from our love for others, but the more subtle understanding is like how Yosef took care of the entire Egypt; he didn't live for himself and realized that he needs to give to others, and he felt that this was his whole existence. When a person does *chessed* – is he doing it to get reward, or to help others? If a person is doing *chessed* because he wants to be rewarded in the Next World, this is not *chessed*, because it is self-serving; it is like how a gentile does *chessed*. Our Sages state that the gentiles do *chessed* entirely for themselves.

How indeed is *chessed* of a Jew different than a non-Jew's *chessed*? The answer is: there is *chessed* among the non-Jews, but *gemillas chessed* is only in a Jew's soul. (If a non-Jew ever does *gemillas chessed*, it is only if he is affected by the spirituality of a Jew). *Gemillas chessed* is to realize that one does not for himself. One who lives for himself is living for his desires; the way he is living his life will be a barrier that holds him back from holiness.

When one reaches the deep recognition (not just intellectually) in his heart, that he does not live for himself but that he exists for others – he has reached the power of *gemillas Chassadim* within himself.

Let us reflect into how we can utilize the potential of our *gemillas chassadim*.

When We Want To Give, But Others Don't Want To Accept

Hashem established in Creation to bestow good upon creation, and that *middah* is stamped into our *neshamah*. However, our body causes us to be selfish and live for ourselves. One whose body controls him cannot have *gemillas chassadim*. One who reveals his soul can do *gemillas chassadim*.

Besides for the fact that the materialism of our body can prevent our soul from utilizing its power to bestow good upon others, there is another obstacle that prevents us from bestowing

good upon others: Even if you are in touch with your soul and you wish completely to bestow good upon another, it can be prevented because the other person doesn't want to receive what you want to give.

When you are trying to bestow good on another's soul, it might not happen, because if the other person is entrenched in the materialism and in bad middos, his body is preventing you from giving of your soul to his.

Why Don't People Smile Back?

There is a famous rule that people reciprocate your own feelings, and this is a possuk in Mishlei: *"Just as water reflects a face to a face, so does the heart of man reflect one to another."* It works like a reflection. A person "reflects" back to you when you want to be good to him; the way a person feels about someone else is the way the other person feels toward him. If a person likes another person, the other will like him back, and vice versa.

That is the way things are supposed to be, but this is only true when there is a true reflection – and only "clear water" can give a reflection. If a person's "water" is black, dirty, and murky, he cannot reflect back the feelings of another person, just as dirty water cannot give back a reflection.

Therefore, even if one wants to bestow good towards someone else, the other person's body can oppose what the giver is trying to give him, and it can prevent him from giving to him. This is due to the bad *middos* that can be present in the one I am trying to give to, and since bad middos are rooted in the physical body, the body of the other person is getting in the way of me trying to give to him.

There is a deep term discussed by our Rabbis known as *panim v'achor* – when a person receives *achor* (the back) after he gives of his own *panim* (face) to another. This is when I want to smile at someone, I want to give him some *he'aras panim* (an illuminating countenance) but he doesn't even give me his face to me. Instead of giving his face to me, he turns to the side, and I get his neck instead of his face. Instead of reciprocating my *panim*, he gives me his *achor*. Sometimes a person simply doesn't show face to others and he doesn't smile at others, and that is why he isn't giving to others. But sometimes, a person can want very much to give to another and reveal love and connection with another, but the other person refuses the connection; this is due to the bad *middos* or materialism of the other person's body that is getting in the way.

Any person with even a little sensitivity sees this going on every day. A person can smile at others, yet he doesn't get a smile back. It is often because other people, who are wrapped up in their physicality, don't want to receive the connection that we wish to have with them!

If a person wants to give something physical to other, he can give it even if the other isn't giving him face. The reason for this is because something that is external and superficial can be received by the other even if the other is being superficial. But when one wants to give another of his soul, like when he wants to give another a feeling of love, of connection, and the other refuses the connection – the one trying to give won't be able to give him of his soul, because giving of the soul requires the other soul to be prepared to receive what is being given.

When a person is ready to give *he'aras panim* [an “illuminating countenance”, otherwise known as a smile] to others and he wants to bestow good upon others, many times, he discovers that the other person doesn't want to accept the connection. Maybe for a little bit of time the other person will be ready to accept the connection, but only for a fleeting amount of time.

One of the Roshei Yeshivos, before he opened up a yeshivah, consulted with a renowned Mashgiach (spiritual mentor) for advice. The Mashgiach told him that he should be aware of three key points, and one of them was the following: That even when you invest so much in your students, and you give and give to them, still, the students might act ungrateful towards you and not realize what you are doing for them. Therefore, don't become upset when you see this happen, because it is to be expected, for it is unfortunately a nature in people that they aren't prepared to realize the good that others are doing for them.

Self-Absorbed In Spirituality

If a person lives entirely for himself, even if he is immersed in Torah and spiritual growth all day, but he's self-absorbed, then he is still not living a life of holiness! He is very far from it. A person who lives only for himself, even if he is very spiritual, is simply not bothered by the kind of pain we are describing, [because he does not have emotional sensitivity, due to the fact that he's not in touch with his soul]. He doesn't go through the kind of painful feeling we are describing here, but, that itself should be painful – more than anything! It shows that something is really missing in himself.

A Real Reciprocal Relationship Is Rare

If a person is *zoche* to have a true friend who reciprocates the warm feelings back – he is very fortunate.

Many times, though, it is not a true feeling between them, and it is just in one's imagination. Even if he's not imagining it, the other person often will lose his reciprocal feelings.

Filling The Void

How indeed can we leave in a world in which we often cannot bestow good upon others because they are refusing? Love is the natural expression of the soul, and when a person lives a truly spiritual kind of life, his love will flow from him naturally. How can we deal with the pain we have from others who refuse to have a connection with us?

If a person is not familiar with this kind of pain we have described here, it shows that he hasn't yet revealed the depth of the power of love; or even worse than that.

Again, let us emphasize that *gemillas chassadim* is not merely to do actions of *chessed*; it is to give to others because one wants to radiate outward to others, to give to others out of *he'aras panim*.

The Source of The Pain

The first aspect of this pain is to realize: it is true pain of our very soul. It is the pain of the *Shechinah* in exile. It only bothers one who lives an internal kind of life.

The pain we are describing is not referring to when we don't get what we want. We are referring to the very inner will of the soul, which naturally wants to give *he'aras panim* to others, and when others don't want that from us, it pains our very soul.

When a person does *chessed* for others and he doesn't get back *he'aras panim* from others, and he's bothered by this, he might calm himself down by reminding himself that Hashem will reward him in the Next World for being kind; but this is a superficial reaction.

A person needs to seek a truer solution to the pain. Our soul longs for *he'aras panim*, as we see from our prayer in *Biras Kohanim*, that we ask Hashem to bestow us of His *he'aras panim*. It is a need that we cannot suffocate. We will have to get it from somewhere.

Why Do You Want People To Smile At You?

First of all, we will point out that that some people long for others to smile at them and give the *he'aras panim* (a radiant countenance) and that others should say “Good Morning” to them, because they are simply depressed, or because they need recognition from others. This is a need that comes from the *nefesh habehaimis* (the animalistic layer of the soul), and is not the kind of pain we are discussing. It is merely anxiety that comes from a need to feel recognition; it has nothing to do with what we are talking about.

We are talking about a different kind of pain, a deeper kind of pain that is entirely spiritual: when a person has pain because no one tells him “Good Morning” because he wants to feel **connection** with others, which is an inherent need of the soul. He wants to be connected with that power of *he'aras panim* in a person, which is a power of the soul – and not because he wants to **get** a “Good Morning” from others. He doesn't want to live in a cold world where each person only cares for himself!

When a person has pain from others' coldness, it is a true longing and desire of the soul – a longing for the kind of life that is in the World to Come.

The Solution

If a person longs for *he'aras panim* for others, although this is a deep need coming from our inner soul, still, it is terribly painful to live like this. A person will keep waiting his whole life for others to smile at him and greet him, and this is not a way to live. We cannot wait for others to come greet us. People are waiting and waiting for others to give them *he'aras panim*, in a world where everyone is bogged down and too busy to give it.

Instead of waiting to receive it from this world, we can get our need for *he'aras panim* fulfilled when we **long for the *he'aras panim* of Hashem**. This will give our soul what it needs and then our soul will feel calmed.

Of course, because we live in a physical body, we won't be entirely satisfied if we just get our soul's needs fulfilled. We are clothed by a physical body, therefore, we will still want people to come give us *he'aras panim*. We cannot deny our emotional needs for attention from others. But if we acquire *he'aras panim* in our soul, we will definitely acquire a degree of *he'aras panim* which will calm us down a bit.

Awaiting A Smile From Others: A Need That Can Never Be Filled

When a person wishes that other people give him *he'aras panim*, and he wishes very much that he could get it, the simple advice that people try is to put on smile at others, in the hope that eventually, everyone else will smile at him back.

But we must know the following: there is a large amount of souls today who are from the “Erev Rav”, and souls of Erev Rav will never give you real *he'aras panim*. Even if an “Erev Rav” soul smiles at you for 1000 years, he will never be able to give you a true *he'aras panim* that comes from the purity of the soul. Only a Jew’s soul can give you real *he'aras panim*, and if you give another Jew *he'aras panim*, you might be able to penetrate the obstacles covering his soul and perhaps he’ll smile back at you; but it’s not definite.

So the advice of “smiling at others so that others will smile back at you in return” is not an inner kind of solution. The yearning that our soul has for *he'aras panim* simply cannot be fulfilled by people on this world!

The He'aras Panim of Hashem

So how indeed can we get our need for *he'aras panim*? Again, we aren’t speaking about a person who is depressed and he needs others to smile at him. We are speaking about the inner will of the soul for *he'aras panim*; how can we get it? If one is always awaiting the *he'aras panim* of others, he lives a life of pain, as we explained. What, then, is the advice we can do?

The answer lies in the understanding of the words, “*Gomel Chassadim Tovim*”. It means to use the middah of *gemillas chassadim* in your soul.

In the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we daven, “*For in the light of Your Face, which You gave us.*” If we feel *he'aras panim* from Hashem, we are able to have a degree of *he'aras panim* even as we live on This World.

This really cannot be described in words. But the soul in us, which recognizes its Creator, can long for that *he'aras panim*, and through the longing, it can get it - even if it’s not completely. “*Gomel Chassadim Tovim*” refers to the *middah* of *he'aras panim* of Hashem; (and that *middah* can be extended to others when we smile at others). It is a *middah* of our soul.

One who feels this *he'aras panim* of Hashem is not having aware of it intellectually; it is an experience of the soul.

One who doesn’t long for this *he'aras panim* lives in cold world. On the other hand, one who longs for *he'aras panim* from other people lives a life of pain. One who receives his *he'aras panim*

from Hashem, though, will have a calmed soul, and he will get his needs for *he'aras panim*, even though it's not complete (because he still has a body, which can't gain from the soul's experience). And in this way, a person will even find that he has the strength in himself to smile even at others who don't smile at him.

The depth of *gemillas chassadaim* – to give *he'aras panim* to others – is as the Sages said, that “A person who shows the white of his teeth to his friend is greater than giving him milk.” This is not referring to the need for others to smile at us, which comes from our *nefesh habehaimis*; it is a longing in the soul to live in a world of *he'aras panim*.

In Conclusion

I hope that your hearts have actually become opened to hearing about this; otherwise, they will just sound like sparse, intellectual definitions. May we merit the *he'aras panim* of Hashem - and through that, we will be able to give the complete *he'aras panim* to others.

021 } Inner Love*The Abilities of Compassion and Love*

In the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we say, "גומל חסדים טובים"88 .

Previously, we have explained what it means to be “*gomel*” *chessed* – to want to be kind to others, because what’s ours is not really meant to be ours; all that we have is meant for us to use it to benefit others. But what is the meaning of the word “*chassadim*”, “kindnesses”?

It means to have compassion on others. The Sages say that *chessed* can be done either with the poor or with the wealthy. How can one do *chessed* with the wealthy, if he doesn’t need our kindness? The simple answer would be that even though we can’t give physical benefits to a wealthy man, we can still give him spiritual kindness – to benefit him in a spiritual way.

But on a deeper note, even *chessed* is toward the wealthy, because Hashem created the entire world only in order to benefit everyone, including the wealthy. Even if there wouldn’t be people on the world, Hashem would still have a desire to bestow His kindness. So really, we should be kind not because others *need* us, but because that is the way the world is supposed to be – *we are supposed to be looking* to benefit others.

When we are kind to the poor, we have compassion on them and give them what they need. But when we are kind to the wealthy, it is a deeper recognition of kindness: because we want to be givers; that we have an inner longing to do good for others.

From where does this human ability come from? Why do people have a longing to benefit others? This comes from the power of *lev tov* in a person – to have a “good heart.” Also, it can be because a person has compassion on others, and this awakens in a person a longing to do good for others.

Most of the kindness we find in the world today is toward the poor. This is kindness that comes from our compassion on others. It can also be a pure form of kindness – a kindness that is *lishmah*. But there is another kind of kindness – a desire to be good to others, to have a *lev tov* toward them. This is the inner ability in a person to love others.

What is the difference between compassion (*rachamim*) and love (*ahavah*)?

With compassion, sometimes a person feels sorry for others and sometimes not. But when a person loves others, the love is always there – it doesn’t need a reason. Why? Because this love is

part of one's intrinsic existence. (Although it can take hard work to reveal this power, once it is revealed, it is always there.) By contrast, compassion needs to be aroused. Compassion is sometimes revealed on this world. But love isn't so revealed on this world; only a few people have revealed it. Compassion and love are actually two opposing forces. Love doesn't need a reason, while compassion needs a reason.

Inner Love – The Root Power of A Jew's Soul

The inner love for others is not present in the kind of “people-lovers” that are in the world, and it is not either “to have good *middos*.” There are people who by nature are very good-hearted, but this is not the inner kind of love we are talking about. We are talking about the inner essence of the soul – which is a pure, total love. It is not one of the *middos*, nor is it a trait of the soul. It is the very *root* of the soul.

We can find non-Jews as well who are good-natured and have a love for people, but this is not the inner kind of love that a Jew's soul has. A Jew's soul has an inner kind of love that comes from Avraham *Avinu* – which the non-Jews did not get. This love, the root of the soul, is also the root of all good *middos*.

Revealing The Inner Love

How can one reveal his inner love for others?

The Jewish people are called *raishis*, the “beginning” of the world [See *Rashi* to *Beraishis 1:1*]. The fact that we are endeared to Hashem as the beginning of the nations is not just a fact of history, but it shows us that we have a power in our soul called *raishis* -- the “beginning”. When a person reveals his “beginning” – in other words, when he reveals the root of his soul – then he reveals his love for others.

Anything else other than this kind of love is a superficial love which comes from one's body. When a person thinks of himself as only a body, he looks at love like any of the other *middos*. Maybe he learns Torah and works on his *middos*, and he even helps others work on their *middos*, but his entire love is from his body's viewpoint. He doesn't yet have the inner love.

But if a Jew has developed even minimal feelings for holiness, he can understand that there is such a thing as Torah learning and good *middos* which only come from the body, and that there is a deeper level of Torah learning and good *middos*, which come from the soul.

The *chassidah* (stork) is a bird which does kindness to its friends, but its kindness is superficial, because it only acts kind to its friends. [For this reason, the Torah says it is a non-kosher bird, even though it has the good trait of acting kind, because it is only kind with its own type, and not to other birds]. There are people who are very nice to their friends – but only to their friends, and no one else. Such kindness comes from the body. We have been influenced by our body since we were born and thus we naturally act based on our body’s viewpoint. But at some point, we need to open up our heart more, and instead reveal a new source for doing kindness with others, a kindness that comes from our soul. In order to reveal true love and kindness for others, we need to receive it as a gift from Hashem; we need to *daven* for this - “*Open up my heart to Your Torah.*”

When People Live Superficially

If a person’s heart isn’t opened yet to uncovering more depth to his *middos*, then he views even Torah, *middos* and matters of *Avodas Hashem* only from his body’s understanding, which is superficial. We need to uncover the inner essence behind everything – we need to adapt a totally new attitude, just like a convert who is like a child born anew.

There are people who can learn a lot of Torah and *mussar*, and they have even written many *sefarim* – but their understanding is still very superficial! They haven’t yet uncovered more depth to their souls, and all of their understanding comes from their *nefesh habehamis*, the lowest part of the soul. They don’t really know anything about life; all of their learning is just copying others. We can find two people having a conversation, yet their words are kind of dead. They aren’t talking from their essence – they are missing the life that is supposed to be found even in ordinary conversation. They are lacking “*The words of G-d are life*” and “*The Torah of kindness on her lips*” in their conversations.

Only when a person reaches his inner essence can he really teach Torah to others, and of him it can be said, “*The Torah of kindness on her lips.*” To be a *gomel chassadim tovim* means that one is kind to others because he has an inner love for them – he loves others *without any reason*. He reveals an unconditional love for others. In this world that we live in, we are living in a very cold world! There is no true, inner love to be found. There are all sorts of wonderful thoughts and ideas found in the Torah, but this is not enough to help us understand what life is about. We have to reveal the inner essence of our soul. We need to reveal our power of inner love for other souls, which is in each and every Jewish soul.

We should be *zoche* to remove ourselves from our bodies and come to reveal the true source of love that is found within us.

022 } *Becoming Connected*

Chessed Should Be A Tool To Build Relationships

גומל חסדים טובים

What is the meaning *chassadim* “*tovim*”? Is there such a thing as *chessed* that isn’t good?

It is written, “*It is not good for man to be alone.*” Only when a person connects with others can there be any “good”.

This is the meaning of *chassadim tovim* – that when Hashem does kindness to us, He does not merely act kind with us, but His kindness to us is always out of a relationship with us.

There are many *gemachim* (*chessed* organizations). Do these people who run any of these *gemachim* feel a connection with those whom they help out? Usually not. There is a lot of *chessed* going on in the world – a lot. But often, it is only “*Gemillas*” *chessed* – it is not yet “*chassadim Tovim*”. It is not *chessed* which causes us to build **connections** with others. Many people do wonderful acts of kindness for others, but their hearts are missing. They will “do” acts of kindness for others, but they’re not doing it with the motivation to build a connection with others.

Why is it that people can do so much *chessed* all day for others and still not feel a love for others? Isn’t there a rule that “the hearts are pulled after the actions”¹⁶?

The reason for this is because it depends on what a person’s motivation is. Only if a person is motivated by a desire to *expand his heart* toward others, will he love others when he does kindness for them.

Superficial “Chessed”

When a person does *chessed* – why is he doing it? Is it because he wants a favor in return – or because he wants to bring a love between him and the other?

There are different kinds of *chessed* that that people do, which are really superficial acts of *chessed*.

¹⁶ *Sefer HaChinuch*, 15.

One kind of superficial *chessed* is when people act kind because that is what they were trained to do since they were young. *Chessed* was ingrained in them since they were children, yet, they never discovered the real reason why we must engage in *chessed*.

Another kind of superficial *chessed* is when a person does *chessed* because he wants more *zechusim* (merits). He's kind to others, but only because it's good for him to do so.

Real Chessed: Give In Order To Love

But the real kind of *chessed* is based on love for others.

Our body's viewpoint is that love is a reason why we give, and therefore, the purpose of love is to **give**. But our soul has a totally different view: the purpose of giving is to form a **love** between the giver and the recipient.

If a person does *chessed* just for the sake of *chessed* alone – and not because he wants to connect to others – his *chessed* is only superficial. The inner essence of *chessed* is to realize that *chessed* is only a tool – it is a tool to reach our inner love for others.

The Gemara says that “One who gives a gift to his friend must inform him about it.” Rashi explains that this is in order that his friend should feel loved. If a person is kind to others but isn't interested in loving the other, it's like a body without a soul. He has the “body” of *chessed*, but he doesn't have the “soul” of *chessed*.

When a person borrows something from another person, what is he left with after he returns it? If a person asks someone to borrow something because he wants to have a relationship with the person, their connection will remain forever, long after he returns the item.

When a person does *chessed* superficially, at best this is because he wants that “the other should have it good.” But the inner kind of *chessed* is to form a love through acting kind to another. The favors one does for another are to be viewed as a tool to bring about this love.

Life Is About Connecting Creation

Let us make this point even stronger.

If a person lives based on his body's viewpoint, he looks at everything through his body's lens. When it comes to *chessed*, he looks at *chessed* as “actions” and no more. But a person who lives through his soul's viewpoint sees everything through his soul. He sees that “Mitzvos were not

created except to connect all people.” The person who sees things through his soul sees that the purpose of interpersonal mitzvos is to have connections with others.

What is the purpose of Creation? A child will say that it is Torah and mitzvos, but this is of course a shallow answer. There is more to it. **The depth of learning Torah and doing all the mitzvos is: to *connect* all of Creation with Hashem!**

A person who lives only through his body sees *chessed* as kind actions, and “what has to be done.” He looks at everything through his *seichel* (intellect) alone – with no feelings involved.

But a person who lives through his soul sees how everything enables connections. He sees that he has to connect with his friends, his neighbors, his family, and everyone else – and unify them all with Hashem.

Every person in the world loves his family. But is a person using this love as a way to further connection, to unify them all with Hashem? Why is it that a person only loves his family, but not the members of his Kolel...?

People can *daven* a lot, but aren’t connected to their *davening*. People are living with their friends all the time, but they don’t really connect to them. Why is it that people often not connected to what they do and experience?

It is because many people don’t realize how life is about connecting to the Creation. People will often do *chessed* only because they “have to do *chessed*”, but not out of a deep desire to connect with others.

Hashem is a “*Gomel Chassadim Tovim*” – He is good to us because He wants us to connect to Him. He does kindness with us out of a desire to have a connection with us.

A person who doesn’t see how life is all about connection sees this life as a constant struggle that bears no results. He will forever try to “concentrate on his *davening*” and try to make his learning “feel more alive and have more *chiyus* vitality in it”, but he will fail and get frustrated, because he is still being superficial.

But when one realizes that life is all about connecting with Creation – because Hashem wants us to connect with Creation, and that is why He gave us the Torah and mitzvos - then of him it will be applied the statement of the Sages, “Words that come from the heart enter the heart.” Such a person does *chessed* because he wants to connect with others, and he is connected in all his thoughts to what he does.

Even if someone learns Torah all day, it's possible that he isn't connected to his learning! He is just "reading" the Gemara or "thinking" in learning – but he isn't **connected** yet to the Torah he learns. He needs to realize that he must come to feel an inward connection to the Torah.

A person who realizes how life is all about connecting to the Creation will feel like a person who has redeemed himself from exile! He will also feel that he is able to connect with the pain of the *Shechinah*, which is in pain over the current situation we are in.

The Gemara says that "A person was not created except to have companionship" (which is referring to our need for companionship with Hashem). This is not just a statement of our Sages – it must become a living reality to us!

023 | *Owning This World Vs. Borrowing This World*

Everything We Own Belongs To Hashem

וְקוֹנֵה הַכֹּל – Hashem is “Owner of everything”.

It is written, “*The heavens are to Hashem, and the earth He gave to humans.*” Hashem owns the world, yet, He also “gave” it to us. So, to whom does the earth belong to? Does it belong to Hashem, or to us, whom He gave it to?

The answer is, when we first make a blessing over food, we are thanking Hashem for giving it to us. But then we make an after-blessing over the food (a *beracha acharonah*), in which we declare that Hashem owns everything – in other words, we return the world back to Hashem after we finish using it.

