

BILVAVI

OVERCOMING  
THE PULL  
TOWARDS  
EVIL

Adapted from the hebrew shiur  
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## Choosing Between Good & Evil Today

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There is a novel concept that Hashem made in His world called *bechirah*, the power to choose. As the Torah says, “*And you will choose life.*” When we analyze the subtlety of the power of choosing, we can see how novel it is. If we are given a choice between two equal coins, it is a fair choice, but if we are given a choice between a penny and a coin worth thousands of dollars, this doesn’t even seem like a choice at all, because it’s obvious that we should take the expensive coin. We understand that it’s only a fair choice if the two options are equal, but if the two options aren’t equal, then it’s not really a choice.

On This World, we are given the *bechirah*, the free will, to choose between good and evil. The good on this world can bring us to closeness and *d’veykus* with Hashem, while the evil on this world brings a person into the “world of disparity”, to become far away from Hashem. So where is the *bechirah*, when we clearly see that these two options aren’t equal?

There is a superficial answer and a more inner answer. The superficial answer is that this is exactly what the power of *bechirah* is – there is good and evil, and evil works through imagination, by getting us to imagine that we will gain from it no less than if we would choose good. Evil – through the power of imagination - can make itself seem as if it’s equally beneficial as good. How does evil mimic good and make itself seem equal with good? It can do so in many ways, but in any case, the power of evil will always mimic itself with good and make itself seem as if it’s equally beneficial to a person just as much as choosing good is.

Getting more subtle, when Hashem made the world, He made the Infinite, and He also made an evil that also seeks to mimic His infinite aspect. The Snake said to Adam and Chavah, “*You will become like G-d*” if they will eat from the forbidden tree. The imagination, contained in that tree<sup>1</sup>, could convince man to think that he can be like G-d.

So there is good and evil, and imagination makes a person think that evil is equal to good. That is a novelty, but the deeper novelty is that it can get one to think that he can be like Hashem – fooling man into thinking that evil can indeed mimic, and be equal, with the Infinite.

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*Sforno Beraishis 3:1<sup>1</sup>*

As an example of this, Pharaoh declared himself as the G-d who made the Nile, saying “*To me this Nile belongs, I made it.*” The human being can either come to resemble G-d by perfecting his character in order to resemble G-d’s perfect traits, as explained in sefer *Tomer Devorah*, or man can declare himself as G-d’s equal, which is the evil side to this power of resembling (*medameh*). Good, holy imagination (or resembling) doesn’t make man fool himself that he is like G-d, for it’s clear to him that one is a human who is limited while the Creator is Infinite, and one can merely get himself to emulate the Creator. But imagination in the side of evil makes one think that he can really be like G-d, that he can become equal with G-d and mimic Him completely. So the side of holiness is where man emulates G-d but doesn’t equal himself with G-d, while the side of evil employs the imagination to make man think that he can mimic G-d and be His equal.

The angels wanted to sing the *shirah* in front of Adam HaRishon because he was made in the likeness of Hashem. Here was a created being who resembled Hashem. So Hashem put Adam to sleep, and then the angels saw that Adam was not equal to Hashem.

The deepest imagination and resembling is idol worship, other gods, to mimic G-d. This is the root of evil imagination, to wish to become equal with G-d.

## The 50<sup>th</sup> Gate of Impurity – Evil’s Attempt To Replace G-d

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*Raboseinu taught* that there are 50 gates of impurity. These divide into 49 gates of impurity which stand apart from the 50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity. What is the difference between the 49 gates and the 50<sup>th</sup>? The 49 gates of impurity are evil imagination where evil makes it seem that it’s equal to good, that is, within the human realm. The 50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity is evil’s attempt to equal itself with G-d, and that is other gods, the desire for idol worship.

In the times of the *Mishnah*, the Men of Great Assembly abolished the evil inclination for idol worship, and ever since then, people rarely feel a desire to wish to become equal with G-d or replace Him with an idol. But the 50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity, which appears in the final generation, is a new kind of evil which seeks to be equal with G-d.

## The Power of Meshichah (Being Pulled)

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The *Ramchal* in *Mesilas Yescharim* says that anything which brings us closer to Hashem should be chased after, just like a piece of iron which is magnetically pulled towards a large iron stone which draws anything metallic towards it, while anything that distances us from Hashem should be avoided as if we are running away from a fire. When we run after something, we are choosing, but an iron doesn't choose to be pulled after the magnet, it is naturally pulled, and the stronger the iron is, the stronger the pull will be. There is a concept that man can be pulled strongly after something – this is called the effect of *meshichah* (pulling). This power exists both in the side of evil and holiness.

One who has revealed *Elokus* (G-dliness) in his soul is naturally pulled after Hashem, like an iron piece that is magnetically pulled after a large iron. Why are most people not pulled after Hashem so naturally? There is a very simple reason for this – it is because they haven't revealed G-dliness in their soul, so there's nothing pulling them after Him. They may have yearnings and a desire for holiness, they wish to be better, they have received the traditions from our forefathers, but they haven't revealed G-dliness in their souls yet, so they are not naturally pulled after Hashem.

Who is pulled after Hashem naturally? The *Mesilas Yescharim* says that one who has the Presence of Hashem in him is naturally pulled after holiness. The stronger one has revealed it and the less one is attached to materialism (these are two aspects), the more one will be pulled, as it is written “*Pull me after You*”, as it is said of the *tzaddikim*.

A clear example of this was by the giving of the Torah, when Hashem revealed G-dliness in our souls at Har Sinai, where *emunah* was carved onto our hearts and for every word of Hashem we heard our souls flew out of our bodies. We were naturally pulled after Hashem like the iron after the magnet stone. This was like the death of the *tzaddikim* who die by “kiss of Hashem”, meaning they are naturally pulled after Him in a magnetic connection. But