When a person uses any item on this world, there are two different attitudes which he can have. Either he considers himself to “own” the item, or he considers himself to be “borrowing” the item from Hashem. What is the difference? If I receive a present from someone, I thank the person as he gives it to me, but after I take it into my possession, I forget that it’s a present. I look at it as my own acquisition which I have rightfully acquired. It’s “mine.” But when I borrow an item, even as I use the item, I am aware the whole time that it’s not mine, and that I am just borrowing it.

All of us have things on this world which we “own.” How do we look at these things? Do we look at these things as a “gift” that has been given to us for keeps (therefore, we feel that our things are “ours”), or do we view them as things that we are merely borrowing from Hashem?

Man is comprised of a body and soul. Our body has a certain perspective towards our acquisitions, while our soul has a different perspective when it comes to acquisitions. Our body’s viewpoint is that our acquisitions are forever, that our acquisitions are like a part of us. Our soul, however, realizes that all our acquisitions on this world are just temporary. Our soul understands that our house is more like a place of lodging that we are given to sleep in, and that any of the items we possess are just being borrowed. Our soul understands that our stay here on this world is merely like a guest passing through a city. When a guest comes to a city, he doesn’t buy things, because he knows he’s going back to his hometown soon. He will borrow and rent things, of course, for what he needs at the moment; after all, he needs to use things to get by.

When a person lives life through the prism of the body, he feels that his various acquisitions on this world are totally “Mine.” If he is given something as a present, or if he buys it from a store, he will be able to recognize that there used to be another owner of this item, but he can only recognize this as he’s actually being given the item. Soon after he gets it\purchases it, he feels that it is his 100%, that he “owns” his item. But when a person lives through the prism of his soul, he realizes that everything he has on this world is only being borrowed. He owns nothing.

When we say that Hashem is *הכל קונה*, the Owner of everything, we need to realize that Hashem owns the entire Creation – both heaven and earth. Everything goes back to Hashem in the end, as we express when we make a *beracha acharonah* after we eat.

Understanding Why We Do Chessed

Avraham Avinu personified the trait of *chedsed*. He was able to excel in *chedsed* because he realized that nothing he owned was really “his”, but rather that everything being given to him was so that he should use it to give it to others. The depth behind why a person should do *chedsed* is because a person realizes that Hashem is Owner of everything, therefore, everything being given to me is so that I should do *chedsed* with it.

When a person does *chedsed*, either he does it with pure motivations, *lishmah*, or he does so with ulterior motivations, *shelo lishmah*. When a person does *chedsed* without the intention of *lishmah*, then he feels like “I” am doing *chedsed*. He awaits a reward for all his *chedsed*. But when a person does *chedsed lishmah*, he realizes that nothing belongs to “Me”; everything belongs to Hashem, and whatever I have is given to me so I can use it for what Hashem wants me to use it for.

All light comes from the sun. The sun is called *shemesh*, which is from the word *hishtamshus*, to “serve.” The sun is a servant of Hashem, and this is alluded to in the statement, “The face of Moshe is like the sun.” Moshe is called the “servant of Hashem”, because the sun shines its light solely in order to serve Hashem, and therefore he is compared to the sun.

There is a kind of person who is a *baal chessed* (person who performs acts of kindness), but he doesn’t realize that he is supposed to serve Hashem through his *chedsed*. He does *chassadim*, kindnesses – but he doesn’t do *chassadim tovim*, “good” kindnesses. In other words, he is missing the element of serving Hashem in all his *chedsed* that he does.

We need to absorb the inner point of every situation. When it comes to *chessed*, we must realize what the inner point of *chessed* is. The inner depth to *chessed* is to understand that everything I have, *in actuality*, belongs to Hashem – not to me.

Chazal say that in the future, *Gehinnom* will cease, but Hashem will take the sun out of its sheath. The *tzaddikim* will benefit from its light, while the wicked will get burned and destroyed from the sun's full zenith. The depth behind this matter is that *tzaddikim* understood as they lived that they existed only to serve Hashem, and therefore they will be able to withstand the sun, because they are also like the sun, which exists solely to serve Hashem. But the wicked, who never realized that life is about serving Hashem, will not be able to bear the heat of the sun - Hashem's servant. In other words, because they won't be able to conceptualize with the idea of existing to "serve Hashem", they won't be able to bear the sun, which is the *shemesh* - the "servant" of Hashem. Thus, they will perish from the sun's zenith.

If a person lives life through his body, he feels that all that he owns this world are "Mine." But when someone lives through his soul, he realizes that all that he has was only given to him so that he can use it for a higher purpose, other than for himself.

The words here are not about a lofty level to acquire; they are not matters of *chassidus* (piety). It is rather on how to view life in the proper perspective. It is to be aware of the inner point of life. If someone does *chessed* to others but he thinks he's giving away "his" money or possessions, he is doing *chassadim* with others – but he is not doing *chassadim tovim*.

024 | *Emulating Our Forefathers**Emulating The Avos*

וזוכר חסדי אבות – “And He remembers the kindnesses of our forefathers.”

Hashem remembers everything. If so, why is it necessary for us to point out that He remembers specifically the kindnesses of our forefathers?

Chazal say that “A person is obligated to say, “When will my actions reach those of my forefathers?” The simple meaning of this is that just as Avraham *Avinu* did *chessed*, so must I go in Avraham *Avinu*'s ways and do *chessed*, etc.

But the inner meaning is as follows. The Avos implanted their *middos* into the Jewish people. This does not just mean that the Avos had exemplary behavior and that we are supposed to emulate them; it is more than that. It is rather that in the depths of our soul, we are children of our Avos, and therefore, we have their great *middos* implanted in us.

Therefore, when I use the *middah* of *ahavah*\love – the *middah* of Avraham *Avinu* – I am not just touching upon the level of our Avos. I am touching upon the depths of my own soul, because the *middos* of the Avos are deep down in me.

From a superficial perspective, we consider someone with good *middos* to be simply that, “a person who has good *middos*”. But the inner perspective is that our good *middos* do not come from ourselves! They come from the Avos, and they were implanted in us. When a person has good *middos*, his good *middos* are the very same good *middos* which the Avos had, and they are being manifest in that person's particular soul.

Thus, we make special mention that Hashem remembers the kindnesses of our forefathers. We are really saying that that the good *middos* of the Avos are found inside ourselves.

Your Personal Mission, Together With Your Collective Mission

In the next line of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we mention that Hashem will bring the redemption – ומביא גואל לבני בניהם. What is the connection between remembering the Avos and the redemption? The simple understanding is that the redemption will come to us in the merit of

our Avos. But the deeper answer is that we will merit the redemption due to the *middos* which the Avos implanted in us.

We need to make the following differentiation. Each of us has various good *middos*; how do these differ from the general *middos* which the Avos implanted in us?

When we use the good *middos* of our Avos [*ahavah\chessed*, or *gevurah\yirah*, or *emes\rachamim*], we leave our “private” kind of self. Normally, when we use our various good *middos* that each of us is blessed with, we are serving Hashem through our unique and individual aspect, but we need to realize that our individual role in *Avodas Hashem* is not all there is to our existence. There is a deeper part to our existence, which is to leave our private, individual self and instead enter into the ‘collective’ aspect of the Jewish people. This is when we serve Hashem through the *middos* of the Avos. When we use the *middos* implanted in us through the Avos, it is then that we really serve Hashem from the depths of our being.

When we use the *middos* of our Avos, we enter into a whole a new kind of existence. We will be able to live the very kind of life which our Avos lived!

Living A Life That Resembles The Avos: A Life of Solitude

Now we will add on a sharper point to this discussion.

The Rambam says that a person is pulled after his surroundings, thus, a person has to make sure that he is found in a place where people are pursuing good. If he can’t find such a place, he should go to the desert, a place free from any bad influences. It is well-known that the Chazon Ish said that these days, the Yeshivos are like the “desert” which we need to go to. However, in this current generation, I am not sure if the Chazon Ish would say this is true anymore about every Yeshivah of today’s generation.

So what should we do? Where are we to go??

The truth is that there is no place on this physical world which you can run to where you will be safe from spiritual danger. The only solution is to live in our internal world of our soul. We need to live in two places at once – on the physical world, and in our internal world of the soul.

We are in exile, and our spiritual situation is in grave danger. Our physical body needs to be here on this earth, but this world is not a place where our soul should be connected to. In our soul, we need to retreat to an inner place and live there.

If a person wants to live a truthful kind of life, he needs to sever his connection he feels with this physical world, and instead identify his soul as the place where he lives. Of course, we need

to live on this physical world and do what we have to do, but only in the physical sense. Our body can be on this earth, but our soul needs to find somewhere else to live in. We need to dwell in our inner world of our soul, our *neshamah*. Therefore, we need to adapt a life of solitude from this world. In addition, a person needs to seek friends who are also willing to separate themselves from this world, because they are truly seeking Hashem.

Nowadays, we cannot just bond with any person we meet - those who are very involved with the outside world. We can have contact with such people if it's only for a moment, but immediately after we have to deal with people, we must quickly retreat to the inner place in our soul. In this generation, we need a life of solitude from people.

In earlier generations, only rare individuals were able to live on the physical world and reach Torah and mitzvos, each according to his own way. There were only individuals who adapted a life of solitude and lived entirely in their soul. But in today's generation, we are living in a very dangerous situation to our spirituality. In today's times, if someone wants to live a truthful kind of life, he must live only in his inner world. To be connected to the physical world these days makes it impossible for one to progress spiritually.

If anyone lives life from the perspective of the soul, he can see clearly how today's generation is literally going through a spiritual kind of genocide. Hashem has placed us in this generation, and He does not ask of us more than what we can do. Therefore, it is certainly possible for us to enter into an inner kind of life and live a life of *neshamah*, a world of "*They are a nation that dwells in solitude, and with the nations they do not consider*". Even in Eretz Yisrael, Jews are a minority; most of the country isn't Jewish. It is up to us to fulfill this possuk – to enter into solitude and separate ourselves from secular society.

"And Yaakov fought alone." We must fight all the evil influences, by being "alone" in our soul. Of course, we must love other Jews, and pray for them. But we must live a life of inner solitude, and identify our inner world of the soul as the main place to live in.¹⁷

¹⁷ To actualize this concept more, see the classes of *Getting To Know Your Individuality*, which explains how we can incorporate hisbodedus\solitude into our life.

025 | *The Avodah of The Era Preceding Moshiach**Yaakov\Ekev\Ikvesa D'Meshicha – When “Yosef” Is Absent*

ומביא גואל לבני בניהם – “Who Brings the redemptions to the sons of their sons.”

We had three Avos – Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov. Yaakov had another name, Yisrael. *Yaakov* is from the word “*ekev*”, “heel”, which refers to his lower aspect. The name *Yisrael* refers to the higher aspect of Yaakov.

Yaakov, from the word *ekev*, is referring to times in which we feel low, when we feel like we are at the “heel”, the lowest part of the body. Yaakov had very difficult times in his life. For 22 years, he mourned his son Yosef, and his *Ruach HaKodesh* left him. Yaakov *Avinu* completed the avodah of the Avos; he was the completion of the *Shechinah*. Yet, the *Shechinah* left him for a while. This was the “*ekev*” aspect of Yaakov. The ladder that Yaakov saw in his dream also refers to his aspect of *ekev*, because the ladder was footed on the earth, and earth implies lowliness, or *ekev*\heel.

The “*ekev*” aspect of Yaakov also hints to the period of *ikvesa d'meshicha*, the “heels of Moshiach”, in which the Jewish people will go through rough times. During *ikvesa d'meshicha*, we are in a period of “*ekev*” – we are at the “heel”: the *Shechinah* has left us [simply speaking]. We are like Yaakov *Avinu* longing for his son Yosef; “*Rachel died, and Yosef is not here.*”

“Yosef” is from the word *tosefes*, to “add”, which alludes to the added spirituality we will gain with the coming of Moshiach. When Yaakov was going through a period of *ekev*, there was no *tosefes* going on. This is a description of *ikvesa d'meshichah*\the footsteps of Moshiach – as long as there Yaakov\heel\suffering in the world, there cannot be Yosef\tosefes\added spirituality to the world.

However, in reality, Yosef was not really gone, as we know. It only appeared that he was gone. Yaakov mourned him for 22 years, because he thought he was dead, but in reality, Yosef was really alive. It was just that he had temporarily descended to Egypt.

Since we come from Yaakov *Avinu*, we inherited his aspect of “*ekev*” – that we are in *ikvesa d'meshichah*; we are like in a state of mourning from all our pain and over the absence of Moshiach, the same way Yaakov was in mourning over the absence of Yosef. Yet, the power of *ekev* which we inherited from Yaakov can also help us realize that all of the suffering of *ikvesa d'meshicha* is only on the outside of things, and that it is not the true reality. We have to instead

look at *ikvesa d'meshichah* as being a 'descent' in our spirituality, just as Yosef was in a "descent" in Egypt, and thus realize that we are not hopeless.

Yaakov *Avinu* implanted in us this power of *ekev*, to realize that all the suffering is only on the external layer of things. How was Yaakov able to give us this power, when Yaakov himself was going through a period of *ekev*\suffering\descent? How do we derive hope from the very power of *ekev* that Yaakov bequeathed to us?

It is because Yaakov's very mourning and suffering is what gave us the power to withstand the period of *ikvesa d'meshichah*! [We will explain].

Our Avodah of The Final Era

What is our avodah during this period of *ikvesa d'meshicha*?

Avraham *Avinu* personifies *chessed*. It is clear to all of us that the *chessed* of Avraham *Avinu* is beyond anything we understand about *chessed*. His *chessed* was endless, way above all our acts of *chessed*. Why? This is because the *chessed* which Avraham *Avinu* did was not as a purpose unto itself; rather, it was used as a tool to instill in us the *middah* of *chessed*. This is the meaning of the statement, "The Avos are the chariot of the world." Each of our Avos became an embodiment of the *Shechinah*. This is the difference between a normal act of *chessed* and the *chessed* which Avraham *Avinu* did. When we do *chessed*, we do not look at it as bringing the *Shechinah* onto the world; when Avraham *Avinu* did *chessed*, he viewed *chessed* as a tool that will bring the *Shechinah*.

There is a statement in *Chazal*, "There is no generation which does not contain the Avos and Moshe." Our *middos* are nowhere near as perfected as the *middos* of the Avos and Moshe, but we inherited their ability to turn ourselves into a tool that brings the *Shechinah*. It is not our avodah to try to have perfect *middos* like the Avos did; if someone tries to do this, he will get very frustrated. **Our avodah is rather to realize that we are supposed to become a tool that brings the *Shechinah* to the world, through our acts.**

"One does a lot, and one does a little; as long as a person does it for the sake of Heaven." Even if a person only does a minimal amount of good acts, he can do so with the understanding that he is a tool to bring the *Shechinah*.

From a superficial point of view, a person thinks that the previous generations were much higher in their comprehension and in their good *middos*, and therefore he gives up hope on ever

trying to emulate the ways of the Avos. “After all”, he thinks, “I don’t have their heads, and I don’t have their middos.”

But the inner perspective is: the avodah of the previous generations, and the avodah of the later generation – including today’s generation – are really one and the same! Our avodah is always to become a tool to bring the *Shechinah*.

To illustrate, if a person sits in a sukkah that is smaller than his friend’s sukkah, does he get less reward for the mitzvah? No, it’s the same mitzvah of sitting in the sukkah. The Shechinah comes to a small sukkah no less than how it comes to a large sukkah, as long as we built it with proper intentions.

When we learn Torah and do the mitzvos, we should not look at these acts as a goal unto itself. Rather, we need to realize that learning Torah and doing mitzvos are tools that bring the *Shechinah*.

If our avodah is essentially the same as in the previous generations – to bring *Shechinah* – if so, what is the difference between the previous generations and the latter generations? In the previous generations, they had to work a lot harder in their avodah.

When a person views religious life through a superficial perspective, he sees that we have many acts which we need to fulfill. But when a person has an inner perspective, a perspective of Torah, he can see how all the acts we do are all a tool that brings the *Shechinah*. In our current generation, our “tools” are smaller – therefore, our avodah is easier! In previous generations, their “tools” were a lot bigger, so their avodah was harder.

When the *Shechinah* left Yaakov *Avinu* for 22 years, this does not simply mean that he didn’t have any *Shechinah*. This cannot be, because the Avos were always the embodiment of *Shechinah* on the world. It meant that he lost his higher aspect, which is “*Yisrael*”, and instead he descended into his lower aspect, “*Yaakov*.”

There is no such thing as a situation in which we cannot have the *Shechinah*. As long as we work properly to be a tool that brings the *Shechinah*, the *Shechinah* comes.

This is the meaning of what we say in *Shemoneh Esrei*, that Hashem remembers the kindnesses of our forefathers and brings the redemption to the sons of their sons; וזוכר חסדי אבות ומביא גואל לבני בניהם. The redemption will essentially be the recognition that we really have the abilities of our Avos in us – the power to become a tool that brings the *Shechinah*, through our acts. (Not *chas v’shalom* out of being haughty, but because we recognize that we come from our Avos).

026 | *Tisha B'Av: Crying From Within**Introduction: Who Is The Redemption About?*

At the end of the first beracha of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we say, “I'maan shemo b'ahavah” (For the sake of His Name, with love). We await the redemption, but besides for this, we await the kind of redemption which is “for the sake of His Name”. Hashem is not going to bring the redemption simply for the sake of His children; we, His children, are only the reason that will bring it about. The reason He will bring the redemption is “for the sake of His Name, with love.”

A Seeming Contradiction

During the Three Weeks, there is pain and mourning over the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. Yet, we also look forward to the redemption. This seems like a contradiction in our Avodas Hashem. How do we integrate these two aspects of our mission together – how do we mourn, while at the same time being hopeful about the redemption? We will explain how.

When a person is in pain, he wants to come out of his predicament. He wants to be redeemed from his situation. This is not the same thing as the Redemption which the Jewish people will experience. Although the Redemption will also bring an end to all personal suffering, that is not the purpose of the Redemption. The purpose of the Redemption will be for Hashem's sake, as we say in *Shemoneh Esrei* – “For the sake of His Name, with love.” It will reveal Hashem's name onto the world, which is the purpose of Creation.¹⁸

The Root of Exile

What is the “Name” of Hashem? A name reveals the nature of something. In the gentile world, a name is meaningless, and names are just made up.¹⁹ The name of a gentile does not define who he is. But the “Name” of Hashem, when it is revealed in the future, will reveal Hashem onto the world.

¹⁸ This is explained at length in *sefer Daas Tevunos (of the Ramchal)*.

¹⁹ *Ran in Nedarim*

Hashem will bring the Redemption “for the sake of His name.” This is because the entire idea of Creation is to reveal Hashem. This is also the hidden purpose behind why we have to be exiled and redeemed from the exiles. The word for exile in Hebrew is “*galus*”, which is rooted in the Hebrew word *giluy*, to reveal. Redemption is “*geulah*” in Hebrew, which is also rooted in the word *giluy*. This hints to the fact that both the exiles and the redemption will reveal Hashem.

Exile is a situation of Hashem’s concealment of His radiance toward us, (known as “*hester panim*”). Our situation today, in exile, is essentially a situation in which the revelation of Hashem is concealed from the minds and hearts of people. The redemption will be a revelation of Hashem onto our minds and hearts, and it will be the time in which we will exclaim, “This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him, and when we all exclaim, “Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu.”

In the exiles we have gone through and are currently going through, there has been much suffering and tragedy. Each of the exiles had their own nature and design, with unique forms of suffering. However, the sufferings of the exiles are just the branches of the exile. The root of the exile, though, is the *hester panim* – the fact that Hashem has concealed His radiance from us. The fact that Hashem isn’t revealed to us – that is the exile itself.

Chazal state that wherever the nation of Israel is exiled, the Shechinah (Hashem’s Presence) is exiled as well. This is because the real depth of the exile is the fact that the Shechinah has gone into exile. When the Shechinah returns – when Hashem will become revealed to us - the exile ends.

All of the exiles – from Egypt until the present exile, which is Edom (Rome and all the nations that have branched out from it) together with Yishmael (the Arab nations) are actually only branches of exile. The root of all the exiles is the absence of Hashem’s radiance toward us.

Why Are We Crying?

Of course, we have to think about the suffering of the Jewish people, but this is not the point of exile. If a person is only thinking about the many sufferings and tragedies that exile has caused us, he is missing the point, because these are just the “branches” of the problem. The root of the problem, the root of all the exiles, is *hester panim*. Without being aware of this, a person just has the “branches” without the “root.”

When we mourn and weep over the destruction, why are we crying? There is the external layer of crying, and then there is the internal layer of our crying. We cry on the outside, but it really comes from an internal kind of crying. When we cry over the suffering of exile, it is only

the external layer of the crying. The real, internal reason why we cry – the root of why we cry – is because of the hester panim.

What Do We Really Want?

Why do we also say b'ahavah (“with love”)? Why isn't it enough to just say l'maan shemo (“for the sake of His Name”)? The answer is because there are different kinds of ahavah, love. There is ahavah rabbah (“great love”) and there is ahavas olam (“eternal” love), but there is another kind of love greater than both of these: the ahavah which we mention in *Shemoneh Esrei*, which is “l'maan shemo b'ahavah.” What is this ahavah? It is a love that comes when the true ratzon, the will of Hashem, is revealed. Without the revelation of this ratzon, there is no love. The word for father in Hebrew is av, which is rooted in the word ahavah, love. Ahavah also means to “want”. This alludes to our Avos (forefathers) who wanted the true ratzon – the desire to do Hashem's will, “It is our will to do Your will.”

The ahavah which we are saying in *Shemoneh Esrei*, “l'maan shemo b'ahavah”, is about the love that comes from the revelation of the very deepest ratzon there is. It is a revelation of “retzoneinu laasos retzoncha” – “It is our will to do Your will.” Exile is the opposite of this. There is no revelation of “retzonenu laasos retzonca” in exile. However, even in exile, there can still be a revelation of the desire to see Hashem – “It is our desire to see Our King” (“retzonenu liros es malkeinu”). We are able to reveal this ratzon in our exile – the desire to “see our King” - but the problem is that we aren't even aware of what we want. Our ratzon isn't revealed, and it is hidden from us. We have hope, though, because we can reveal it.

“For Your salvation we await every day.” This will be the redemption, which we await for. If this would be the true ratzon of people, the redemption would come. But our ratzon itself is in exile! There is galus on our very ratzon – in other words, what we really want is hidden from us. Since our ratzon is missing, there is no love either, because ahavah is revealed only when there is ratzon.

How To Reach The Real Crying

If we have a desire to “see Hashem”, though, then we will feel the internal kind of pain we are supposed to feel, and we will not just mourn superficially on the outside. To truly have pain over the exile, we have to truly want the redemption. When one uncovers a true desire for redemption, only then can he truly feel the pain over this exile. That is the true kind of weeping

we need to have. If a person reaches this recognition within, his tears are true tears, and they will not just be fleeting moments of emotion.

Let us compare this to the following scenario. Imagine a person who goes to a wedding and he doesn't know the person getting married. It's very hard for him to make himself get excited and feel happiness at the wedding, because he doesn't feel a love for the person getting married. It's impossible for a person to just fall into the joy of dancing at a wedding and rejoicing the chosson (groom) if he doesn't feel a love for the chosson (unless he has an unusual level of Ahavas Yisrael, love for Jews.) Here we can see how ahavah can only be present when there is ratzon; if a person has a love for a person (ahavah), he can awaken in himself an excitement for the person (ratzon), but if he doesn't have a love for the person, he has no will to please him.

The same goes for feeling the pain over the destruction. You can't just fall into the Avodah of the Three Weeks\Nine Days. You have to feel the real pain that is going on, the internal kind of crying. How, indeed, can we feel the inner source of the crying? The way we can do this is by clarifying to ourselves what we truly want. Even though a person learns Torah and does the mitzvos, that only shows what he's like on the outside. What does he truly want on the inside? What is a person's true ratzon in life...? Hashem will bring the Redemption "for the sake of His Name, with love." He has a will and a love for us – ahavah and ratzon. We need to connect ourselves to these middos of Hashem – the deepest ratzon; and to reveal it. The more we reveal our ratzon for the redemption, the deeper our salvation from this exile will be.

The Avodah of Tisha B'Av

What is the practical Avodah we need to do on Tisha B'Av?

Many people have a hard time with Tisha B'Av, because we are fasting, and it is also forbidden to learn Torah. People who want to utilize Tisha B'Av, at best, read different statements of *Chazal* in the *Gemara* about the destruction, and go to hear inspiring lectures. However, this alone is missing the point. All of this is just mourning in a superficial manner. What we need to do is to think about the inner ramifications of the destruction – the fact that we are missing the true ratzon in life. That is the real destruction, and this is what we mainly have to mourn about on Tisha B'Av. The destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the many tragedies that took place then, the suffering of all the exiles - these are just the external layer of the destruction, and to cry about this alone is just being superficial.

What we really need to mourn about is the destruction that took place within ourselves – the destruction to our ratzon of revealing Hashem onto the world. This is what we should cry about.

027 | *Our King, And Our Companion**The Concept of Hashem's Malchus/Kingship*

מלך עוזר מגן ומושיע – In the end of the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we express how Hashem is our מלך, King.

In the days of Elul, we prepare for Rosh HaShanah, in which we declare Hashem as King over us; שתמליכוני עליכם, “That I rule over you.” What is the *malchus*, the Kingship, of Hashem?

There were kings in the Jewish people, but these were just to give us somewhat of an idea to the *malchiyos*, the Kingship, of Hashem. Hashem's *malchus* is totally different than what we understand about a human king.

Chazal state, “There is no king without a nation.” It seems that there can be a *nation* without a *king*, though. The Jewish nation wanted a king at one point, but they were still a nation even without a king. It seems that a person can survive without a king. A king seems more like a luxury.

But the Kingship of Hashem is a whole different understanding than how we view a human king. From Hashem's perspective, not only is there is no king without a nation, but there can be no nation without a king.

There is a very big difference between how we accept Hashem's Kingship, with the way other nations relate to a king. Our whole existence depends on how we accept upon ourselves the Kingship of Hashem.

Malchus – Revealing The Kingship

What is essentially the concept of *malchus*?

The *sefarim hakedoshim* say that *malchus* is a revelation that there is a king. In a *malchus*, there is a root of the *malchus* and the branches of the *malchus*. The “branches” are the rules of the king which the nation must follow - but the root of the *malchus* is the very fact that there is a king, and that the nation must recognize this.

“It is our desire to see the King” – our very will to see and recognize the king is what defines the *malchus* of Hashem. The behavior that this obligates us in are the “branches” of that recognition,

but the root of the *malchus* is to simply recognize that there is a King and that we desire to know the King. To *recognize* the King is how we *realize* that Hashem is the King.

To illustrate, we have 365 negative commandments; there are levels of punishment. But if someone rebels against the King, he is liable to capital punishment. All of the 365 commandments are like a rebellion against the King, and in that aspect, a person deserves death for committing any of the 365 commandments. Since there is a *malchus* of Hashem, everything we are doing is being committed in front of Hashem.

The Avodah of Elul

We are in a time in which we declare Hashem as King (through reciting *Selichos* and asking Him for mercy) and we are also in a time in which we must seek out Hashem; “*Seek Hashem where He is found.*”

These two recognitions are not two separate concepts; they are intertwined. If we recognize that Hashem is King, that makes a person realize that wherever he is, he is in front of the King. This is the depth behind the words of the Rema, that a person must always be cognizant that he is in front of Hashem, wherever he is. Thus, to declare Hashem as King is to realize that we are constantly in front of Him.

A king cannot forego his honor. If so, how does Hashem forgive us? The simple answer is that a human king cannot forgive, but Hashem can forgive. The deeper answer, though, is that when we ask for forgiveness, we are asking Hashem that he should not see our sins in the first place, as Bilaam declared in his song, “*I do not see sin in Yaakov.*”

Elul: Fearing Hashem as King, and Realizing He Is Our True Friend

Thus, we have two parts to our preparation for Rosh HaShanah, during these days of Elul.

These are days of *yirah*, in which we fear Hashem, in order to declare Him as King. The other aspect is to realize the meaning of the possuk, “*וה' אלוֹקֵינוּ עִמּוֹ, וּתְרוּעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ*” – the word *teruah* comes from the word *reia* (רִיעַ), “friend”. *Chazal* say “*Do not abandon your father and the friend of your father*”, and this is referring to Hashem, that Hashem is the “Friend” whom we must not abandon.²⁰ *Chazal* say, “*Either a friend or death.*”²¹ The question is who our “friend” will be...

²⁰ See Rashi to Shabbos 31a

²¹ Taanis 23a

So on one hand, Elul is a time of *din* (judgment) and *yirah* (awe), in which we do *teshuvah*, and we make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul-accounting) and take upon ourselves various resolutions; each to his own. But this is just the external part of Elul. The inner aspect of Elul – which all of the external *avodah* is supposed to lead to – is to realize that Hashem is our true “Friend”.

Relating To Hashem As Our Ultimate Companion

“Either a friend or death.” A human friend, a *chavrusa*, is only temporary. You are not bound together forever with him. A real friend is someone who never leaves your side and you can always be with him. The only real friend you can ever have is Hashem, because you can always be with Him. We cannot live a lonely kind of life. If you know anyone who lives alone, you can see what kind of lonely and sad life he has. But that is only true regarding the external part of our life. In the inner place in our soul, we can live “alone” with Hashem – inside a deep place in our soul, we can be in His palace.

These days of Elul are days to prepare for accepting Hashem’s *malchus* upon us. The way we prepare, with our soul, is by realizing that we cannot live alone. We need a friend, a true friend, and the only One whom we can connect to eternally is Hashem. As we declare on Rosh HaShanah, “And You are the King, the Almighty G-d, Who lives forever.” We need an “inner” and true kind of *chavrusa*.

Elul – Entering Inward

These are days in which we can reach deeper layers in our soul. We need to clean ourselves out inside, by doing *teshuvah*, but that’s not the ultimate goal. We must be aware of why we are cleaning ourselves out inside. It is because we want to make way for the King to enter. That is the goal of all our *teshuvah* during Elul.

Elul is thus not just about doing *teshuvah*. These are days in which we can enter deep into our soul. Our heart is a *Kodesh Kodashim* within us.²² This is not an exaggeration. The Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur would enter into the innermost chamber on Yom Kippur; so too, during these days of Elul, we need to reach deeper and deeper into our soul, by getting in touch with our heart, until we reach our innermost chamber of the heart.

May we merit to recognize the Kingship of Hashem, from the depths of our soul, to realize the possuk, "וזה' אלוקים עמו, ותרועת מלך בר".

²² *Nefesh HaChaim, shaar aleph*

Hashem – Our “Helper”

מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן – Hashem is our עוזר, our ultimate Helper.

Hashem is our true Helper. When a person helps another, the one receiving the help is considered the main person. But when Hashem helps us, we realize that Hashem is the main one, and we are just secondary. As it is written, “*My help comes from Hashem.*” (Tehillim 121:2).

Chazal say that our evil inclination gets stronger every day, and if not for Hashem, we cannot overcome it²³. On a deeper note though, our every action that we do really needs Hashem’s help.

How Hashem Helps Us

How, indeed, does Hashem help us?

Whenever we do an action, it is considered alive only if we put Hashem into the equation. Although we use our power of *bechirah* to do good actions, our actions can only be considered ‘alive’ when we realize how we need Hashem to help us, and this gives life to the actions we do. A person might do many good deeds, but inwardly, he can be dead, because there is no life-source to his actions; Hashem is missing from the equation. Once we put Hashem into what we do, Hashem is providing life to our actions, and then the actions we do are alive.

Life Vs. Imagination

A person needs to live an inner kind of life, in which all that he does is inwardly connected to Hashem.

We must know what it means to really live *life*, and what it means to merely *imagine* what a good life is – to see the differentiation between these two.

To illustrate, a child plays a game and is having a good time; he thinks that this is his life. As he begins to get older, he realizes that all his fun was the world of imagination, and that this is not life.

²³ *Sukkah 52a*

The life which we see in front of us, on this world, is all a world of imagination! In order to really know what our life is, we have to merit from Hashem that He open our hearts to understand what it really is. If our heart hasn't been opened a little, we do not understand what "life" is at all. We might know what death is, but we won't know what "life" is.

Our existence is that we are a soul clothed by a body. Therefore, we initially perceive life from the perspective of our body, even if we learn Torah and mitzvos; from the perspective of the body, we have an erroneous perception of what life is about.

We have to *daven* to Hashem that He should open our heart (as we *daven* in the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*, "Open my heart to Your Torah") in order to understand what life really is.

We should look back at our past and see that whatever we thought until now as "life" is not really life, just imagination. Most people are not experiencing the true meaning of life, even if they live for 70 or 80 years. People often do not even experience one moment of true life on this world!

Real Life

Our *neshamah* deep down in us knows what real life is. But when we ask Hashem for life, we do not always know what it is. The meaning of life is really a secret; only our *neshamah* knows what it is.

Sometimes we receive sparks of understanding of what the meaning of life is. But in order to actually arrive at a total recognition of what life is, we need to have our hearts opened.

During Elul, what are people asking Hashem for? People have all kinds of things they want and ask Hashem for a whole list of things. The more a person asks for various things, the more it shows that he doesn't understand what life is.

We are all asking Hashem for a real **life!** In the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Rosh HaShanah, we *daven*, *Zochreinu L'Chaim*, *Melech Chofetz B'Chaim*, *Kosveinu B'Sefer HaChaim*...we keep asking for life, because that is really our central request in Elul. As for our personal requests that we ask of Hashem, most of these requests are not for life itself, but rather about various details that branch out from our life, such as *parnassah*, etc. The main request which we ask for in *Shemoneh Esrei* is that we should have a real, genuine kind of **life!**

Since we are young, we think that we know we are alive. But the truth is that most people don't even realize what it means to really be alive. People ask Hashem that they be granted life

only because they don't want to die. But as for *life* itself, to know what it means to be alive – people often do not know what it is.

We don't want Hashem to take away our life, as we *daven* in the prayer of *Shema Koleinu*. But what *is our* life to begin with? What is the life that we are asking for more of? Do we realize the true meaning of what it means to be alive...?

To See Real Life, We Must Open Our Heart

If our hearts begin to become a little opened, we can realize that the kind of life we think we have been living until now is really the world of imagination, which is the way a child views life.

It is hard to verbally express this concept in words. The point is that your heart needs to become opened, and then you will know what is being discussed here.

Living Through The Prism of Imagination Vs. Living Through The Essence

In Elul, we ask for *chaim*, life. We must realize that this world we see in front of us is not a real life – it is entirely a world of fantasy.

Ever since Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, this world became like one big imaginary kind of existence. This is the depth behind the curse of “death” that came to the world – it was a “death” to the ideal state of mankind.

So when we ask for life in Elul, the depth of our request is that we are asking Hashem that we be granted the power to leave our imagination, and instead taste of the true life – the *Eitz HaChaim*, the source of true life.

It is not only a person who is immersed in physical interests who is living in imagination. Even a person learning Torah and doing mitzvos, who is not entrenched in physical pursuit, can also be living in imagination. We see from this from the fact that we can have all kinds of dreams at night.

When we reveal the **inner essence of our heart**²⁴, we will then understand what the true meaning of life is, and then we will be able to truly have *d'veykus* with the Creator.

²⁴ As is well-known from the Rav's teachings, the “inner sense of the heart” is the ability of the soul to live with a palpable sense of Hashem in our life, as a simple feeling.

029 | *True Salvation*

ומגן **מושיע** ומלך עוזר **מושיע** Hashem is our **מושיע**, our “Savior.” What is the concept of a *yeshuah*, of seeing salvation? Simply speaking, it is when a person has a difficulty, and Hashem saves the person from his predicament; we call this a *yeshuah*, salvation.

But the deeper meaning is that *yeshuah* comes from the word *shaah*, which means to “turn.” [We will soon explain].

When a person is in need of a *yeshuah*, the *yeshuah* is when Hashem reveals His light in the person’s life. When a person is going through a time of *hester panim*, he is in a predicament. When Hashem removes His *hester panim*, He turns His Face to the person, so to speak – and that is the essence of the *yeshuah*.

The simple understanding of *hester panim* is that when there is *hester panim*, He doesn’t protect us and instead leaves our fate up to the hands of people on this world. *Hester panim* implies an absence of *Hashgachah Peratis* (Divine Providence), so when this is removed, there is *yeshuah*. But the deeper understanding is that when Hashem shines His Face on us, so to speak, there is *yeshuah*.

A person who has troubles might view this as a situation of *hester panim*, while a person with health and livelihood and good children seems to be enjoying *he’aras panim*. That is the way we simply understand the difference between *hester panim* and *he’aras panim*.

But the deeper understanding is that *hester panim* is when a person doesn’t live with Hashem in his life, while *he’aras panim* is when a person lives with Hashem in his life. The true *hester panim* of Creation is when people don’t feel Hashem’s *he’aras panim*. In turn, *hester panim* is when people don’t feel Hashem enough in their life.

Moshe spoke with Hashem “face to face”. Only Moshe saw Hashem face-to-face, but we can also have a face-to-face relationship with Hashem. This is more than just feeling *he’aras panim* of Hashem every here and there in our life. It is when we feel a yearning for Hashem all the time in our life; this is *panim b’panim* with Hashem.

A person might feel Hashem in his life taking care of him, in all areas of his life. Whenever he feels like he needs Hashem, he asks Hashem to save him, and indeed he always feels like Hashem is taking care of him. He feels the *he’aras panim* of Hashem in his life. This is wonderful, but he is still missing something.

There is a higher kind of relationship we can have with Hashem: *panim b'panim* (face to face). This is like a person who receives good from his friend, but not only does he receive what he wants, but he is given a smile and radiant countenance along with it. A person who only feels *he'aras panim* from Hashem in his life, but not *panim b'panim*, knows that Hashem provides all his needs, but he only turns to Hashem when he needs something. A person who has the higher relationship with Hashem, *panim b'panim*, feels Hashem all the time in his life – not just when he receives things from Him.

There are people who learn *sefarim* about *emunah* and *Hashgacha Peratis* (Divine Providence), which is wonderful, but they are still unaware that they can have a deeper feeling of Hashem in their life – *panim b'panim*. When people have troubles and they ask Hashem to take them out of their troubles, because they believe that Hashem can help, this doesn't always mean that the person is close to Hashem. Such a person looks at Hashem as someone who can help him get out of his troubles, and that is how he relates to him. He looks at Hashem like his “*ezer k'negdo*” ...a mere helpmate...

A person who hears these words might wonder: “What do you mean? We are supposed to *daven* during Elul for all our needs. It is our *chiyuv* (obligation).” We need to *daven* for our needs, but there is a lot more to what we should be *davening* for in Elul besides for our needs!

In Elul, the *sefarim hakedoshim* say that we are entering the Palace of the King, where we are surrounded by Hashem's light. We cannot see Hashem face to face, but we can definitely feel, in our mind and our heart, that we are face to face with Hashem. This is the true meaning of having a *yeshuah*. The main trouble in a person's life, from all his troubles, is when he doesn't feel Hashem in his life.

What is the worst thing you went through this year? Everyone has a different answer. But the true, inner trouble we have is that we don't feel Hashem in our life, that we don't feel His Face shining upon us. That is the true *tzarah* (painful situation) of all *tzaros* in a person's life.

In *Avinu Malkeinu*, we ask Hashem for mercy, because we are undeserving. Are we asking for reward? Or are we asking Hashem that we should merit to see and feel Him in our life? Are we just asking Hashem for various things, or do we want to see our Father? A child, who is good to his father, mainly wants to see his father, more than anything he wants. “*It is our will to see our King*” – this should be our main request.

Imagine a father who gives so much to his children, all their needs, and all his children do is ask him for things, never wishing to see him....

The way we declare Hashem as king is when we desire to see His Face; “It is our will to see our King.” Is this really our desire when we declare Hashem as King? Do we mean what we say? If we don’t really want it as we express the *malchiyus* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, then we are lying in our *tefillos*.

Of course, during Elul we also need to do *teshuvah* and make a *cheshbon hanefesh*. But that is all an introduction, to be able to enter the Chamber of the King, which is when we come to *Rosh HaShanah*. The goal of all our *teshuvah* during Elul is to be able to see our King, to wish to see Him.

It is not enough for us to feel Hashem’s *he’aras panim* in our life. We need a relationship of *panim b’panim* - to feel Hashem in our life on a more regular basis, not just to feel Him from time to time when He saves us from troubles. We need to uncover a yearning for Hashem, “our will to see the King” – to live a life of yearning for Hashem. This is what we should cry for during Elul.

May we all merit a good year and be written in the book of righteous.

030 | *Surviving The Scariest Time In History**Hashem – Our Protector*

מגן – מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן – Hashem is our “Shield.” Hashem promised Avraham that He would be a shield to him and protect him from harm in war; “*And I will be a shield for you.*”

Let us reflect into this concept and then see how it applies to us practically.

Hashem protects us, and He has different ways of how He protects us. He can send angels to protect us if He wants, like when He sent angels to protect Yaakov *Avinu*; or He will use people as His messengers to protect us. But it is Hashem Himself who is really protecting us. When a person merits to be protected by angels, it’s really because he has merited to be protected by Hashem Himself.

Meriting Hashem’s Protection – Through Connecting To The Torah

When a person lives a body-oriented kind of life, and his *neshamah* (Divine soul) isn’t so accessed in his life, then he seeks security in the physical sense. But when a person lives a spiritual kind of life, and he lives a life of Torah and mitzvos, he is protected by spirituality. When Yaakov *Avinu* was leaving Eretz Yisrael, he needed protection, because he was leaving spirituality. This hints to us that when a person lives spiritually, he merits protection from Hashem Himself, and when he lives materialistically, he doesn’t merit this protection.

Similarly, *Chazal* say that Torah learning protects a person from sin²⁵, but this is only on condition that he considers Torah learning to be his main job on this world. If he only learns Torah ‘every here and there’, the Torah can only protect him ‘every here and there’, and not on a permanent basis. His Torah learning will only on the level of “mitzvos”, not on the level of “Torah.” But when a person is always accustomed to learning Torah and he is deeply connected to it, he is connected to the Torah and to its protection that it gives a person.

Who is behind this protection? Hashem, Who is our shield. Hashem told Avraham, “*I will be a shield for you.*” If a person recognizes that Hashem Himself is the essence of his life – to be close with Hashem – he merits protection from Hashem Himself.

25 *Sotah 13a*

Where Do We Run To When We Are Scared?

There are levels of protection, and the more we penetrate into the layers of our soul, the deeper kind of protection we can merit. A person has to know which soul layer he is at, so he can know what kind of protection he is deserving of.

The way a person can know this as follows – when a person feels danger, where does he run to when he's afraid? And when he runs, what are his first thoughts as he's escaping from the danger? From where he is drawing his feeling of security from? What is going on in the depth of his soul as he is scared?

This is the self-introspection every person needs to make in himself. There are all kinds of fears a person can have – we have small fears, like being scared of a cat when it jumps out of a garbage, and bigger fears, such as fears of getting into a car accident, *chas v'shalom*. As a person is having these fears, where does draw his feeling of security from?

A person who lives a deeper and spiritual kind of life, when he becomes afraid, immediately feels secure from spirituality. A superficial kind of person, though, when he is afraid, might turn to *segulos* or to giving *tzedakah* or to going to *tzaddikim* for a *beracha*. It is not a bad thing to give *tzedakah* or to go to *tzaddikim*; these are matters written about in our *sefarim hakedoshim*, but, it is still a superficial response to fears. If a person is drawing his feeling of security from such *segulos*, this is not a spiritual response, but a superficial one.

Running To The Torah For Protection

The real way to respond to fears is to run away to the Torah for protection.

What does it mean to run away to the Torah? Compare this to a scared child, who will run to his mother or to his father for protection. Why does he run to his parents? It is because when we are afraid, we run to the place where we feel secure. The place where we feel secure is what we recognize as the source of our life, and that is why we run to it. The child runs to his parents when he's scared, because he recognizes them as his source of life, and that is why he gets his security from them.

That is what happens when a person is afraid – he runs to where he gets his source of life from. A person needs to have a true source of life run to when he's afraid. Without a real source of life, a person gets his entire sense of vitality in life from eating and from schmoozing, and he never develops a real source of vitality. When he encounters a great fear, he has no real source of life to run to; so he will become desperate and panic, looking for anyone else who can save him.

But if someone has revealed spirituality in his life as the source of vitality in his life, when Torah is his true source of vitality in his life - he will truly have where to run to when he's afraid. This is when the Torah in a person's life is a *Toras Chaim* to him, a "Torah of life". When he feels sad or afraid, he runs back to his source, where he draws forth vitality – the Torah that he learns, which he identifies as the main source of vitality in his life.

The Deeper Source of Vitality: Hashem

If a person enters even deeper into his spirituality, the fact that he just knows about Hashem's existence is what gives him life. When he feels afraid, he can run to Hashem to feel secure.

What does it mean to run to Hashem? Does it mean to run to Him for help only when we are afraid? That is not what it means to run to Hashem. If our *emunah* in Hashem is already our source of vitality in our life, then we will run to Hashem automatically when we are afraid - and not just because we are running to Him so He can save us.

When a person is in danger, he cries out to Hashem to save him. But if a person lives a truly spiritual life, he already recognizes before the trouble, that Hashem is our source of life where we draw our security from, and when he goes through a fearful time, he runs back to his Source of life. He's not just running to Hashem so he can be saved – he runs to Hashem because he clearly recognized that Hashem is the source of all life.

Our soul can derive tremendous enjoyment from just from the knowledge of Hashem.

The Footsteps of Moshiach: Living In Scary Times

Hashem is our Shield. We conclude the blessing with *מגן אברהם*, 'ברוך אתה ה' – because it was Avraham *Avinu* who merited that Hashem was his Shield. He merited this because of his great *emunah*; Avraham *Avinu* was the one who shined *emunah* onto the world. The real protection we need is to draw our security directly from Hashem Himself.

This applied to all generations in the past, but in our generation especially, in the generation preceding Moshiach ("*ikvesa d'meshicha*"), it is especially true - when the enemies of the Jewish people cast fear upon us.

There are many troubles in the world, and they continue to increase with time. *Chazal* say that "each day is more cursed than the day before it." Our task in all of this is to get by all these troubles - in an inner way. We need to know how to run away from all of the troubles - but in the right way.

What does mean it to run away to Hashem? It doesn't just mean for a person to rely on Hashem for everything; this is a misguided approach. There are people who want to "run away to Hashem" and let Him do everything. But this is an erroneous approach. Rather, the way to run away to Hashem is to already enjoy a relationship with Him, **before** the troubles and difficulties of life come. This way, when the troubles do come, we will naturally run to Him, having developed a bond with Him from before [as opposed to suddenly running to Him for safety when we get afraid (in which there is no bond)].

Of course, we need some physical security too; we have a body and a soul, and our body needs physical security in order to be calmed. But our main sense of security in life should be coming from our relationship with Hashem - to have a relationship with Him, on a daily basis.

In Conclusion

May Hashem protect us from troubles and from the "birth pangs of Moshiach". But even more so, that we should realize that Hashem is our Shield whom we can be protected by when the troubles come our way.

031 | *The Intent In Giving Tzedakah*

The “Shield of Avraham” –In Avraham Avinu’s Merit of Tzedakah

The end of the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* concludes with “ברוך אתה ה', מגן אברהם” “Blessed Are You, Hashem, Shield of Avraham.” Our *Chazal* reveal to us that the fact that Hashem is our Shield is not just the end of the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*; it is a reality that applies to all the generations.

Hashem made a promise to Avraham that He will protect him, due to the merit of his great *chessed* and *tzedakah* which he did for the world. This carries over into all the future generations, throughout all the exiles we go through.

In particular, the power of *tzedakah* is enjoying much abundance in our generation; there is much *tzedakah* being given, much more than in the previous generations. This is not by chance. Our *Chazal* already revealed a long time ago that in the final generations, there will be more *tzedakah* given.

Let us reflect into what’s going on in our times, what we are missing, and what is needed to be added on.

Our Tzedakah Upholds The World

There are three pillars that hold up the world – Torah, *Avodah* (*Korbonos*) and *Chessed* (kindness). *Chazal* state that “Torah will be forgotten” in the future generations. Our *Avodah* as well, our *Korbonos*, are not here with us in exile. But our pillar of *Chessed* always remains. So although our Torah and our *Avodah* has weakened in the exile, our *Chessed* still remains strong.

When a person gives *tzedakah* or does a *chessed* for someone, even if he doesn’t have the best intentions, *Chazal* say that he still gets rewarded, because someone still received from him. Therefore, *chessed* and *tzedakah* doesn’t require as much holy intentions as our Torah and *Avodah* does. The reason for this is because *chessed* nourishes other people, whether we do it with intention or not. Thus, the merit of our *chessed* always remains strong.

It’s unbelievable how much *chessed* and *tzedakah* is going on in the world. If not for *tzedakah*, we couldn’t survive. The Torah and *Tefillah* going in the world are also unbelievable, but Torah and *Tefillah* require purity of heart in order to really protect us. But our *tzedakah* always remains

pure, because it doesn't require holy intentions; as long as we just give *tzedakah* to others. *Tzedakah* upholds the world even when we give it *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motivations).

The Problem That Results From Giving Tzedakah "Shelo Lishmah"

However, this creates a problem. If our entire *tzedakah* is always *shelo lishmah*, then it follows then that *shelo lishmah* is upholding the world. If our *shelo lishmah* is keeping the world alive – if we are only giving *tzedakah* because we want reward, such as *parnassah* and *shidduchim*, etc. – then our entire existence is being sustained by *tzedakah* that is being given *shelo lishmah*. If *shelo lishmah* is running the world, then our entire life is turning into *shelo lishmah*....

Again, to emphasize, the amount of *tzedakah* in the world is amazing. I do not mean *chas v'shalom* to invalidate this. But we have to know what our *tzedakah* is missing these days. If the reason in giving *tzedakah* is only to get rewarded, then the entire world is thriving on *shelo lishmah*, which is not a true kind of life.

This is also the root of the misguided thinking in today's times. In the last 10 or 15 years, the world of *tzedakah* has grown amazingly, but, this takes its toll on our clarity of "things.". When there is a lot of *tzedakah*, and it's all being given *shelo lishmah* – and this is what is supporting the Torah – then there will be a lot of *tzedakah* in the world, but not much Torah. Our Torah learning loses its worth when it is being supported entirely by intentions that are *shelo lishmah*.

To give an example, much of the money going through the *tzedakah* organizations is not always being given out according to *Halacha*. People aren't so careful with how they give out the *tzedakah* money.

Uncovering A 'Spark of Lishmah' In Our Acts

What should we do about this?

We can't change the generation. But each of us, on our own personal level, can make the following reflection. Each of us has an ability to act either *lishmah* or *shelo lishmah*. *Chazal* say to act *shelo lishmah* and eventually we will arrive at *lishmah*; Rav Chaim Volozhiner explains that this is true only if we have a "spark of *lishmah*" even within our acts of *shelo lishmah*.

Therefore, practically speaking, every person should do the following exercise. Try giving just one shekel as *lishmah*, in every donation that you give. Give one *shekel* purely for the sake of giving *tzedakah*, and not because you want *zechusim* (merits), and not even for another person's *zechus*. Don't give it for any *zechusim*. Just give it purely for the sake of giving *tzedakah*.

We don't mean to suggest that for every donation you give that you should give half of your donation *lishmah*; that is too much of an undertaking. That is only for rare individuals to practice. Instead, just give one *shekel* from the pile as *lishmah*.

The more you get used to this, the more you will weaken your *shelo lishmah* when you give *tzedakah*. You will begin to notice your intentions and become more aware of what it means to really give. You will feel uneasy at giving your *tzedakah* because you want to get rewarded for it – and you will naturally start giving it more with more intentions of *lishmah*. The more we give a little bit of our *tzedakah* to go for *lishmah*, the more we uncover the inner point of our heart - which is the power to act *lishmah*.

We should also try to take this point of *lishmah* and carry it over into our Torah learning as well, that we should try to uncover just one small spark of *lishmah* in all that we do.

May we all merit to “return with *tzedakah*” – with the coming of *Moshiach* speedily in our days.

032 } Our Middos Enable Hashem's Middos

Hashem's "Might" – His Attribute of Judgment

The second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* starts with **אתה גיבור לעולם** - “You, Hashem, are eternally mighty.” Later in the blessing we praise Hashem for His kindness and mercy, that He supports the world through His kindness and revives the dead. What does the beginning of the blessing have to do with the end of the blessing? What does praising Hashem’s strength have to do with His kindness and mercy upon Creation?

The Midrash reveals that first Hashem wanted to create the world with *middas hadin* (the attribute of judgment) and He saw the world wouldn’t last, so He “included” in it the *middas harachamim* (attribute of mercy). The Sages also state that the way a person acts is the way Heaven deals with him. If someone acts merciful, Hashem is merciful towards him; if he is not merciful to others, he does not merit Hashem’s mercy.

However, just because Hashem created the world with *middas harachamim* doesn’t mean that Hashem stopped using the *middas hadin*. The *middas harachamim* was “included” into Creation, but it didn’t cancel out the *middas hadin*.

That is the meaning of **אתה גיבור** – first we praise Hashem’s *gevurah* strength, which is describing His *middas hadin*, and then we praise His kindness and compassion, which is His *middas harachamim*.

Our Middos – The Tool to Receive Hashem's Sustenance

There are all kinds of *middos*. Our “*middos*”, our behaviors, are not the same as the 13 “*middos*” of Hashem and the 13 “*middos*” which the Torah are expounded with. Rather, our *middos* are a tool to contain the 13 *middos* of Hashem and His Torah. If we have good *middos*, Heaven deals us with accordingly, as we brought earlier from *Chazal*.

Our avodah with our *middos* is not just to fix our bad *middos* and use our good *middos*. That is just the superficial perspective. It is also superficial if a person thinks that “Hashem will hopefully purify my *middos*.” Fixing our *middos* is not just another subject we add to our list of learning Torah and doing mitzvos. Rather, it is part of the general picture of our life’s mission; it is not just another subject of our life.

To illustrate, when we are missing something in the house, we still realize that we have a house, and it is just that the house is missing something. If the house is missing the door, this is unpleasant, but the house is still livable. But if our house is missing a roof, we are not just missing a roof; we basically don't have a house. Without a roof, a house is unlivable.

Fixing our *middos* is therefore not just “another” part of our life. When a person doesn't take out the garbage, the house begins to smell bad. Neglecting to take out the garbage is not just a lack of a certain detail in one's life. It ruins the whole house. In the same way, fixing our *middos* is necessary in order to live our life. It is not just another one of our obligations in life.

Through having good *middos*, Hashem's good *middos* are able to shine through to us, and then our Torah learning will look different. When a person learns Torah but he doesn't work on his *middos*, it might seem like he's learning Torah, and he's just missing good *middos*. But the truth is, his bad *middos* are preventing him from having success in his Torah learning. Without good *middos*, a person doesn't receive Hashem's mercy.

All success that comes to us can only come through Hashem's *middos* which are being channeled down to us from Heaven. Anything we see or sense can only be enabled through Hashem's *middos*, which keep the world going. Therefore, if a person doesn't seek to purify his *middos*, he is missing the tool to receive Hashem's *middos*, and his life will be very shaky.

Whatever we do, without exception, depends on Hashem's *middos*. Therefore, if we do not have the tool to receive Hashem's *middos* – in other words, if we don't have good *middos* - we won't succeed in our life.

When a person gets angry, he can feel it very strongly. But there is more to the *middos* than the emotional response that we feel from them. A good *middah* means that Hashem's good *middos* are being channeled into us, and a bad *middah* is the absence of this.

It is not only our *middos* which get affected by this concept, but even our actions can only be enabled by Hashem's *middos*. When we eat breakfast, we can only do so because of Hashem's *middos* of mercy that allow us to do anything and have it good. (The source for this concept is in *sefer Chovos HaLevovos (Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh, Chapter 5)*

We must come to an inner recognition that our *middos* are constantly at work, and therefore, we must constantly work on them to fix them.

If a person's *middos* are left unfixed, he won't be able to properly understand the Torah. Working on our *middos* is thus not a 'separate' issue from our Torah learning. It has direct ramifications on our understanding of our learning. Everything is enabled through *middos*, thus,

we cannot succeed in our learning if we don't have good *middos*. Our tefillah and our chessed as well is affected by our *middos*, because every single action we do is affected by the *middos*.

If a person doesn't work to fix his *middos*, he might think he understands his learning, but his learning is all superficial. His Torah learning is like Achitophel and Doeg, of whom the Sages said that they only learned Torah externally and superficially. Bilaam also knew a lot of Heavenly secrets, but all of his vast knowledge about spirituality was impure, because he did not purify his character.

If Hashem's *middos* are working for us, we will succeed with our actions and understand our Torah learning. But this is only if we have good *middos*, when we seek to purify our *middos*.

In Conclusion

This is the meaning of אֵתָהּ גִּיבוֹר – when we realize the *middas hadin* of Hashem, that Hashem only sustains us when *we act accordingly* [by having good *middos*] we can then merit His mercy, which we describe later on in the blessing.

The Vilna Gaon said that if a person doesn't break his bad *middos*, there is no point in living. What does this mean? Isn't the main thing on this world to learn Torah? But the depth of this is that if a person doesn't fix his *middos*, he doesn't really understand the Torah and he can't be close to Hashem. Maybe he will know a lot of Torah, intellectually, but he doesn't really understand it, because without good *middos*, a person is missing the tools that enable him to understand the Torah.

May we merit to fix our *middos*, whereupon Hashem shine His *middos* into us. May we merit to connect ourselves and cleave to the *middos* of Hashem, which will give the tools to reach any success.

033 | *The Final Judgment*

The Middas HaDin\Attribute of Judgment

אתה גיבור לעולם – “You, Hashem, are eternally mighty.”

[As we brought in the previous chapter], When Hashem first created the world, He wanted to create it with *middas hadin* (attribute of judgment); Hashem saw that the world wouldn't survive, therefore, He included in it the *middas harachamim*, the attribute of mercy. The “might” of Hashem in this blessing is referring to His *middas hadin*.

What is the *middas hadin*? There are different judgments we go through. One opinion in our Sages is that we are judged every day. We are also judged once a year on Rosh HaShanah. After a person dies and his soul returns to Heaven, he is judged again, and in the future, there will be a final day of reckoning, which is called the *Yom HaDin HaGadol HaGibbor V'haNora* – the “great, mighty and awesome day of judgment”.

The Final Day of Judgment

What is the day of reckoning in the future? We will be judged for all our previous lifetimes, from the start of Creation all the way until our last lifetime. We will be judged from the first day of Creation, in which Adam lived, for all souls were once part of Adam's soul, as *Chazal* revealed. This will not just be a judgment for various details we know of from our life, but it will be an all-inclusive judgment that includes every single detail from all our lifetimes together. This is described in the possuk in the end of sefer *Koheles*,

"סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלוקים ירא, ואת מצוותיו שמור, כי זה כל האדם" – “*In the end of things, all will be heard; fear Hashem, and guard His commandments, for this is all there is to man.*”

Another factor of the future judgment is that each person will also be judged along with all of Creations. It will not just be a judgment on our “private” kind of existence – all the actions we did since we began to exist – but it will be a judgment of the entire Creation in its totality.

This begins to help us gain a new picture of our actions. Our actions are not just our private actions per se, but they will be affected by all other actions from everyone else in Creation.

In the future, when Moshiach comes, there will be a great new revelation. Hashem will judge the entire world, all at once. The future *Yom HaDin* will be a judgment on the entire Creation,

every last detail – *all at once*. This is the depth of judgment, which only Hashem can do Himself. We will all one day have to give an accounting before Hashem Himself. This will differ from the judgment of the Heavenly Court; it will be a judgment coming from the ultimate Judge – Hashem Himself.

As a person matures, his sense of fear of judgment gets deeper. He fears the judgment of Rosh HaShanah, and he begins to fear how one day he will have to give an accounting to Hashem.

A person might know a lot intellectually about these concepts, and he can know many sayings of *Chazal* about it, yet, his understanding of this concept can still be superficial. He knows about the future day of judgment, but he doesn't connect to it, and thus he doesn't fear it.

The Depth of Learning Torah

Thus, it is not enough to learn Torah – a person has to live a life of Torah, in which Torah is his very life. A child can learn Torah, but it is not yet his life. “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”. The Torah is the source of Creation which Hashem used to create the universe with. The Torah is the source of life.

Hashem is exacting with *tzaddikim*, and the depth of this is because *tzaddikim* are found on a higher plane. They are immersed in the holy thoughts of Torah. A true Torah scholar, when he learns Torah, scrutinizes every word. He lives in a realm where every word of Torah is scrutinized and endlessly analyzed, a world of constant refinement. That is the difference between a Torah scholar, whose Torah is his life, than someone who just sits and learns Torah. (A superficial person can't tell this difference. He looks at a Torah scholar and thinks, “What's the difference between him and someone else sitting and learning? Both people are sitting and learning...”)

This helps us conceptualize the future day of reckoning, which will analyze every detail in Creation together. “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world” – in other words, *from* the Torah, which includes all of Creation, Hashem will judge the entire Creation. The Torah is really all “one piece”, and Hashem will also see the entire Creation as all one piece in the future, seeing every detail at once.

However, it is very possible that a person is learning Torah, day and night, yet he doesn't realize how all of the Torah is all one piece. He doesn't enter it deeply; he doesn't see how the Torah is the source for all of Creation, thus, he doesn't analyze properly every detail in what he learns.

When we hear about the concept of the future day of reckoning, in order for it to affect us, we need to be deeply connected to the Torah. When we are deeply connected to Torah, we analyze its every detail, and that helps us conceptualize what the future judgment will be like – a very detailed kind of judgment. If a person isn't deeply connected to the Torah – if he doesn't seek to analyze his learning – he won't be able to connect to the fear of the future day of judgment.

The Future Judgment Will Be On The Level of Torah We Reached

Until now, we explained how a person can connect himself to the future day of judgment. On a more subtle understanding, there are several kinds of judgment – there is a judgment on the actions we do, which we are judged for on Rosh HaShanah, and there is a higher kind of judgment, which will be the judgment of the future. It will be a whole different kind of concept of judgment than our current time.

In the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we describe the *middos* of Hashem as "הגדול, הגיבור, והנורא", and we explained how each of these *middos* is referring to the *middos* that our three Avos personified. The future day of judgment, however, will incorporate all of these *middos* together. Therefore, it will be the day that is the *Yom HaDin HaGadol HaGibbor V'haNora*, because it will incorporate all of the aspects of all our Avos, since the start of Creation. It will not just be a judgment on our actions, but on our level of **Torah** that we reached.

These days if a person goes to a Beis Din, he sees *dayanim* (judges) giving a judgment. This is nothing compared to the *din*\judgment of the future. The judgment will be on everything, just like the Torah is all-inclusive.

Therefore, in order to merit a good judgment in the future, we need to deeply connect ourselves to the Torah. It is not enough to do *teshuvah* on our deeds. In the future, there will be no more deeds - just Torah. The entire question then will be about "How much Torah did I reach...?"

We need to really connect ourselves to the Torah, to understand that the Torah is really the source of the entire Creation, that it is all-inclusive. The ultimate judgment of the future will be on our level of Torah that we reached.

The Higher Kind of Yirah\Fear

This is a whole new *yirah* fear that we need to acquire. It is the inner kind of *yirah*. We are used to the concept of being afraid of punishment for sin, and to fear perfection, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* describes; but there is a higher kind of fear, the fear of the Torah, which we also need to acquire.

We can only get this fear if we really connect ourselves to the Torah – “*Fear of Hashem is wisdom.*” If we really connect to the Torah’s wisdom, we will attain the true fear of Hashem.

034 | *Revival of the Living*

The Ongoing Revival In Creation

In the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we say "מחי' מתים אתה" – "You revive the dead." It is written, "*Hashem revives the dead with His expression.*" Our Rabbis point out that there are five times in this blessing which we mention how Hashem revives the dead. The first time we mention the revival of the dead, it is referring to the general revival of the dead which will be in the future.

But as we know from the words of our Sages, Hashem is constantly reviving the world. Just as He supports life all the time - as we say later on in this blessing, **מכלכל חיים בהסד** - so does He revive the dead all the time.

The simple understanding of this is that when a person goes to sleep, he returns his soul to Hashem, and when he gets up in the morning, Hashem gives him back his soul; this is the simple understanding of how Hashem revives the dead every day.

But the deeper understanding is that Hashem revives the various parts of our soul. The five times we mention the revival of the dead in this blessing are an allusion to the five parts of our soul. Generally speaking, there are five parts to our soul. The highest part of our soul²⁶ is our *ratzon* (will), followed by our power of *machshavah* (thought) then *hisbonenus* (reflection), then our *middos* (emotions and character traits) and finally, our actions, which are the lowest layer of our soul.

It is written, "*Hashem renews, in His goodness, every day, the act of Creation.*" This does not just mean that Hashem revives the world every day, but that He revives one's personal soul, every day.

The Renewal of Our Ratzon\Will

We will start with the highest layer of our soul, our *ratzon*. How does our *ratzon* get renewed every day? We are referring to a *ratzon* for holiness, not *retzonos* for various physical pursuits. How do we feel any *ratzon* for holiness?

²⁶ These five layers of the soul are the external layers of the soul, but our actual essence of our soul is deeper than our will. It is our actual "I" – our *neshamah*, which is a "piece of Hashem." Refer to the author's *Getting Know Your Self*.

It is really engraved deeply in our soul to always strive for holiness. “It is our will to do Your will, but the yeast in the sourdough [the evil inclination] prevents us.” Our *ratzon* gets revived all the time because there is a personal revival of the dead that is constantly taking place in one’s personal soul. Whenever I want to do learn or *daven* or do something spiritual, my *ratzon* is getting awakened, and this can only happen if **I recognize that Hashem is reviving me**. It is not enough for a person to know about this intellectually - he must have an inner recognition of it.

When a person isn’t connected inwardly to the concept, then it doesn’t work for him, and he is kind of asleep in his soul. Just like our body goes to sleep, so our our soul can be asleep – when it is not connected to spiritual realities. But when we believe and recognize that Hashem keeps reviving us, our *ratzon* is revived, and then we are able to keep having a *ratzon* for anything holy.

From where does anyone get the power to sit and learn Torah every day? It is because they have a *ratzon* which is active. What is the difference between someone who shows up to the *Beis Midrash* every day to learn, on a regular basis, and someone who only comes once in a while, when he feels like it? The first person has a *ratzon*. He is connected to the concept of the soul’s revival, and therefore his *ratzon* is always ignited.

To give another example, when people begin *Daf HaYomi*, their *ratzon* is active, but as *Daf Yomi* goes on, many people lose interest. Their *ratzon* stops. Why do people lose their *ratzon*? It is because they don’t realize that Hashem can keep reviving us. The only ones who are able to last through any spiritual undertaking are the ones who understand that Hashem keeps reviving our *ratzon*, and that is where they get strength from. Those who lose their *ratzon* are unaware of the concept of how their *ratzon* can constantly be revived by Hashem.

The Renewal of Our Actions

From where do people get the ability to always be active in doing the mitzvos? How can people just do, do, and do more good deeds? Don’t we need *menuchah* (rest)? How are certain people able to always be doing so many *mitzvos* and never cease doing *mitzvos*? It is because they are connected to the soul’s revival. Therefore, their actions are constantly getting revived by Hashem. They are constantly experiencing an ongoing *techiyas hameisim* (revival of the dead) in their realm of action.

The Renewal of Our Middos

From where do people get the strength to always work on the *middos*? There are many people who were working on their *middos* when they were younger, but then they got married and “move on” with their life, leaving their aspirations behind, and they stop working on their *middos*. They have “*tekufos*” (periods) where they work on their *middos*, and “*tekufos*” when they don’t work on their *middos*.

But there are people who are constantly working on their *middos*, for years and years. How are they able to work so hard on themselves? It is because they are connected to the power of the soul’s revival. They realize that their *middos* need to always undergo *techiyas hameisim*, and that is how they get the strength to work on themselves.

Elul and Beyond

People work on themselves every Elul, but very few people remain with their progress. How are people to continue their growth? Inspiration cannot build us. We need to build and develop in ourselves a power in our soul that can keep us going. That power is to connect ourselves to the ongoing *techiyas hameisim* in Creation. This will supply us with a constant, inner source of revival.

Attaching Your Entire Soul to the Ongoing Revival

All of us **know** – in our minds, at least - that Hashem exists. But do we *feel* it? We **know**, intellectually, that Hashem keeps us alive, but do we actually feel that way? When we have a *ratzon*, we should feel that it is being enabled by Hashem. When we reflect deeply, we should feel that it’s coming from Hashem. When we think, we should feel that it’s coming from Hashem. When we work on our *middos*, we should feel that it’s only possible because of Hashem. When we do any act, we should feel that it’s only because Hashem helps us.

Listening To Your Breathing

It is written, “*Every soul praises Hashem*”, and *Chazal* interpret this *possuk* that for every breath a person breathes, a person should thank Hashem. Every day, for a few minutes, take some quiet

time and listen to your breathing, and feel how Hashem is allowing you to breathe.²⁷ (Don't do it a whole day. We are not angels.) Our breathing is something we can feel; it is not just something we know about. So pay attention to your breathing, feel yourself breathing, and make sure you are very calm when you do so. You can begin to feel how Hashem is keeping you alive with each breath, reviving you every second with each breath.

We all know in our mind that Hashem keeps us alive, but in order to feel it, we must be able to clearly feel it. Listening to your breathing is a good way for you to feel Hashem's existence. If you do this throughout the day, you will uncover a deep closeness with Hashem, feeling how Hashem is constantly giving you life. Don't just do this mechanically.

If someone practices this with inner calm, every day, he will slowly begin to actually feel his *ratzon* for holiness. His entire life will feel like an ongoing *techiyas hameisim*. This can be applied to the entire spectrum of our soul – our will, our deep reflection, our thoughts, our middos, and our actions – that Hashem is supplying us with energy to do any of these things.

When you get up in the morning and you say *Modeh Ani*, you can feel how Hashem has given you back your life. In the same way, you can constantly feel how Hashem is giving you your life, when you connect throughout the course of the day to the concept of the ongoing *techiyas hameisim*. When this becomes your way of life, you will uncover a deep connection with Hashem, in all your soul layers – all the way from your *ratzon* down to your actions. This will happen slowly, not all at once.

This is the *maayan hamisgaber* (mighty wellspring) that a person can access in his own soul.

The Power To Get Past All Failures

This is how we can gain a constant renewal and always start anew, no matter what failure we went through that day. When you connect to the source of your life – Hashem – and to believe that He is constantly reviving you – you will be able to get past all your major failures. Even when you fail, you will be to immediately get up from the failure, because you are tapping into the power of your soul's constant revival.

The root of all failures is really because after a person fails, he doesn't believe he can get up again afterwards. He isn't connected to the concept of the constant **revival**, therefore, he doesn't feel renewal in his soul.

²⁷ For more specific guidance on how to do this breathing exercise, see the *shiur of Rosh Chodesh Avodah: Cheshvah: Breathing*.

Working On This Concept

This is a matter which does not come to you just by knowing about it intellectually. You need to actually connect yourself to the concept, to actually feel where your source of life is coming from [Hashem]. To work on this, take some quiet time and sit in a calm, quiet place [as the Chazon Ish writes to do, in *sefer Emunah U'Bitachon*] and try to feel this concept we have described here.

In Conclusion

The meaning of these words of *Shemoneh Esrei*, that Hashem is מְחַיֵּה מֵתִים is that Hashem doesn't just revive the dead in the future. He revives us every second; when we believe in this, that there is an ongoing *techiyas hameisim* that we can connect ourselves to.

035 | *Yearning For The Future*

The Future Salvation

In the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* we say **מחי' מתים אתה, רב להושיע** “You revive the dead, and You are great in Your salvation.”

In the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* we also mentioned that Hashem is our savior, but in the second blessing, we add on another point: that Hashem is “great” in His salvation. This is connected to the end of the blessing, in which we praise Hashem for the fact that He revives the dead. What, indeed, is the connection between the fact that Hashem is **רב להושיע** with the fact that Hashem revives the dead?

There are personal kinds of salvation which each person needs, and there is the general salvation which the Jewish people await for (and on a more subtle note, the entire Creation): the coming of *Moshiach*, which will be followed by the resurrection of the dead. This is the simple understanding of why we mention Hashem’s salvation in connection with the revival of the dead.

Yearning To Be Removed From All The Impurity

But the deeper understanding is as follows.

What, indeed, will change in the world after *Moshiach* comes? In the future, it will be a time of “light” to the world, while now we are in a time of darkness. But what exactly is that light which will be revealed to the world?

Simply, we understand that in the future, all of our troubles will go away. In addition, sins will disappear; Hashem will slaughter the evil inclination. The spirit of impurity that is in the world will be removed - the impurity of the world in general, as well as the impurity that is found in *Eretz Yisrael*. There is impurity in the world which the previous generations never fathomed would be here. We await the future, in which all of this impurity will disappear.

The impurity of the world fills the air of the entire world – it has entered every community, shul, every *beis hamidrash*. The more we seek the truth, the more we yearn to escape from all the world’s impurity and to merit the great salvation which Hashem will bring upon the Creation. The more a person searches for truth in his life, the more he realizes how impure this world is,

and he sees how it is so subtle. The more we feel how impure this world is, the more we see how evil this world has become – and the more we yearn for salvation from the current state of affairs. The more we see this world through an inner kind of vision, the more we see what’s going on, and we will then yearn to get out of this situation.

It resembles how “a person who sees a *sotah* in her ruination should become a *nazir* from wine.”

Why We Should Yearn For The Future: Aspiring For An Internal Change

What is it that we long for? How can we gain an inner kind of vision and see how impure this world is, and what is it that we are supposed to await? What kind of change do we await to come to the world?

There is a huge difference between the current times and the times of the future. In our current world, we have the pillars of Torah and *Tefillah* and *Chessed*, which uphold the world; we will have this in the future as well. On the external layer of things, there is no difference between today and the times of the future. The difference between today’s times and the future will be in the *inner layer* of the things that we do.

We must examine the inner reason why we need to have Torah, Tefillah, and *chessed*. What is the reason that we must do *chessed* – and what is the reason that we, personally, do *chessed*? Notice the difference between why we must do *chessed*, and why you personally do *chessed*. It’s not the same motivation.

Often people are doing the right thing, but only on the external layer of things. Inwardly, there is a lot lacking to the actions we do. There is a reason why we must do the actions we do, but *that reason* isn’t always the reason that *personally motivates* us to do those things. The reason *why I do* the *mitzvos* isn’t always the reason that I am *supposed* to do those mitzvos.

When we do a *mitzvah*, are we doing it because that is what we are supposed to do, because it is the will of Hashem, revealed to us through our Sages and Rabbis– or do we have other intentions involved in what we do, which are for various personal interests....? Do we have other *cheshbonos* (calculations) in why we do our *mitzvos*, which are not about fulfilling the will of Hashem....?

If we have various personal motivations for why we do the good deeds that we do, then the way we are living our life is very far from the truth.

The Two Kinds of Self-Introspection We Need To Make

First, we need to examine our deeds and see if we are acting right. But we also need to examine what's going on inside ourselves. This is a hidden kind of self-introspection which often eludes people, but it is more necessary than ever to make this kind of self-introspection, in our current generation. We need to examine if our inside is matching what we do on the outside (*tocho k'baro* – “his inside is like his outside”).

There are two very painful circumstances in the current era of Creation which we want to be saved from. The first painful aspect in Creation is that people aren't living their life according to the Torah; the four parts of *Shulchan Aruch* are being neglected in many people's lives. But in addition, there is another kind of painful situation: the inner motivations inside most of us are contradicting what we do. People might be doing the right thing all the time, but inwardly, they aren't connected to what they do with the correct motivations.

This is the internal kind of search we need to make, in this generation. Our actions need to be in line with Hashem's will, of course - but so do our *inner motivations* need to be aligned with Hashem's will. If a person learns Torah, but deep down he wants other things than learning Torah, his Torah learning is not truthful, and his Torah learning will not elevate him.

We hear various things all the time, and we don't know what is truth and what is falsity. What direction do we need to go in? We must be searching for the truth - that is the direction we need to go in. Our life needs to be run according to the Torah, not just in the external actions we do, but because our inner will should be aligned with Hashem's will in the Torah.

We must make sure that our intentions in what we do are pure, that the motivations inside us should be connected with what we do. It is not enough for us to just always “do” the right thing. We need to make sure that our motivations are being purified.

Everyone needs to be clear how to act properly - and how to do our acts with the proper intentions. Living like this will transform a person's whole lifestyle.

In Conclusion

Thus, we can now understand why we mention how Hashem is **רב להושיע** in connection with the future resurrection of the dead. In order to merit the future revelations – the coming of Moshiach and the resurrection of the dead – we need to uncover a desire for salvation from our current world, not just to await the time in which all impurity will leave the world, but because

in the future, everything in our life will be with pure motivations. We need to want the truth and aspire for it now.

The world we are in now needs two kinds of salvation. People are not living according to the Torah; we await a salvation from this, in which all people will keep the Torah. That is one thing we await. But there is another kind of problem which we need to be saved from: that even people who keep the Torah do not always have their inner will aligned with Hashem's will. This is the salvation what we should mainly await for – that our inner will should be connected to the acts of *mitzvos* that we do. That is the true meaning of salvation.

This is how we truly await the salvation of the future – to await a future in which our inside will match what we do on our outside. May we all merit the future, in which “peace and truth will meet” – when our insides will feel the truth that we are practicing on our outside. It is this which we long for.

036 | *A Generation of Abundance*

Our Generation Is Being Showered With Abundant Materialism

In the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, which describes the resurrection of the dead, we say משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם – “He Who returns wind and brings down rain.” This is connected to the future resurrection of the dead, in which Hashem will bring down a spiritual rain that will revive the physical body and bring it back to life. This is the holy kind of “*geshem*”\rain of the future – the rain that will bring the soul back to the body.

As the generations progress, the spiritual level decreases. *Chazal* say that each day is more cursed than the one before it. One of the main spiritual problems in our current generation is that we have an abundance of materialism. Our current generation is blessed with much opulence, the likes of which never were before.

The amount of material pleasures going on today is unparalleled. Our ancestors never dreamed that there would be so much food available like there is today.

In addition to the amount of materialism going on today, the magnitude of it as well is problematic to us. It causes people to constantly run after all kinds of new tastes that come out. Because there is such a wide array of different kinds of tastes that come out, this makes people always seek some new-tasting item that hits the market. There are two points contained in this phenomenon which we need to consider.

How To Use This World's Pleasures

The *Mesillas Yeshtarim* says that everything in this world tests us. Materialism is a test, and the more a person attaches himself to materialism, the further he is from pursuing spirituality; what, then, is the purpose of materialism [such as food]? Its purpose is so that we can use it to have *yishuv hadaas* (peace of mind). Although *Chazal* say that we need to subsist on bread and water, we also need a little more than that, an amount that will be enough to satisfy our *yishuv hadaas*. In this way, we use Creation in the right way, and then Creation becomes elevated to holiness.

But if a person indulges in materialism, if he's using it for more than just giving himself some *yishuv hadaas*, then he will become too attached to materialism. The more he gives in, the more he will want. “He who has a hundred, wants two hundred.” The materialism in his life is then

being used for evil. Rebbi was fabulously wealthy, and the table in his house was always set with the finest foods. Yet, the very same Rebbi stated that he did not derive any enjoyment from this world. What does this mean? Does it mean that he starved himself and never enjoyed any of his wealth? It means that he only enjoyed what was necessary for him to enjoy, in order to sustain his *yishuv hadaas*. Beyond that, he did not allow himself to enjoy.

However, even when a person is only enjoying this world for the sake of *yishuv hadaas* – a minimal amount of enjoyment so he can have some peace of mind – he is still in danger, because in the end of the day, he is still involving himself with materialism. He is in danger of becoming very connected to it.

In fact, even when it comes Shabbos and there is a mitzvah of *Oneg Shabbos* to have good food, the Vilna Gaon warns that one should not overeat on Shabbos, or else he will come to overeat during the week as well. Instead of gorging into the food, a person should taste it and no more; “*Those who taste of it [Shabbos] will merit life.*” We need to “taste” the Shabbos food, but we should not get carried away and become a glutton.

We have to be careful not to indulge in this world, even when we have to make use of it. This is true even when we are using this world’s pleasure to give ourselves some *yishuv hadaas*; we have to always be wary of the *Yetzer Hora*. “Woe to me from my Creator, woe to my from my inclination.”

The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that we have to carefully weigh how we use materialism, to see if we really need something or not. We need to know if eating a certain food will bring us to have *yishuv hadaas*, or if it’s not really necessary for our *yishuv hadaas*. If we don’t need it for our *yishuv hadaas*, it binds us to this world and makes us entrenched in physicality, and then we won’t be able to grow spiritually.

The Need For Taste

That is with regards to the actual materialism of this world. But another point in this is the concept of tasting things. The reason why we people can be drawn after food can also be because people enjoy new tastes. We find the concept of taste by the *manna*. The *manna* was able to taste like anything you wanted. This is a separate discussion than the subject of being attached to materialism: the pursuit of new tastes.

In our generation, not only there is an abundant amount of materialism going on, but there are constantly new tastes that are coming out. Rav Dessler zt”l explained the depth behind this: there is a special abundance of taste that is being poured down upon us from Heaven. He said

that in the previous generations, in order for a person to really enjoy learning Torah, one had to exert himself very well to understand it. But these days, a person can enjoy the Torah even without working so hard to understand it – if he just merits to have a “taste” for the Torah, he enjoys it. In our generation, a person can merit the enjoyment of the Torah even if he just gets a little “taste” for it.

For this reason as well, there is a tremendous amount of *Chiddushei Torah* going on in today’s generation, much more than in the previous generations. The reason is because in our generation, a person merits success in his Torah learning as long as he tastes it and begins to enjoy it a little. With just having a taste in the Torah, a person can merit *Chiddushei Torah*, much more easily than in the previous generations.

This spiritual abundance is available to anyone who seeks it - we just have to seek it! But it is very readily available to us. Any sensible person, when he reflects about the situation of our generation, can see that the amount of abundance going on these days is astounding. It is therefore very hard for a person these days to enter his inner, spiritual world. It is because we are surrounded with so much materialism.

In order to pull ourselves away from materialism, a person should seek the taste of Torah. If a person doesn’t satisfy his need for taste in the Torah, he will end up looking to satisfy it in other places, in the outside world. Materialism is a test to us, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* states, but it is more than just a test. There is an abundance of taste going on in today’s generation – both when it comes to materialism, as well as when it comes to spirituality. A person has to make sure he is connecting to the abundance of spiritual taste that is readily available today, and this will offer him the real taste, which will prevent him from pursuing the superficial kinds of tastes in the outside, material world.

If a person is indulging in materialism, and he is too attached to trying out new tastes from the physical world, he has two major obstacles that are hampering his success in Torah learning. He won’t be able to taste the Torah!

Why People Aren’t Succeeding In Their Learning

Most of the generation is being raised with indulgence. People grew up with constantly fulfilling their physical desires, surrounded by so much food. For this reason, many people haven’t yet merited the taste of the Torah; they can’t even get their first real taste of it, because they are so used to material tastes. However, Hashem has provided us with the remedy, even

before the problem started; He has provided with the taste of Torah, which can counter the tastes of this world.

But, it's very difficult for a person to enjoy the taste of Torah when a person is so used to the tastes of this physical world. If a person has already indulged too much in this world, he must do the following: he must clean himself out from all the physical pursuits. As it is written, "*I have cleaned the house.*" Chazal say to subsist on bread and water. This is too hard for most people to do, but one thing is definitely true for all people: we all need to separate ourselves, to a large extent, from this world. If a person can set aside time every day in which he is detached from materialism and he is totally spiritual, this is wonderful. If someone can't do this, at least he should aspire for such a kind of lifestyle and think of how wonderful it would be. He should think that he *can* do it.

Even if a person never sins, if he is attached to materialism, the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that he lowers his soul in doing so. It is not possible for us to have any spiritual progress and develop our *neshamah* if we indulge in materialism. Our *neshamah* wants the real thing; it wants the taste of pleasure.

It is like the famous parable of the pauper who married the princess. The pauper did everything he tried to do to please the princess; he bought her the most expensive foods he could buy, but she was never satisfied. She was a princess; she had been used to the most royal food in the world, and nothing the pauper could bring her even came close to what she was used to. That is what our *neshamah* is like. There is no amount of physical pleasure that will satisfy our *neshamah*, because our *neshamah* comes from Above, from a realm of complete spirituality, and physicality doesn't talk to it.

Practically Speaking

Practically speaking, to work on this, a person can hold himself back each day from eating a certain amount of food that he enjoys. This is called "*Taanis HaRaavad*", the "fast of the Rav Avraham ben David" [who was the Sage that instituted a way to "fast" even as we eat].

There are a few ways how one can do it. 1) Either a person sets aside a piece of food on his plate and doesn't eat it, 2) Or, he can eat the food very slowly, without indulging in it and wolfing it down, eating the food in steps.

037 | *The Danger In Going Out To Work* *[addressed to avreichim faced with the pressures of financial instability]*

After The First Sin, Man Is Cursed With Having To Go To Work

מכלכל חיים בחסד – “Hashem supports the living with kindness.” Hashem supports the world with life-sustaining energy.

Adam, before the sin, was completely supported by Hashem. He didn't have to work to get a livelihood. Hashem's kindness was at its complete level ; angels prepared him all his meals. But after he sinned with the *Eitz HaDaas*, mankind was **cursed** with having to work - “*By the sweat of your brow*”, in order to be supported.”

The *chessed* we enjoy today from Hashem is not the same kind of *chessed* which Adam enjoyed, which was a state of total *chessed* from Hashem. However, Hashem still supports all of the world through His *chessed*; it is just that now, there is a curse placed on mankind that effort is needed in order to make a living, as a result of the sin. The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that the fact that we have to make effort to make a living is a “penalty” placed on mankind as a result of the sin.

On one hand, Hashem supports us with His kindness (even though it's not the same as Adam before the sin). At the same time, there is a penalty placed on mankind that a person has to make effort in order to make a living.

Work: Using Your G-d Given Talents So You Can Be Supported

Each person has to make a different kind of effort in order to make a living, according to his own situation. What exactly is the concept of making effort to make a living? The *Chovos HaLevovos* speaks about this at length. How much effort do we need to make? The *Chovos HaLevovos* explains that Hashem gives each person his own talents in order to make a living. Our talents which Hashem gives us are a tool that helps us gain a livelihood.

Therefore, we need to be aware that making a living is not about “making a lot of money”. It's about using the talents Hashem gave us as a tool to be able to be supported.

'Cruel' Labor – When People Work In Jobs That Don't Suit Them

We know that there is such a thing as exile. Exile can take place in our own soul as well. When a person has to make a living, he needs to do something that's for him. If he works at a job that's not "him", it's like he is exiled to the cruel labor of Egypt (*avodas perach*) in which men had to do women's labor and women had to do men's labor. It's torture to do something that's not your type of thing; that was the depth of the "cruel labor" in Egypt.

When Adam was cursed with having to work hard, that was one kind of curse. But in Egypt, this curse became worse, when the people were given labor that was torturous. The "*choimer* and *levainim*" (bricks and mortar) in Egypt was that men couldn't use their abilities and women couldn't use their abilities; they each had to do the other gender's kind of labor. It was therefore a whole new kind of curse of hard labor.

What It Means To Have Bitachon

The Alter of Novhardok zt"l would explain that *bitachon* (trust in Hashem) means to resemble the level of Adam before the sin. In order to have *bitachon*, we need to somewhat connect ourselves to the level of Adam before the sin, which is when man recognizes that he is a *neshamah*.

However, at the same time, we were cursed with having to make effort. We need to use our talents in order to make a living. Yet we must be aware that this is not the ideal situation of mankind; it is a curse.

The highest level a person can reach is when he lives totally in his *bitachon*, connected to the state of Adam before the sin. We find that there were Sages in the times of the Gemara who worked. They were able to go to work and be unaffected by the world, because they remained connected to their *neshamah*. The middle level of having to go work is to use one's talents in order to work. The lowest level is when a person works and he's not doing a job that utilizes his talents – such work resembles the cruel labor of Egypt.

First let us examine the inner layer of this concept of having to make effort to make a living, and then we will examine the external layer of this concept.

The Situation Of The Workplace Today

If a person lives a life of *neshamah* (soul, or your G-dly essence), he is inwardly connected to the state of Adam before the sin. Such a person lives in the state of *neshamah*, and therefore he can merit somewhat to be supported by Hashem, similar to how Hashem supported Adam in

Gan Eden. But if a person doesn't live a life of *neshamah*, he lives life from his body, and he is connected to the materialism of the body; he is apt to connect to the entire world of materialism – the outside world, which is very materialistic - especially in today's times.

This is not an issue about if a person should “sit and learn” versus “going to work”, which is an issue of how much *Bitachon* to have versus how much *hishtadlus* effort that one has to make. *Bitachon* means to live a life of *neshamah*. If someone doesn't live a life of *neshamah*, he can't be connected to *Bitachon*. That is one issue, and this issue has been around for a long time: How much effort should I make, and how much *bitachon* do I need to have? It depended on one's spiritual level.

Now there is a new issue in going to work. These days, if a person lives life through his body and not through his *neshamah* - and he goes out to work - he is very connected to the materialism of this world. In today's times, the materialism of the world is very strong, and by going to work, a person connects himself to this impure, materialistic world.

If a person is connected to the materialism of the world, he is in grave, spiritual danger. This is the inner problem going on in today's times when it comes to making a living. In previous generations, the Sages were able to go to work (and they had to, because there is a curse placed on mankind to make a living), because they lived a life of *neshamah*, and therefore they were disconnected from the materialism of the world as they worked. Therefore, a person can't say that “I want to go in the footsteps of the Sages” and work just like Rav Yitzchok Nafcha (who was a blacksmith) did. The Sages were able to make a living while at the same time being connected to their *neshamah*, which people today are not on the level to do.

In today's times, leaving Kolel to go to work is not just a question about how much *hishtadlus* effort to make a living is needed versus how much *bitachon* one needs to have. It is more than just a *hishtadlus* \ *bitachon* (effort vs. faith) issue. Going to work endangers one's very spirituality! Going to work today these days means to be heavily connected to the world, which is more impure than ever.

In the Gemara's times, when a person lived spiritually, and he also worked, this was like using the “beauty of *Yefes*” and incorporating it into the “tents of *Shem*” [*Yefes* was the son of Noach, was blessed by Noach to have success on this world. *Shem* was the older son of Noach, who was blessed with success in Torah – he was the ancestor of the Jewish people]. There was a concept of using this world in order to elevate it to holiness, to take advantage of what “*Yefes*” has to offer. But these days, going to work is like connecting to Cham, the other son of Noach, who was cursed, because he was totally impure. Cham was steeped in the worst kinds of impurity;

Cham represents the current situation of the world, which is at the lowest level of impurity. These days, to leave Kolel and go to work is a *spiritual death*!

We Need Mesirus Nefesh

Of course, the question now is obvious: “So how are we supposed to make a living?! How will we eat and be supported?! What are we supposed to do if we don’t work – we’re supposed to starve?!” The answer is: Would you rather die spiritually or physically? Which one is worse? Our *Chazal* (in Tractate Kiddushin) tell us that spiritual death is worse than physical death, and that if a person is given a choice, he should choose physical death.

We can all see the terrible spiritual problems that happen to people who are too connected to the world because they had to go out to work. We are indeed faced with a problem - may Hashem help us to be saved from the predicament we are in. These days, going out into the world to make a living is a *spiritual death*. A person should be prepared to die rather than have his soul burned up!

If someone still has a spark of holiness left in him, if he demands the truth, then he should realize that we need these days is *mesirus nefesh* (sacrifice) – to be prepared to *give up our lives* rather have to go out to the world in order to work! If a person goes even beyond this and he purifies himself internally, Hashem will indeed help him be supported; he will merit *siyata d’shamaya* (Heavenly assistance).

Either we can make the wise decision, or we make the foolish decision. There are no compromises. If we stay in the *Beis Midrash*, at least we’ll be able to survive with bread and water. But if a person goes out to work, he’s dead. This is not an issue of “how much” one is learning, like if he has a morning *sefer* (Torah study session) and a night *sefer* and he works during the day. This is a whole different issue: it’s a danger to one’s entire soul these days if he goes out to work.

If a person is in a situation in which he has to go to work, he should *daven* and cry to Hashem that he be saved from this situation, the same way that Yonah *HaNavi* cried to Hashem that he be saved from having to go to the wicked city of Ninveh. We must connect ourselves to the world of Torah, to the world of Hashem, to the inner kind of life – and not to a world of death.

May we merit the meaning that our support should come from a pure place – as *Chazal* say, “The Torah was not given except to those who ate the *manna*” - so that our hearts will thus be pure to recognize the Creator.

038 | *Rising From Failure*

Hashem Supports The Fallen

"סומך נופלים" - Hashem allows those who fall to “lean” on Him for support, after they fall.

Similarly, it is written, “*A righteous person falls seven times, and rises.*” Not only does a *tzaddik* rise after he falls so many times, but with each time he falls, Hashem is there for him, giving him strength to get up from each fall.

How does Hashem strengthen a person when he falls? He doesn’t just strengthen a person after he falls. Hashem helps a person that even when he falls, he won’t fall totally.

‘Days of Love’ and ‘Days of Hate’

Rabbeinu Tam (in Sefer *HaYashar*) writes that every person has “good days” (Days of Love) and “bad days” (Days of Hate); we all have periods of growth, achievement, social success and feeling positive in general, as well as times of failure, unutilized potential, social alienation, and in general, feeling negative about everything²⁸.

When a person is going through these “bad days”, the *avodah* is that he shouldn’t allow himself to fall totally. A person has the ability, even as he’s falling, to avoid falling so hard. He can make his “fall” a bit lighter.

How? This is that even when a person is going through a rough time, he can still connect himself to Hashem, and then receive strength to persevere.

Although we see people who don’t rise after they fall and they remain in their fallen state, this is only because they are not turning to Hashem for help.

A sensible person makes sure to have an organized schedule and make the most out of his period of “Good Days”, but he also makes sure to prepare himself for when the “Bad Days” strike. This way, when those “Bad Days” come, he will be able to go through it and prevent himself from having such a hard fall. Without preparing for “Bad Days”, a person enters a dismal period and he has no idea how to deal with it. He gives up, and he despairs totally. He becomes totally broken.

²⁸ See *Alei Shur Vol. 1, Perek 6*; see also the *shiur of Rosh Chodesh: Tamuz: What To Do When You Are Down*.

What a person has to do is to prepare for surviving a dismal period, simultaneously as he lives his regular and ordinary days of the year in which everything is going good for him. Every single person has ups and downs, even the greatest *Gadol*, but the difference between a regular person and a *Gadol* is that a *Gadol* has already prepared himself so well before the bad times that even when he as a fall from his level, he doesn't fall so much. The more a person prepares himself to deal with hard times, the less of a fall he has when he inevitably falls from his level.

The Deeper Perspective On Dismal Periods: Failing In Order To Grow

The deeper way to view our failings is to realize that even when we fall from our level, it's really not a fall. It's necessary for our growth to fall sometimes.

The more a person views life like this, he can notice the following. Every time he has a failure, he will be able to see that although he has fallen, it is much less of a fall than his previous fallouts. This is because he has grown in between the last failure and the current failure. Now he's at a higher point, so he doesn't fall as much as he used to.

It is written in Tehillim, "*Because I sit in darkness, Hashem is my light.*" It is precisely a period of darkness in our life which helps us realize that Hashem is our light, that we rely on Hashem to help us. If not for going through the darkness, we would never see Hashem as our light. It is only darkness that makes us recognize light.

Most of the failures we go through in our life – our failures in spirituality – are actually not failures, from an inner viewpoint. They are all constructive. They help us grow and realize how much we need Hashem to help us progress.

All people go through times which take them out of their normal routine in life. How should one look at this? We must still realize that Hashem is holding us up.

(We are not discussing here someone who drops Torah and mitzvos because he's going through a dismal period; that is not part of the discussion here. We are rather discussing someone whose general routine in life has been disrupted, and he continues to keep Torah and mitzvos as he should, but he's just feeling very down and dismal, because he has been taken out of his normal routine).

The biggest failure in history was Adam's sin. He had one avodah to do – not to eat from the tree – and he blew it. He failed. Avraham *Avinu* questioned Hashem, and he asked for a sign from Hashem that his descendants would be redeemed. He got punished for this. We see from this that even the greatest people in history had failures. Of course, we have no comprehension

of Adam HaRishon or Avraham *Avinu*, but one thing is for sure – to some degree, they had failures. So we all have failures; it's part of life. It's part of the growth process.

The View From Your Neshamah

We must gain the soul's perspective on things. Our *neshamah* (soul) can see from one end of the world to another; it has a higher sense of sight than our physical eyes see. Our soul gives us a whole new perspective on things, a whole new way to see things; it can show us how to ascend our limited physical view on life – which is that failures are simply “failures” – and instead realize that instead failures are part of how we grow.

If we gain our soul's perspective, the entire way we live our life will change. It enables us to leave the materialistic viewpoint and transcend time, and instead go above time, entering eternity.

These are not mere words; they are a description of *how to view reality*.

The only ‘failure’ there is in Creation is the fact that people do not have the soul's viewpoint! They remain confined to their past failures, and they live in their failures, and they don't know how to transcend the time and place they are in.

If a person has only a superficial perspective and he lives in Bnei Brak, let's say, he thinks “I live in Bnei Brak.” He doesn't know how to go beyond that perspective; he confines himself to times and places. Most people are like this, and this is the root “failure” that is going on in Creation.

Realize that you are a *neshamah*, a soul, which existed already before this world came about. You are not confined to the various failures that you go through on this world. The other nations of the world, who do not have a *neshamah*, do not have this power to transcend places and times. Only a Jew, who has a *neshamah*, can see beyond this world, and thus realize that he can rise above all his failures, and not live in them.

In Conclusion

May we merit from Hashem to gain the perspective from our *neshamah*, and more so, that our *neshamah* should shine in our life. Through that, we will have a whole different perspective towards our failures. We can then come to realize that just as Hashem revives the dead and returns the soul to the body, so can He return the light of our soul to our body, where we can gain the soul's perspective on things.

This is how we can come to “lean” on Hashem after we fall – by having the soul’s perspective. What you went through in 5773 is not all there is to your existence. You were around since the beginning of the world, and you will continue to exist in the future, when there will be the Next World, the coming of Moshiach, and the revival of the dead. With this perspective, you leave your confines to the present time, and you realize that your failures of the past don’t have to affect you.

039 | *Before We Get Sick*²⁹

רופא חולים - We mention in the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* that Hashem is the Healer of the sick.

The *Gemara* says that a doctor is given special permission from Hashem to heal. When Avraham Avinu was sick, a special angel from Hashem was sent to heal him. That was a physical kind of sickness. But there is another kind of sickness one can have; let us reflect.

When Hashem heals a person, how does He heal him? A doctor heals a person using various medicines. But how does Hashem Himself heal us?

Chazal say that Hashem always provides the remedy before the illness. *Chazal* also say that the *Shechinah* is at the foot of the bed of an ill person. If a person feels this, he will be able to have the “remedy that comes before the illness”.

If a person doesn't remind himself of the *Shechinah* when he is sick – if he forgets about his relationship with Hashem – then all he thinks about his discomfort, his loss of money since he's not going to work, and other things that he's missing out from by being sick.

When a person is sick, the *Shechinah* is near his bedside, as *Chazal* say. In other words, being sick is an opportunity to be closer to Hashem, and if a person would feel this, he would get healed by Hashem Himself.

Usually, when people get sick, they simply get busy with doctors. They place too much emphasis on the physical aspect of being sick, and they forget about this concept of *Shechinah*. People instead think of this statement of *Chazal* as intellectual knowledge, but they don't actually feel this way when they are sick. If a person doesn't feel that the *Shechinah* is with him when he is sick, the *Shechinah* indeed will not be with him.

A person needs to reveal his soul. Without revealing the soul, a person might keep all the mitzvos, but when it comes to having *emunah* in Hashem, he knows intellectually that he must have *emunah* in Hashem and he “gets *chizuk*”, but he doesn't actually feel Hashem next to him.

²⁹ The Rov gave a similar shiur a few months after this one, Tefillah #070: Hashem Is Our Doctor, which contains similar material to this shiur, but with a few additional points. In relation to this shiur, refer also to *Da Es Menuchasecha\ Search For Serenity: Coping With Illness*.

But there is a kind of life a person can live in which the knowledge of Hashem is not just a knowledge, but he can feel it. When a person is sick, his body gets weakened, and it is an opportunity for a person to feel his soul more. It is easier to access our soul when our body gets weakened. *Chazal* say that the older a Torah scholar gets, the more serene he becomes; the meaning of this is that since his body weakens with age, he is more in touch with his soul, and his soul is more revealed. He becomes more serene.

Unfortunately, most people, when they get sick, do not use the opportunity. Instead, they feel their body's hold on them even more...

When a person gets sick, and he feels weak, he often like his body has totally taken over, and he feels helpless, with such a weakened body. It is then an opportunity for him to reflect about what life is about. To think about what spirituality is. To think about how much more he needs to do in his spiritual mission on this world.

When a person is asleep, imagination takes over, and he has dreams. Dreams reveal to a person what's going on inside his subconscious, but it's not a clear image, because it's still imagination. But when a person is sick, he can get to know what's really going on inside himself, by reflecting about his life and ask himself if he is living a life of truth. His mind is clearer then, unlike a person in a dream, who is imagining things.

When a person is sick, his weakened body makes his mind clearer, and it is an opportunity for a person to get into his mind and what's really going on in it: What he really wants out of life, what he needs to do with his life – and if he has been living life in the right way until now.

This is the meaning of how the *Shechinah* is revealed to a sick person. The more a person reflects when he's sick, about the truth of life - the more revelation of the *Shechinah* he merits. Being sick reveals to a person what he's really all about inside.

And the more *Shechinah* a person merits, the more he merits to get healed from Hashem – and the less effort he will have to make in going to doctors and getting healed.

Every person, even the greatest *tzaddik*, has a physical body, and therefore, to some degree, even the greatest *tzaddik* in the world is affected by his body. Rav Dessler calls this the concept of “body shadow” (*tzeil haguf*), that even the greatest *tzaddikim*, who are very in touch with their souls, are still somewhat hampered by the physical body. But when a person is sick, he now has the opportunity to leave his body's hold on him and instead identify more with his soul.

A sick person is called a *choleh*, from the word *chalal*, empty space. This alludes to the *chalal*, the void that is in Creation – the concept that people are missing a connection with Hashem.

Thus, being sick is a time and opportunity for a person to leave his void – his lack of connection with Hashem – and now increase his *emunah* in Hashem.

When a person gets sick, he should of course make effort to go the doctor. As *Chazal* say, permission is given to doctors to heal. But he should also make sure to increase his *emunah* at the same time. It is an opportunity to discover *emunah*.

No matter how young or old a person is, and no matter what his illness is, being sick is a time to access our *emunah* in Hashem. Being sick shows us that we have a *chalal*, a void in our soul, a lack of connection of Hashem. It is a message from Hashem for us to increase our relationship with Him and fill that void.

These days, they heal animals too. When we get healed by doctors, do we want to get healed just as they apply medicine to animals...? Being sick is not just a time to seek healing for our body. It is a time to work on our *emunah*, to realize that although Hashem gives permission to doctors to heal, we must simultaneously work on our *emunah* in Hashem, that He is the source of all healing.

We should think about this even before we get sick, and not wait until we get sick in order to work on this.

May we all merit to have the *Shechinah*, a complete healing – and may all the sick in the Jewish people merit it.

040 | *Escaping The Self-Imposed Prison*

Hashem Frees From Captivity

In the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we say that Hashem is **מתיר אסורים**— He “frees the imprisoned”. We also make a morning blessing each day of **ברוך אתה הי אלוקינו מלך העולם, מתיר אסורים**— “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the world, Who frees captives.”

A simple kind of jail is a physical kind of jail, such as the jail that Yosef was imprisoned in. When a person goes to sleep at night, it’s also like being in jail. When a person goes to sleep, the *sefarim hakedoshim* state that all the parts of soul enter the heart. It is written, “*I am asleep, but my heart is awake.*” Our heart stays awake as we sleep, because it contains our soul, and our soul never sleeps. Therefore, we thank Hashem in the morning when we say the blessing of **מתיר אסורים**, because Hashem frees our soul from its captivity.

Let us reflect on this concept of **מתיר האסורים** what it means to be in “jail.”

The Jail Of The Body Over The Soul

The ultimate kind of ‘jail’ is the fact that our *neshamah* (soul) is in our body. Our *neshamah* came from Heaven, and it did not want to come down here. Our *neshamah* was placed by force into the body, and it feels that it has become enslaved to the body.³⁰ If anyone is in touch with his *neshamah*, he can feel like he is in a jail, that his *neshamah* is imprisoned by the body. He feels like the possuk, “*I am a stranger in this land.*”

Shabbos – When Our Neshamah Goes Free From The Body

When it comes Shabbos, we are able to enjoy spiritual pleasure and experience the light of our *neshamah*. One of the Shabbos *Zemiros* is, “*Then [on Shabbos] you will rejoice in Hashem.*” Shabbos is called *yoma d’nishmasa*, the “day of the *neshamah*”. The true *oneg* (pleasure) of Shabbos is that we can experience our *neshamah*’s pleasure in Hashem. The only reason why we have good food on Shabbos is to pacify our body and include it in the joy of Shabbos, but the

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real pleasure of Shabbos is our *neshamah's* joy in Hashem, which is the special opportunity of Shabbos.

We have described so far two kinds of jail – when the soul is imprisoned in our body as we go to sleep, and when the soul feels imprisoned by the body in jail. These are both extreme kinds of jail, and not everyone feels it. But there is a third kind of jail, which applies to any kind of person, which we will now discuss.

The Inner Imprisonment – Forming Erroneous Beliefs

Each of us have different *de'os* (opinions) and *middos* (character traits). All of our various *de'os* and *middos* we have are actually like being imprisoned in a jail! There are people who are imprisoned by their various erroneous beliefs they have in their life. These can be beliefs they absorb from the particular sect of Judaism they are found in, or because of various beliefs they developed on their own. When this kind of person meets a person with different beliefs, he cannot understand how another person can act differently than what he thinks is right. “It has to be the way I think”, this person feels. He feels that only **his** opinions in life are right, and that everyone else who disagrees with him are wrong.

What happens to such a person in his life? As a person gets older and he has a family, he realizes that things don't always go **his** way. He has a wife and children, and he realizes that he can't always get what he wants, that he doesn't control things. He gets a really frustrated whenever the members of his household don't do like **he** wants.

(Sometimes he indeed goes through a very painful situation in the household – when a child doesn't want to be religious. But we won't address this problem. We will address a different kind of situation: when a child takes a different path of *Yiddishkeit* (religious, Torah Judaism) that the father doesn't approve of.)

If the father is a very strong-minded person and he thinks that only his way in *Yiddishkeit* is the way to follow, he gets tremendously agonized from with child, who is taking a different path than the one which he wanted him to follow. Or, let's say, the child isn't learning as much as the father would like him to. The father suffers from this, because he expects his child to learn more – the child isn't conforming to “**his**” rules and expectations.

People develop various beliefs about life, that “it has to be this way”, and their whole household has to suffer from these beliefs. The house becomes like a jail! The house will be run like a jail – everyone has to conform to the beliefs which this father has formed. The father feels, “It *has* to be my way”.

Let's say a person has a few children, and he decides that "In my house, you have to make a *siyum* (complete a tractate of the Talmud) when you become *bar mitzvah*." So his first child makes a *siyum* upon his *bar mitzvah*, then his second child becomes *bar mitzvah* and makes a *siyum*, then his third child, then his fourth child. Then his fifth child comes and doesn't make a *siyum*, for whatever reason. The father can't fall to sleep since he feels, "What's going on over here? My child is going against **my** *mesorah* (tradition)!!"

This father decided that his children have to make a *siyum* upon their *bar mitzvah*; this is one of his beliefs about life. Therefore, his children have to suffer from him...

Besides for how this affects the home, a person can also develop a problem in which he is imprisoned inside himself, when he has to conform to a certain way which isn't meant for him to be like.

Each of our *Avos* (forefathers) were different. Did Yitzchok *Avinu* have to do exactly what Avraham *Avinu* did? Did Yaakov *Avinu* have to do what Yitzchok *Avinu* did? No. Each of the *Avos* had their own unique way. Avraham *Avinu's* path was *chessed* (kindness). Yitzchok *Avinu* took a different path – *yirah* (awe). Yaakov took a different path, *emes* (truth). Our own *Avos* did **not** follow the "*mesorah*" of their own fathers!

Of course, we all have to keep the Torah. "The Torah will not be exchanged." But each of us has our own individual role in the Jewish people, and one's individuality needs to be expressed - not suppressed.

Each of us has our own private aspirations, and we each have to be ourselves. We have to be **ourselves** in our *ruchniyus*. A person has to learn Torah in a way that defines his personality, and he has to *daven* in a way that defines his personality. A person has to do *mitzvos* and be himself when he does the *mitzvos*. The Torah should never be compromised as *Chazal* state: "This Torah will never be exchanged." A person, however, still has to be *himself* when it comes to his own *ruchniyus*- not what others try to mold him into.

The *de'os* (formed beliefs) that a person develops can put himself in his own inner imprisonment, and he also causes others to suffer. If others aren't doing what he believes in, then he sees others as "separating from society". He might even think this way even if most people don't do like him.

"This is how it is done in the family," he feels. If he gets a new son-in-law or a new daughter-in-law in his family, he makes them do things the way it's done in his house, because "This is how it's done in this family. Therefore, you must conform." There are people who lay down all

sorts of rules to their newly married children-in-law and give them very specific “rules” of what they have to do now, now that they have married into his family...all kinds of rules.

Such behavior greatly weakens the relationship between the father and the children. People do this stubbornly, all in the name of “It’s a *minhag* in Yisrael, which is Torah.” If others don’t do like his *minhag*, he views them as doing the wrong thing. This is an inner kind of imprisonment that a person places himself in! The person confines others to his rules simply because “This is how it has to be”, since he is firm in his beliefs.

People turn their formed beliefs into matters which they consider are the most important in *Yiddishkeit*; often people make up all kinds of silly ‘*minhagim*’ that their family has to follow and they confuse their children in the process.

Getting Our Priorities Straight

What, indeed, is the main thing we must emphasize in *Yiddishkeit*? The main things are Torah, closeness to Hashem, to love Hashem, to do *mitzvos*, to do *chessed* – and in a *true* way. Those should be our priorities in *Yiddishkeit*. Often, the matters which should **really** be important to us usually evade us - while the various formed beliefs people have in their *Yiddishkeit* are what they place emphasis on, and often these are silly kinds of ‘*minhagim*’ which they feel that others need to do.

Of course, as we said, the Torah can never be compromised – that is, if it is a *minhag* which clearly comes from our Sages. But this is only if it is a *minhag* based on holiness, not on some empty “*minhag*” that a person comes up with which he believes others have to do.

We are living in a generation of a new kind of ‘jail’. Our soul is imprisoned in our body, but now we have another kind of jail in this generation – that people are imprisoned in their various *de’os*\beliefs they have formed. It’s nothing less than a jail.

Imprisoned By Personal Weakness

Until now we spoke of how a person’s *de’os* (opinions\formed beliefs). Earlier, we mentioned that a person can also get imprisoned by his own *middos*. Now we will explain how people get imprisoned by their *middos* (personality\character traits) as well.

Each of us possess *middos* that haven’t yet been perfected. Besides for the fact that we have a general *avodah* to work on our *middos*, we each have particular *middos* that are imprisoning us when they are left unfixed.

For example, a person can be obsessed with running after *kavod* (honor). It's not just that he wants *kavod*; it goes more than that. His entire life is centered around how he can always get more *kavod*.

When his daughter enters *shidduchim*, he is interested solely in one thing – that his daughter should marry into a certain dignified family, so that he will receive a lot of honor from the *shidduch*. From the time his daughter is young, the father might have his eyes on a certain family which is known in the community as a very prominent family, which he hopes to marry his daughter off to. Therefore, no other family is good enough for him.

He also decides that his daughter has to live in a certain community, even if he knows if it's not good for her. "Too bad. Let her figure it out how to survive", he feels.

He decides that his son has to learn in a certain *yeshivah*, *even if not's good for the child*, because it's considered a prominent *yeshivah*. But he is told that his child won't succeed in that *yeshivah*! "Too bad", he thinks. "The main thing is the honor I will get from it - that everyone knows that my child is in this prominent *yeshivah*. His success in learning will eventually come; honor doesn't come so fast." That's what he thinks.

He sends his children to certain *yeshivos* because it will look better for his children's *shidduchim*, even if he knows those schools aren't good for his children. All his decisions are centered around what will give him the most *kavod*.

These are just a few examples of how a person's life can be **entirely** centered around one bad *middah* that he has. My point here is not that we have to fix our bad *middos* and our weaknesses; that is also true. We all have certain bad *middos* and reoccurring weaknesses which we need to fix. My point is rather that a person can be living in a prison-like kind of life, because he becomes imprisoned to that particular bad *middah* which is dominant in his life. It's a different point. Our worst weaknesses don't just cause us to do the wrong thing every once in a while - they can be ruling our entire life, keeping us in a kind of inner imprisonment.

Going Free From Inner Imprisonment

We must wish to go free from all the imprisonment which we put ourselves into. Of course, we need to make sure that we are always keeping the Torah. The Torah's rules are clearly the kind of confinement that we need in our life and help us live a good life.

But if someone searches for truth, we must realize how many kinds of superficial beliefs that we have incorporated into our life. Imagine how your life would look like if all those formed beliefs in your life would go away. It would be like going free from a jail!

Again, let me emphasize that there are some things which we can never compromise. Anything we do which is clearly the will of Hashem is genuine Torah, and those things we do should not be given up for anything, no matter how confined it makes us feel. This is a kind of confinement we need, and we should accept it lovingly, because it is good for us. There are also some rules that we improvised which are indeed needed in our life.

But if we want to leave our inner imprisonment – the extra rules we placed on our life which are not really necessary according to the Torah – then imagine how your life would look like without all those rules you placed on yourself. Then, go through each of the rules you came up with in your life, and analyze each one of them, and think about how much each of them are **truly necessary** to keep, or if they are just formed beliefs that are only imprisoning you.

We will then be able to mean the words when we say each morning, **מתיר אסורים**. May we merit help from Hashem to go free from the unnecessary imprisonment we place upon ourselves, together with accepting the Torah's rules with love. May we merit from Hashem to truly *be ourselves* – this is the true meaning of **מתיר אסורים**.

041 | *Believing In Resurrection*

Death, Sleep and the Future Resurrection

עפר ומקיים אמונתו לשיני עפר – We express in *Shemoneh Esrei* our belief that Hashem will awaken the dead in the future, those who are “asleep in the earth.” We believe in the future resurrection of the dead, which is one of our 13 principle beliefs.

Those who died are referred to as those who “sleep” in the earth – שיני עפר. *Chazal* say that sleep is a sixtieth of death. But those who are dead are described as those who are “sleeping” in the ground.

The curse of death was that man’s body returns to the earth after he dies. Besides for the fact that the body is buried in the earth, it also “sleeps” in the earth, until it is resurrected in the future. What does it mean that the body “sleeps” in the earth?

Those who are resurrected in the future are those who were never really “dead” in the first place – they were merely “asleep” in the ground until they were revived. When a person goes to sleep, it’s a temporary kind of death, as *Chazal* explain that sleep is a sixtieth of death.

If someone doesn’t believe in the future resurrection, *Chazal* say that he doesn’t get up in the future. Such a person is truly “dead” in the future. Someone who believed in the future resurrection, by contrast, will be revived in the future, and he was merely “asleep” in the ground until then. When a person believes in the future revival, his death is merely a state of “sleep”, not death.

Nighttime was given to us to go to sleep. What keeps us alive as we go to sleep? In essence, learning Torah can keep us alive at night if we learn it at night, because we are commanded to learn Torah both by day and by night. But we all have to go to sleep, as we know from the Rambam, that every person needs his sleep. So what keeps us alive when we go to sleep at night?

Our *emunah* is what keeps us alive. “*And the righteous shall live by his faith.*” When we are “dead” – when we are asleep – we can be “alive”, because our *emunah* keeps us alive. Those who get up in the future will become alive again, because their *emunah* in the future resurrection is the very power that will revive them back to life. This is the depth of why those who don’t believe in the future resurrection won’t merit to be resurrected, while those who did believe in the resurrection will merit to be resurrected.

The Two Parts To Having Emunah in Hashem

The basic level of our *emunah* is to believe that Hashem runs our life. The second part of our *emunah* is to believe that Hashem can take us out of any situation in life - since Hashem is running everything, every last detail, without exception. Without having this *emunah* – or when this *emunah* is only intellectual and not yet in one’s **heart** – a person doesn’t feel that Hashem is with him, and that is a deathlike kind of existence. Being connected with Hashem is a life; when a person isn’t connected with Hashem in his life, his life is death.

When a person goes to sleep and his soul leaves his body, he is kept alive with the belief that Hashem keeps him alive. When this *emunah* is active in one’s life, a person receives his life-sustaining energy throughout the day as well.

A person also needs *emunah* regarding his future so that Hashem can take him out of any situation. Not only do we believe in our general future – that Hashem will bring the redemption – but that He can take us out of our own personal future “situations”. We believe in the general resurrection which will be in the future – and we also must have *emunah* that Hashem can give us life, now, in our own personal life. It is written, ‘*And Your faith at nights*’ – even when we are going through “night”, a time of darkness in our life, our *emunah* in Hashem can take us out of all darkness.

This is the depth of believing in the future resurrection. Not only must we believe that Hashem will revive the dead in the future, but that Hashem can take you out of your current situation. These are the two parts to our *emunah* in the resurrection which have great ramifications in our life. When we have *emunah* (in our *daas*/awareness of the *lev*/heart) that Hashem can always uplift us from wherever we are, we can soar to greatness.

Emunah That We Can Reach High Levels

There are many rungs in our ladder of growth which the Sage Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair lists [which is the outline of *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*]. We start with *zehirus* (watchfulness) *zerizus* (zeal), *nekiyus* (cleanliness) etc. all the way until *techiyas hameisim* (revival of the dead) and *ruach hakodesh*. Is there anyone who believes he can get to the top of the ladder of growth, to get to *techiyas hameisim*? People are skeptical. But the key is to access the depth of our *emunah* in *techiyas hameisim*. When we believe in the deeper meaning of *techiyas hameisim* - when we believe that Hashem can take us and lift us up beyond our current situation - then we will be able to get there!

A person takes a look at these spiritual levels and immediately despairs: “How do you reach ‘*taharah*’ (purity) these days, in an impure world like this?”

But we must believe, with all the depths of our soul, that we can get to the highest levels of spiritual growth. If the Sage Rabbi Pinchas Yair tells us that these are the steps in our ladder of growth, then we can do it. We just need to firmly believe that we can do it.

To have this *emunah* really requires *bittul hadaas* (to nullify our regular intellect) on our part. People who hear these words might think, “This speaker doesn’t understand. He doesn’t realize what this generation is about. He doesn’t realize what kind of impure world we live in, that it’s simply impossible for us these days to reach such high levels such as *techiyas hameisim*...”

But Hashem said, “*I am Hashem, and I do not change.*” Hashem’s existence never changes; He “was, is, and always will be.” Just as He was with the *Avos* and with all the souls of every *tzaddik* in every generation, so is He with anyone who searches for Him. “*He is close to those who call out to Him in truth.*” (*Tehillim*: 145). It doesn’t matter what time we live in; we can always connect with Hashem, as long as we truly search to be close to Him, and then He will be with us.

The revival of the dead is not just an event that will happen in the future. By having *emunah* in the resurrection, it can affect you even today. Our logic doesn’t agree with this, of course. Our logic tells us that it’s simply impossible these days to reach high spiritual levels, such as meriting your own personal *techiyas hameisim*. Our logic is telling us to remain satisfied with just “a little” Torah, “a little” *Tefillah*, “a little *emes*” in your life. **No!** Our souls need to aspire for perfection! Search for the truth, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* says in the beginning. If we only listen to our rational logic, we will give up, but if we have *emunah* – which goes higher than our logic – we can believe that we have a *neshamah*, which is pure, which is a “piece of Hashem.”

Believe in this – **truly** believe in it, and not just superficially. If you really believe you are a *neshamah*, you will be able to reach the highest rung of the spiritual ladder.

If you constantly live with this belief, you will be able to withstand even your lowliest and worst situations. Not even death will stop you, because you will be able to believe firmly that you will come out of death one day in the future, with *techiyas hameisim*. But this will only work if you truly believe that Hashem can take you out of any situation and help you succeed in any situation.

Leaving A Sleepy Mind Through Emunah

The Vilna *Gaon* says that when a person sleeps, his imagination takes over. When the soul leaves the body, the holy thoughts of the body leave with it, so imagination takes over instead. That is the definition of sleep – it is a situation of imagination taking over. Thus, imagination is whenever we are “asleep.”

Even when a person is physically awake, he can be asleep, if he’s not using his power of thought enough. Most people are sleeping as they are awake! This is why there is a great lack of *daas* in today’s times. It is because most people are asleep even as they are awake – their whole day is being spent in their imagination!

The more we get in touch with our *neshamah*, which contains our power of holy thought, the more we can overcome the imagination and start being more “awake” to the reality, which is to have *emunah* in Hashem. We must have *emunah* that the light of our *neshamah* can be revealed, which will enable us to soar to the highest levels. We must believe that we have a *neshamah* in us, and that it can transcend all of our human limits, no matter what situation we are found in.

So we need to have *emunah* in Hashem, and in addition, we need to believe that we are a *neshamah*. Believe that there is a *neshamah* (and it resides in your brain).

How Emunah Affects Our Torah Learning

Of course, we also need to learn Torah and fix our *middos* too, besides having *emunah*. I don’t mean to negate this, but the more we have *emunah*, the more the light of our *neshamah* will shine, and this will have a direct result on our Torah learning and *middos*.

This is what separates a Jew from a non-Jew – a Jew has a *neshamah*. Otherwise, a non-Jew sitting down to learn Torah can understand it just as much as a Jew can. What’s the difference between a Jew sitting down to learn and a non-Jew who sits down to learn Torah? It is because a Jew has a *neshamah* - thus, a Jew’s Torah learning is a whole different kind of understanding in the Torah. This helps us understand how revealing our *neshamah* changes the way we learn Torah.

You should know that even most people who are sitting and learning Torah all day are only using their regular intellect to learn Torah, and they aren’t in touch with the higher intellect of their *neshamah*. The intellect we start out with in life is not the same kind of intellect that our *neshamah* has. The intellect we start out with in life is a mind that is physical. Only our *neshamah* can access the true understanding of the Torah – the Torah that is *Torah Ohr*, a “Torah of light”.

If we have *emunah* that Hashem can take us out of any situation, we will receive *siyata d'shamaya* to reveal our *neshamah*, and then our entire Torah learning will look different.

May we merit to reach the kind of Torah that is *Torah Ohr*, the understanding in Torah that comes when we access our *neshamah*. This is the true meaning of ומקיים אמונתו לשיני עפר—those who merit to become truly “resurrected.”

042 | What It Means To Have Good Middos

Our Avodah To Resemble Hashem's Middos

מי כמוך בעל גבורות ומי דומה לך “Who is as mighty as You, and Who can resemble You?” We express how nobody is as *mighty* as Hashem, and that it is impossible for anyone to *resemble* Hashem.

What is the difference between these two terms? Why do we split this into two separate expressions of praise – first we say Hashem is mighty, and then we say that no one is comparable to Hashem?

Another question is that on one hand, we state here in *Shemoneh Esrei* that nobody can compare to Hashem. Yet, we also know that we have a general *avodah* to “resemble” Hashem – “*hevay domeh Lo*”, “You shall resemble Him”, through cleaving to the good *middos* of Hashem. This is a seeming contradiction.

Understanding Our Middos

[To know the answer to this, we must know the answer to a different question.]

[We just mentioned the concept that we are supposed to get our *middos* to resemble the *middos* of Hashem.] Why indeed must we acquire good *middos*? Does logic require us to work on our *middos*, because we are supposed to act with basic *derech erez* (good manners), or is it because we are supposed to come to resemble Hashem?

Where do our *middos* come from? We have “good *middos*” which come from our *nefesh habehaimis* (our lower, “animalistic” layer of our soul) and we also have good *middos* which come from our *lev* – our heart.³¹

The “good *middos*” which come from our *nefesh habehaimis* are the *middos* which come from man’s aspect of *adamah* \earth; these *middos* are simply *derech erez*, and they are *middos* which come the lower part of our soul.

³¹ as explained in the beginning of *Sefer Tanya* that our good *middos* come from the right chamber of the heart.

But the higher part of our soul is in our heart, and this is the source of our higher “good *middos*”. Hashem is able to dwell in our heart; our heart is clearly the higher part of man. The *middos* which stem from our heart are the *middos* which we can be improved to resemble Hashem.

These are the two kinds of *middos* we have. The first kind of good *middos* are what we recognize as required “*derech erez*”, to act with decent and proper behavior. This is the kind of good *middos* that *Chazal* say that we would have been able to learn from certain animals, had the Torah not been given. So these good *middos* are *middos* which even animals possess – hence they are called the *middos* of our *nefesh habehaimis*, the “animal” part of our soul.

Woe is to the person who only has good *middos* that even animals possess! These are *middos* that non-Jews can possess – they are good *middos*, but they are merely “*derech Eretz*”, and even animals possess them. If a Jew **only** develops these kinds of good *middos*, then he hasn’t developed the depth of his *middos*; he possesses mere *derech erez* – which even animals can have.

There is a famous statement of *Chazal*, “Wisdom is found among the nations” (*Chochmah B’Goyim Taamin*). We must know what this statement means, however. There are many Jews today who unfortunately base their entire lives on this statement of *Chazal*, and they draw all their wisdom in life from non-Jewish knowledge. Thus, we have to know how to apply every statement of our *Chazal*, where and when it applies to; so we must know very well how to apply the statement of *Chazal* that “wisdom is found among the nations”, and what this really means!

We must be aware that we have higher *middos* in ourselves than the *middos* which non-Jews are capable of. We have in us higher *middos* that are able to resemble the *middos* of Hashem, and these are a whole different kind of “good *middos*” than the “good *middos*” which come from our *nefesh habehaimis*. [Therefore, we cannot learn about our *middos* from non-Jewish psychology about the soul.]

Psychology and Therapy Today

Even more so, the knowledge about our lower *middos* cannot apply to how we develop our higher *middos*. The lower *middos*, which are in our *nefesh habehaimis*, can be affected by our *nefesh Elohis* and become improved. But whatever we know about the *nefesh habehaimis* cannot help us develop the higher *middos* of our *Nefesh Elohis*.

There are people now from within our own people- I don’t want to say their names - who are trying to educate *Klal Yisrael* about the *nefesh habehaimis*, that we must all learn about what the *nefesh habehaimis* is. They want Jews to learn about their *nefesh habehaimis* by learning about the

nefesh habehaimis of a non-Jew. **These people are uprooting our basic beliefs and lowering the Jewish people to the level of animals!**

There is a famous saying of the Chasam Sofer³² that we cannot bring proof even a non-Jew's body to how we work with a Jew's body. How much more so does this apply to our souls – we can't learn about what a Jew's soul is from learning about a non-Jew's soul.

If we want to help a Jew develop his soul – whether we want to know about how to build our own soul, or whether we want to give therapy to a Jew who is going through stress – we can't learn about this from knowing the psychology of a non-Jew's soul. It is a very unfortunate situation that is occurring today, that Jews are being taught psychology about the non-Jewish soul so they can understand how the soul works. A non-Jew's soul doesn't teach us about a Jew's soul!! Only the Rambam was able to study the souls of non-Jews and see which of the information could apply to us and which information could not.

The Two Stages of How A Jew Can Improve His Character

When we want to work to improve ourselves, we must realize that we have two parts in ourselves. The lower “good *middos*” in ourselves, which stem from our *nefesh habehaimis*, are the good *middos* which help us become a decent, “good” person. The higher *middos* in us are the part in us which helps us become **closer to Hashem** - through having good *middos*.

It is not enough to want to be a “good person”; a Jew has to become close to Hashem, and being a “good person” doesn't always mean that he will aspire for closeness to Hashem. Therefore, to be a “good person” is a desire that comes from our *nefesh hebahaimis*, and it is not all there is to our good *middos*. Ultimately, we must become close to Hashem, and this utilizes the higher *middos* of our *Nefesh Elokis*.

If we want to work on our *middos*, practically speaking, we will need to first develop the lower part of our soul in order to get to the higher part of our soul. If we skip over developing the lower layer of the soul – if we neglect the development of our *nefesh hebahaimis* - we won't be able to get close to Hashem. A person who wants to get close to Hashem, without first becoming a basically “good person”, is being delusional. We first have to become a “good person”, to begin with and then we can reach higher into our soul and become close to Hashem.

For example, let's say a person doesn't speak *lashon hora* (gossip). Why shouldn't we speak *lashon hora*? Our soul should naturally recoil from speaking *lashon hora*, even if we aren't yet

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perfected in our character and we're not yet closer to Hashem through having refined *middos*. At a later stage, we can come close to Hashem through not speaking *lashon hora*, but first, we need to reach a basic level, in which we naturally recoil from *lashon hora*, because we should feel that we need to first become a “good person” – and we should feel that speaking *lashon hora* simply prevents us from being a “good person.”

So first, we need to develop a basic desire to become a “good person”. We should recoil from bad *middos*, simply because we want to become a good person.

However, this is only half the job. We must not remain with just the good *middos* of being a “good person”, because just to be a “good person” alone doesn't get us close to Hashem. If we remain at the level of having good *middos* simply because we want to become a “good person”, we are remaining at the level of *nefesh habehaimis*.

The next part of our *avodah*, then, is to reach the higher part in ourselves, our *Nefesh Elokis* – the source of our higher *middos*, which are the *middos* that bring us closer to Hashem. This is when we get our *middos* to resemble Hashem's *middos*. After the *middos* which come from our *nefesh habehaimis* are improved, the *middos* of our *Nefesh Elokis* can now be properly developed, and it is **these** higher *middos* which will help us become closer to Hashem.

It is written, “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*” The only thing that speaks to our *Nefesh Elokis* is closeness to Hashem – that is the only thing that is truly “good”. A fundamental part of being close to Hashem is to have good *middos* that resemble Hashem's *middos*. If we have bad *middos* that are left unfixed, we can't get close to Hashem; our *middos* are like garments on top of us, so if we come to the King with bad *middos*, it's like walking into the Palace of the King wearing sackcloth. The perspective of the Torah is that our bad *middos* prevent us from being close to Hashem, thus, we must fix our *middos*. Our *Nefesh Elokis* seeks to work on our *middos* because our soul has a deep yearning to get close to Hashem, and part of that involves working on our *middos*.

This is different than the desire of our *nefesh habehaimis*, which seeks self-improvement simply to become a “good person”, but not as a means of becoming close to Hashem. Our *Nefesh Elokis* seeks perfected *middos* as a tool to a greater end – to reach closeness with Hashem, which is impossible to reach with unfixed *middos*.

Knowing Your Motivations In Self-Improvement

Therefore, if we want to work on ourselves, we need to know what our motivations are. Why are we seeking to work on our *middos*? We need to figure out what our real motivations are in

doing so. Do we simply want to become a “good person”...or is it because we want to have good *middos* so we will become closer to Hashem? That is the ultimate question a Jew needs to ask himself before he embarks on his journey of self-improvement.

Our Developed Good Middos Are A Spark of Hashem's Middos

We can now understand the following. As we said, our *nefesh habehaimis* can feel like it wants to be a “good person” and thus seek to improve its *middos*, while our *Nefesh Elohis* wants good *middos* because that will be a tool to get us close to Hashem. We have an avodah to get our *middos* to resemble Hashem's *middos*, thus, working on our *middos* should be for that goal.

But here comes a question. We say in *Shemoneh Esrei* that nobody compares to Hashem **וְאֵין דוֹמֵה לָךְ**. If so, how can we ever come to get our *middos* to resemble Hashem?

The answer is: We do not really understand our *middos*. Our real *middos* of our soul are really the *middos* of Hashem, which we do not understand, because they are G-dly in their essence. Hashem's *middah* of *rachamim* \compassion is what we must resemble, but we can only resemble the part of His *middah* which is within Creation. Beyond the compassion we need to have on others in Creation, we do not understand anything more about the *middah* of compassion, because Hashem's *middah* of *rachamim* goes way beyond the bounds of Creation.

Therefore, we can understand the following. *Chazal* say that at first, Hashem wanted to create the world with *middas hadin* (attribute of judgment), but in the end He created it with the *middas harachamim* (attribute of mercy), because He saw the world would not last with *middas hadin*. Do we have to resemble the *middas hadin* of Hashem, and get our strictness to resemble Hashem's strictness, just like we are supposed to resemble Hashem's mercy? Our Rabbis wrote that resembling Hashem applies only to the *middos* of *chesed* \kindness and *rachamim* \compassion, but not the *middas hadin*. Why? Because Hashem did not end up using His *middas hadin* to create the world. The original thought in Hashem's plan was to use *middas hadin* to create the world, but in the end, *middas hadin* was not used to create the world.

[This is the meaning of **לִּפְנֵי כְּבוֹד בְּעַל גְּבוּרָתוֹ וְאֵין דוֹמֵה לָךְ** first we praise the *gevurah* \might of Hashem, which refers to His *middas hadin*; we are not supposed to resemble the *middas hadin*. Thus, we say afterwards **וְאֵין דוֹמֵה לָךְ** even in the *middos* which we are supposed to resemble, the *middas harachamim* (trait of compassion), we still do not understand the *middos* of Hashem, and we can only resemble a mere sliver of Hashem's compassion, by having compassion on others in Creation).

Why We Work On Our Middos

These are matters which are relevant to anyone who seeks to work on his *middos* and he wants to do it in the sensible, Torah approach, to go about it with *daas* (the true understanding of matters, based upon the Torah). We can't just work on our *middos* without the proper understanding about what our *middos* are. The Vilna *Gaon* says that we live our life entirely to break our *middos* – therefore, we must really understand ourselves well in order to work on our *middos*.

We must realize that we have two parts to ourselves, the two sources for *middos*, which should not be confused with each other. These are fundamental understandings in how we work on our *middos*. First we must simply desire to become a “good person” and have refined character, but, we must not remain with this understanding. We must ultimately seek to become close to Hashem, and part of this requires you to work on your *middos*, to get your good *middos* to ‘resemble’ Hashem's *middos*. That is the proper perspective to have on working on our *middos*.³³

33 Refer to the author's Getting To Know Your Feelings for more on how to develop these concepts; see also Understanding Your Middos chapters #001 and chapter #016. (Refer also to Tefillah #094: Seeking Advice, and Derashos #0101: Knowing Your Soul.

043 | *Finding Renewal**Near-Death Experiences*

'מלך מחיית ומחי' – Hashem is the “King Who gives death and life.” We mention a few times in this blessing about how Hashem revives the dead, but here we add on another point: that Hashem also brings death.

Why is it necessary to mention that Hashem also brings upon death to a person? The simple answer to this is that we know that there are times in which a person can be dead and then be brought back to life. There are people who were considered to be clinically “dead” and they miraculously sprung back to life.

Revival From Spiritual Death

But the deeper meaning of 'מחיית ומחי' is as follows.

There are two kinds of “death” – physical death, and spiritual death. Physical death is when the soul/life spirit of a person leaves the body. But a person can experience times of spiritual death as well. This is when a person falls completely from a previous spiritual level.

Man in general is constantly “progressing forward” and then “retreating”, in a cycle; this is called *rotzoh v'shov* (running and returning). We go through good periods, which are called “Days of Love”, and we go through bad times, which are called “Days of Hate”³⁴; we keep passing through these two phases in a cycle. Sometimes we are doing well in our spirituality, and sometimes we are falling.

But sometimes, a person falls totally from his spiritual level. These are not “Days of Hate”; they are more extreme of a fall than the fall a person goes through during the “Days of Hate”. This is a kind of spiritual “death” that happens to a person. It happens when a person has totally lost his sense of vitality in life. The person feels like he is dead inside – when he feels like he has lost his feelings for *Avodas Hashem*.

³⁴ *Sefer HaYoshev of Rabbein Tam (Chapter 6). For more on this concept, see sefer Alei Shur Vol. I. Chapter 5, and Rosh Chodesh Avodah #03: Sivan: Taking Breaks*

Hashem breathed into man a *nefesh chayah* – a life-spirit, a soul that contains vitality; when a person loses his sense of vitality in life, he feels dead.

But Hashem is 'ממית ומחי' He revives the dead – Hashem can revive even those who are spiritually “dead” and bring them back to life.

Revival - Through Renewed Vitality

There is also a more subtle kind of spiritual death that can happen to a person: when a person wishes to return to something he once experienced that gave him *chiyus*, a sense of vitality - but he finds that he can't return to it.

Each of us has a source where we derive “*chiyus*” (inner vitality) from. Anyone who lives an inner kind of life gets vitality from an inner source – not from the physical world, but from the inner, spiritual world. But we must be aware of the following subtle point: It is impossible for a person to derive vitality from the same thing again. Our inner experiences are new and different each time; any inner experiences you once had, which previously gave you vitality, are not able to give you vitality any more.

This is the deeper meaning of 'ממית ומחי' – that in order for us to become revived again with life, our previous vitality ‘dies’, and then once again can become filled with renewed vitality from Hashem. Hashem gives us completely new vitality each time, and it is never a repeat from the past.

Seeking Vitality

It is impossible for a person to keep receiving vitality from the same thing. Even when a person learns Torah and he receives vitality from the same words he keeps learning, it is not the same vitality each time.

To give a stark example of the concept, we all go through various lifetimes. Each of our lifetimes are different each time. Our family we have now is not the same family we had in our previous lifetime (usually). This is because we never have the same “life” more than once. This example really illustrates the concept we are describing – it was a harsh example, but we had to use it in order to bring out the subtlety of this concept.

We are not able to derive vitality more than once from the very same thing. This is reminiscent of the concept of having *panim chadashos*, a “new face” – we need renewal.

A person is used to having a certain *seder* (routine) in life. He learns each day at a set time and has three times a day when he *davens*. But there is a part in our soul which seeks to ascend beyond our regular *seder* and receive new vitality. This is not just an aspiration to grow, but a desire to derive new kinds of vitality.

We want to feel alive inside from our life, but we don't want the same kind of feeling over again. We keep searching for a new feeling of vitality, not the same old vitality we are used to receiving. Our soul deep down senses that it cannot continue to derive vitality from the same old thing, therefore, it seeks new kinds of vitality.

There are people who are very idealistic when they are younger, and they were involved in spiritual growth, but then as time goes on their idealism weakens, and they stop aspiring. Before a boy in yeshiva gets married, he can be very full of aspirations to grow spiritually, but then after he gets married, he stops aspiring. His life becomes like a graveyard, because he loses his sense of vitality from his spiritual world. He yearns to return to the same kind of vitality he used to have, but this is impossible. He needs a new kind of vitality, and he won't be able to get it from the same thing anymore.

When people look for vitality in the same thing that always gave them vitality, this is a superficial search for vitality, and it will not provide a person with real vitality.

If you take a look at the world today, people are constantly trying to get “more” and “more” of the same. It's really because people want vitality. The mistake that people make is that they are seeking to gain vitality from whatever used to give them vitality, and they aren't searching for a new source of vitality. It is impossible for our soul to receive vitality from what used to give him vitality!

If someone really understands this concept, he will understand that life has to become a constant search for renewal to our vitality – to always seek vitality from a **new** source.

Even from the physical world we can see this concept. Yesterday is not here anymore; today is a new day. There is no way for us to return to yesterday; today, we need new vitality, which we did not have yesterday.

Refreshing Your Torah Learning

When a person learns the *Gemara*, and he sees the words of Abaye and Rava, it appears superficially to be the same words each time he sees them. But the truth is that you can find new

insights each time, in those very same old words. You can keep finding new things in the Torah you learn.

There are people who are always reviewing the Gemara; they can finish Shas and review it, again and again. But often, many people are just reviewing the words monotonously, and the words appear dead to them. They're just doing it for the sake of reviewing it, but not because they get vitality from the words! They are always reviewing the Gemara, but the words of the Gemara are dead to them. They don't see life in the "same old" words of the *Gemara* that they keep reviewing....

A truly aspiring person is someone who knows how to keep finding renewal in his learning.

Evil Renewal

Renewal is also a power that can be used for evil, however. In the material world, people are seeking renewal in all kinds of new and exotic products that hit the market – all kinds of "new" tastes. Every ability can be used either for holiness or evil; when people constantly seek new tastes in the materialistic world, it is the power of renewal being used for evil.

Seeing the "Same Old" As "New"

A person needs renewal when it comes to his spiritual world. This doesn't necessarily mean that when a person sits down to learn a *Gemara* that he should come up with a new *p'shat* (understanding) of the *Gemara*. It means that a person has to always feel a renewed sense of vitality in his life, a completely new source of vitality. It makes a person feel alive inside. Every moment, we can find new vitality that wasn't here the moment before.

(I hope that those listening to this don't think that they have to merely "acquire" this concept as another "good *middah*". This is not about acquiring another good *middah* or quality. It is about how you can feel more alive inside.)

There is a basic kind of inner vitality we can have, and then there is an even more inner kind of vitality we can have. When a person searches to have more Torah, mitzvos, and closeness to Hashem – and all other spiritual qualities to have – this comes from the soul's need to search for vitality. Our soul searches for vitality.

But we must know the following important point: we cannot derive new vitality from something if we never derived vitality from it in the first place.

It is written, “*Hashem renews in His goodness, every day, constantly, the act of Creation.*” Hashem is constantly renewing Creation – therefore, we can keep deriving new vitality from the same things we see. This is an ability our soul has to look at things always with a renewed perspective, thus we can always derive new kinds of vitality from everything – because everything can always be “new” to us.

For example, there are people who constantly buy new *sefarim*. It gives them vitality. Why do people have to keep buying new *sefarim*? There are plenty of *sefarim* in the house. A person is really able to discover new things in them each time! The “same old” *sefarim* that are in a person’s house for the last 70 years can always be “new” *sefarim* to a person, as long as he discovers new things in those *sefarim*. The very same page of a *sefer*, the very paragraph and lines of a *sefer*, can always give you new insights.

If people would know this, they wouldn’t feel a new to always buy more *sefarim*, because they would always be able to find something new in their old *sefarim*. You don’t need new *sefarim* to give you renewal; you can find renewal in the same *sefarim* that have always been in your house.

True, you don’t always see something new in it when you learn. But if you learn the same thing 100 times, maybe at the 100th time you’ll discover a completely new insight you were never aware of, or maybe in the 101st time it will happen....

The point of these words is that often people are searching for new vitality when they haven’t even gotten past the first basic level of finding vitality. A person thinks it’s time to move on and seek something new, when he hasn’t gotten past the first step yet. The *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) employs this tactic to get people to always acquire “more” and “more” spiritual levels,³⁵ when in reality the person hasn’t even gotten past the elementary stages. When people want “more” and “more” this is not a search for true renewal.

We have described here a very subtle point in our soul. The words here might not be understandable at all to those who hear it. But if the concept here is absorbed well, it will make you feel like a completely new person, (*beryah chadasha*).

Renewal In Your Torah Learning

³⁵ Seeking “more” is called “oid” in Hebrew; in other places, the Rov explains that this nature in a person to seek “more” stems from from evil imagination; listen to the audio file of *Da Es Daatcha #08* (not yet translated into English); refer also to *Getting To Know Your Imagination #08-Orderliness Stops Imagination*.

So whenever you sit down to learn a *Gemara*, you can think about the words of the *Gemara* in a way that you are always able to see new things in them, and get a renewed sense of vitality from the words.

Here is another example of this idea. On Purim, there are aspiring people who want to have an elevated kind of Purim, *Baruch Hashem*, so they make sure to say up the whole night of Purim and learn *Maseches Megillah* (Tractate Megillah of Talmud Bavli). *Baruch Hashem*, people are learning on Purim; this is wonderful. It is wonderful that people learn every year on Purim and review *Maseches Megillah*. But, this is still not the essence of Purim! The Purim which you will have this year does not have to be the same exact Purim you had last year. The *Maseches Megillah* which you are learning this year on Purim does not have to be the same exact *Maseches Megillah* you learned last year on Purim – it does not have to be a mere review of the same words. It can be a whole new kind of *Maseches Megillah*! Reviewing *Maseches Megillah* each year on Purim does not have to be just that each year you are simply “reviewing” what you did last year. It can be a completely new experience.

Summary

If a person connects himself to the concepts here, not only will he be able to develop a solid structure in his *Avodas Hashem*, but he will be able to keep ‘renewing’ his structure as well. He will develop the power of renewal and be able to always find **new** vitality.

But as we mentioned, this is **only** on condition that a person **already** derived vitality from a previous level, whereupon he can then seek new vitality. [If a person never got vitality in the first place from something, and now he seeks vitality, this is not coming from the soul’s deep power to find renewal, but it is rather coming from the *yetzer hora*’s tactic to get a person to always seek “more” and “more” levels when he hasn’t even gotten the basics.]

The Difference Between The Wise and The Foolish

The Sages state that the older a Torah scholar becomes, the wiser he becomes, while the older an ignoramus becomes, the more foolish he becomes. The depth of this is that a Torah scholar can keep finding new insights in the “same old” things, while an ‘ignoramus’ [someone who didn’t connect to Torah enough] wonders what new things can be found in the “same old” things.

A fool thinks he knows everything already. “I know it already”, is a common argument of fool. There are people who claim, “I already know this part of the Torah. What is new here for me to learn? I already know it!” He thinks he knows everything already, so what’s the point of living anymore...for this person, maybe his life really has indeed ended, because he thinks he knows all there is about life already....

We can keep finding new insights in the very same words of Torah we learn. It is written, “*The Torah of Hashem is perfect*”, and the Baal Shem Tov explains that the Torah always remains untouched, because no one has ever understood the full depths of the Torah’s words.

In order for a person to develop the power of finding renewal, it’s not something that comes to you through intellectual reflection. It is a soul experience! It is a reality that can felt by the soul.

When a person connects to this deep power of the soul, he feels alive inside, and he is truly alive. This is the meaning of how Torah scholars keep becoming wiser with the older they get – they can keep finding renewal in the very same things.

In Conclusion

This is the deep meaning of "ממית ומחי" – every moment, we can receive renewed perspectives toward things [from Hashem] experienced in our soul. Our previous vitality dies, and then our vitality gets renewed by Hashem – we can gain a whole new life each moment.

May we merit the time in which all renewed vitality will spread to the rest of the world as well, in which will there be a complete revival of the dead.

044 | *Redemption Unfolding and The Decree on Torah*

Salvation Is Hidden

ומצמיח ישועה – Hashem “grows the salvation.” Earlier in *Shemoneh Esrei*, in the first blessing, we also mention how Hashem is our savior, our "מלך עוזר ומושיע". We again mentioned the concept of *yeshuah* \salvation before in the words "רב להושיע". Here we again mention the concept of *yeshuah*, of Hashem’s salvation, but we add on a different point: that Hashem is “growing” the salvation.

What does it mean that Hashem is always growing salvation? It seems more like a lofty concept, a matter of esoteric thought, which doesn’t seem to have practical ramifications in our life. A person tends to think that the *yeshuah* will come eventually, but as of right now, it is of no relevance to today. After all – the *yeshuah* hasn’t come yet; Moshiach isn’t here yet. Of what relevance is that Hashem keeps growing salvation – **ומצמיח ישועה**?

It is written, “*In Your salvation, we await.*” We keep awaiting Hashem’s salvation. It is not just that we have faith that the future salvation will come; we **await** it – in other words, the salvation is always growing. This is the meaning of **ומצמיח ישועה**. Every second, the salvation is growing and forming. So the fact that Hashem is always growing the salvation doesn’t mean that Moshiach is always coming today; he will only come once, in the future. Rather, the meaning is that our salvation is always being grown.

Before a crop is ripe, it is preceded by a shell. The shell that comes before the fruit is a metaphor for the current rimes, in which we await Moshiach, while the fruit that emerges is a hint to Moshiach’s arrival. Thus, the salvation is really here, but it is hidden and covered over. In the future, the shell will be removed, and the salvation will be opened and revealed. There is always a salvation going on, just we can’t see it so obviously; it is within a concealment. But it is always taking place. Thus, Hashem is **ומצמיח ישועה** – there is always a salvation that is growing and taking place, in the *hidden* layer of reality, and not in the opened layer of reality that we see.

We can find this illustrated in the following story of the Torah. For 22 years, Yaakov mourned Yosef. As he mourned, the roots of the salvation were taking place. Yosef was imprisoned, and this led to him becoming advisor of Pharaoh and eventually king of Egypt. Yaakov *Avinu* is mourning him for 22 years, thinking that all is lost, while in reality, Yosef [a hint to Moshiach, whom Yosef is the ancestor of] is really being saved and his redemption is

being formed. Hashem was growing the salvation for all those years that Yaakov is mourning over his loss.

Salvation and The Future Redemption, Unfolding

When a person hears about the idea of having a *yeshuah* \salvation, he tends to think of it as a matter of thought, but not as something that is practically relevant in his life. He thinks that the *yeshuah* will eventually come in the future, as we know and hope for, but as of right now, can it really be that Hashem is growing forth the salvation...? A person tends to be skeptical.

We must understand the following. When a person plants a seed in the ground, the growth process is of no use to him unless the ripe crop emerges. When Hashem constantly plants the seeds of salvation, though, even the planting of the salvation is already a kind of salvation. We are able to have some degree of salvation even if the total salvation of Moshiach hasn't yet come. When Moshiach comes, it will be the *geulah shelaimah*, the complete redemption; but we can still have a degree of redemption in our situations, even if it's not a complete redemption.

On the outside layer of things, there doesn't appear to be any salvation going on in reality. But in the inner layer of reality, the salvation is always growing.

When someone lives superficially, all he sees is the external layer of the reality in front of him; he does not see any salvation going on. He might long for the redemption, but as far as he's concerned, "Moshiach isn't here." But when someone lives an inner kind of life, although he lives here on this earth just like anyone else, at the same time, he lives in an inner layer of reality, in a world of inner solitude with the depths of his soul. In that inner place, he can always see how the salvation is being grown. He sees the ongoing salvation as something that not only exists, but as something that is *revealed* in the reality of his life.

When someone lives superficially – especially in our generation, where superficiality means that a person has no sensitivity whatsoever to spiritual feelings – then he follows the crowd of the rest of the generation, and he simply isn't sensitive to a deeper meaning of reality. If someone is aware of the inner layer of reality and lives with it, he sees how there is always a salvation taking place; he sees how the light of Hashem is constantly shining.

The *Maharal* says that in the era preceding Moshiach, there will be a "growth" of a salvation that we first go through. First we see the salvation growing and forming, more and more, until we finally merit the complete salvation, which will be the future redemption.

Jewish Souls Are Being Destroyed Today By The Outside Influences

The Greek exile took place when we were in Eretz Yisrael and we had a *Beis HaMikdash*. In our times, when we are in Eretz Yisrael, we are also in the midst of an exile - and it is a very bitter one.

There are decrees being made on us. But all these decrees, as terrible as they are, are not even the depth of this exile! The decrees are only the *external* part of this exile. The *real* part of this exile is that so many *neshamos* (Jewish souls) are being burned up [by the secular influence]! and in fact, they have already **burned up most *neshamos*!**

The Chazon Ish said that one shouldn't be afraid of the decrees they make on religion; if that is what someone is afraid of, he is mistaken, because he is unaware of the main problem. Anyone with a little feeling for holiness can see how most *neshamos* have already been burned [by the secular influence]!

Most of the *neshamos* that are being burned up are those who are **from the Torah world!** This 'burning of *neshamos*' taking place is not only referring to people who live outside the world of Torah. Most people are not aware that Jewish *neshamos* are being burned - people simply think that it is simply a war being decreed on religion. But it is *much* worse than that.

Who can't tell of the burning that is taking place? **All** of the evil from the outside society has now entered into the Torah world and influencing people.

We Must Go Through A Massive, Internal Change

Do we really want to leave the current lifestyle and return to living an inner kind of life??

It is true that those who are outside the Torah world will have to do *teshuvah* in order to be saved. But even those who are on the inside [the frum, Torah world] also have to do *teshuvah*; because the *whole way of life* now that people are living is wrong!

We are not presenting here a new path to take. We are describing here how we need to follow in the footsteps of our *Avos*. We need to ask ourselves, "How did our *Avos* live?" The whole way that the generation lives today needs to change.

The Sages state that the Jews living in Persia were deserving of the decree of death, "because they enjoyed the banquet of that wicked one [Achashveirosh]." Of this entire generation, it can be said that "they enjoyed the banquet of that wicked one." People are enjoying the false lifestyle of this generation.

Hashem gives us all the power of free choice. A person therefore can recognize very well what he's "eating"...

If someone searches for the truth, he must make the following reflection: we are the children of Hashem, as we know from the possuk, "*You are children to Hashem your G-d.*" In this generation, we have become very distanced from the level of being "children" to Hashem. This exile has confused us a lot and made us forget about our dignified status; we do not realize that we are really the dignified children of Hashem.

Hashem is calling out to each Jew. It is unbecoming for us to wallow in the empty pursuits of this generation.

Returning To The "Desert" Again To Accept the Torah

We need to ask ourselves: What would any of the leaders of the past do in a generation like this? What would the *Chasam Sofer* have done?

Parnassah (making a living) should not be the main point of our life...

We have only one true option: we need to choose the right way to live life. We need to accept the Torah again anew, just as the Jews in Persia did after they were saved from Haman's decree. They returned to their acceptance of the Torah and gave up their previous lifestyle of enjoying Achashveirosh's party.

When you re-accept the Torah, you need to feel exactly as the Jewish people felt when they stood at Har Sinai in the desert. You have to be willing to go to the desert again and give up your previous lifestyle. You have to be prepared to abandon everything you're used to – this whole world of falsity we live in.

Hashem wants to take us out of the current lifestyle of this generation. Our main salvation will not be in escaping the decrees that are being made on us. The decrees on us are terrible, but this is not the main evil "decree" upon us; the main evil decree we are going through is that the generation lives a very false kind of life. We must be able to abandon it.

We must abandon this kind of life, of which "having *parnassah*" has become the main part of life, so that we can reaccept the Torah again, by returning to the "desert" where we stood at Har Sinai. We have to be able to leave behind the current lifestyle that we recognize, which is already in the "50th Gate of Impurity."

The Torah World Must Now Make Sacrifices

The main introspection needs to be made by those who are in the Torah world, that we must examine our lifestyle and be willing to undergo an internal change. When we are going through a decree like this, we need to apply the possuk, “*What does Hashem ask of you...so that You fear me.*”

If a person has even a minimal amount of feelings for holiness, he can hear Hashem calling to us to return, and to leave the crooked way of life that this exile has caused us to live with.

In the prayer of *Av HaRachamim* on Shabbos, we mention how the previous generations gave their lives to sanctify Hashem’s Name. We are in a time in which we need to be willing to make the sacrifice and disconnect ourselves from the current lifestyle, a generation which is in the 50th Gate of Impurity.

This is not some kind of extreme *chumra* (stringency). It sounds extreme only to those who aren’t searching for the truth.

Not only does Hashem want the decrees upon us to end; He wants that we change our lifestyle totally, and return to the true kind of life.

(These days, if a person walks into a *beis midrash*, he can’t even tell who is a real “Chareidi” and who isn’t....)³⁶

In Conclusion

May we merit to live the true kind of life, and to merit a degree of salvation, **ומצמיח ישועה** – even if we do not merit to see the complete redemption in our times, we can at least merit a degree of salvation, by disconnecting ourselves from the false lifestyle of this generation, and to instead see the salvation that takes place in the inner layer of reality.

Although this will not be a complete redemption, at least it will be a partial redemption to our soul. If we merit even that partial redemption in our souls, we can then merit the fulfillment of the possuk, “*The salvation of Hashem can come in the blink of an eye.*”

³⁶ See **Chanukah #048-Greek Exile Today.**

045 | *To Yearn For A Pure World*

Introduction

In the end of the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we say **ונאמן אתה להחיות מתים** – “And You are trustworthy to revive the dead.” Throughout this blessing, we mention five times how Hashem revives the dead.

The Sages say that the Torah already alludes in a few places that there will be a resurrection of the dead in the future, and that if someone doesn't believe that there is a source in the Torah for it, he is a heretic. This is true even if he firmly believes in the concept of the resurrection! If he fully believes in the future resurrection, but he doesn't believe that there is a source in the Torah for it, he is a heretic [and he doesn't merit to get revived in the future].

Why is this so? Why is it so necessary for a person to believe that the resurrection of the dead has a source in the Torah? We are not talking about a person who doesn't believe in the concept of resurrection. We are talking about a person who does believe, just, he denies that the Torah alludes to it. Why is such a person considered a non-believer in the future resurrection?

It must be that a person who doesn't believe that there is a source in the Torah for the resurrection is missing the main part of the belief. Let us try to understand why.

A Damaged World

When Adam sinned by eating from the Forbidden Tree, the Sages tell us that the entire world was damaged. Not only did Adam and Chavah damage their spiritual level, but the entire world was never the same again. The world we see today is not the same world that existed before the sin; it is a lower form of existence. Mankind was cursed with death as a result of the sin. In the future, when there will be a resurrection of the dead, the world will achieve its rectification, and the sin of Adam will be fixed. The future resurrection will not just be that the dead become revived back to life; it will be a rectification of the entire world, which is currently damaged from Adam's sin, and it will restore the world back to its original, pure form.

When Adam sinned, the entire Creation was ruined. However, there was one thing that remained pure. The Nefesh HaChaim writes that the Torah remained unaffected by the sin, because Torah can never become impure. “*The Torah of Hashem is perfect, it settles the soul.*”

We did not yet merit the coming of Moshiach and the future resurrection of the dead. All we have is our belief in it. But in actuality, it has not yet happened. How are we able to believe in it? From where do we derive the strength to believe in the resurrection?

Our soul has a yearning to live in a world of complete good, in which there is no sin; a world of the future resurrection, in which “*all death will be swallowed up forever.*” In the world we live in, we are sullied with sin. The sins increase all the time. But we must awaken our soul’s deep yearning to live in a world in which there is no sin, which was the pure state that existed before Adam ate from the Forbidden Tree. Our soul yearns to live in a pure kind of world. “*My soul thirsts for You.*”

Living In A Pure World: Connecting To Our Torah Learning

How do we cure our soul’s thirst? There is only one thing that can cure it, because there is one thing we still have left that remained pure and unaffected by the sin: the Torah. This is the meaning of what we say in Selichos, “*We have nothing remaining except for this Torah.*” If someone does not feel his soul’s thirst to live in a pure kind of world, then he is unaware of it, and thus he won’t seek to fill it. Even when he learns Torah, his Torah learning will not be able to satisfy his soul, because he does not seek to live in a world in which there is no sin.

We must believe that there will be a future resurrection of the dead, but that is only one side of the coin. On the other side of the coin, we also have to access it somewhat even now, before the actual time of the resurrection has come. How can we have access somehow to the resurrection of the dead? It is by learning the Torah and connecting to it in a deep way.

If a person wants to know if he’s really connected with the concept of the resurrection, he should make the following reflection: he should ask himself if he has this yearning to live in a pure world in which there is no sin. And after that, he needs to ask himself if he is indeed filling that thirst – if he feels that his yearning for purity has been satisfied through learning Torah.

Connecting To The Redemption

The time of the redemption has not yet come; we do not yet have Moshiach, the Beis HaMikdash, and the resurrection of the dead. But although we haven’t yet merited the revealed redemption, we can still have a degree of redemption in our own souls – as it is written, “*My soul is close to her redemption.*” Before we merit the general redemption that will come to the masses, we need to first experience our own inner redemption. The light of the redemption can be

experienced by anyone who truly yearns for the redemption, as the Ramchal writes, especially now that we are nearing the redemption, and thus its light is shining and more readily accessed.

Of course, even if we experience an inner redemption in our soul when we yearn for redemption, this is not like the complete redemption that will come to the masses. But we still need to have a connection with redemption even now, before the actual redemption has come. We need to live the deep part of our soul, which yearns to connect to a pure world in which there is no sin.

These are not your average words which you come across. This is a description of a connection that we should live with – to be connected, in our souls, to a pure world. It is to dwell in an inner world that is nothing like the world we see and recognize. If someone becomes used to living in this deep place in his soul, he is living the future resurrection already.

The Sage Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair lists the revival of the dead as the highest rung in the ladder of spiritual perfection. This shows us that the revival of the dead is not just that the dead will be brought back to life. The revival of the dead is really an understanding, in which a person connects himself to the world of the future revival, in which there will be no sin.

The Connection Between Resurrection and Torah

Now we can understand why someone who doesn't believe that resurrection of the dead has a source in Torah forfeits his share in the Next World. It is because such a person is not connected with the concept of resurrection – he doesn't yearn to live in a pure world.

Thus, to believe in the future resurrection is not just because the Torah requires us to believe in it. It is to connect ourselves to that perception of the future, in which our Torah learning will be completely pure, because we will dwell in a pure world. That is the depth of why one needs to believe that the resurrection has a source in the Torah.

The Month of Nissan: A Time of Renewal

The month of Nissan, which we are in now, is known in the *sefarim hakedoshim* as the month of renewal. It is the time in which Hashem renews Creation. It is a time to begin again anew.

The root of Creation was the Torah, for Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world. Thus, learning the Torah is where we can derive the power to begin, again - anew.

The time of renewal is in the month of Nissan; and in our soul, we renew ourselves by returning to a new beginning – to return to our beginning, our pure state in which there was no sin. We need to thus reveal our soul's yearning to live in a pure world.

We need to dig deep into ourselves and remove all the dirt that's covering over our soul, and to identify with a pure world deep inside ourselves in which where there is no sin. We can then begin to feel, with utter clarity, that we are like strangers on this earth, that this earth is not our real place.

The whole reality we live in is right now a reality of sin, a ruined state of Creation. As long as a person thinks that this world is the real place he lives in, he can live in all kinds of places in the world. But when a person realizes that he wishes instead to live in a pure world that is a much better place than this one, he sees how much this world contradicts the reality that his soul knows about. (On a deeper note, he will be able to sense that even Gan Eden can contradict the soul's idea about reality, because *even Gan Eden* is not yet the pure kind of world that our soul wants....!)

In Conclusion

In these weeks of the month of Nissan, it is time of renewal. The week of *Parshas HaChodesh* in particular is a time of renewal, but we must understand that these weeks are not about a mere superficial reading of the four *parshiyos*; we need to actually reveal the power of renewal that is inherent in these weeks.

May Hashem merit us to reveal this place in our soul – our soul's yearning to live in a world in which there is no sin.

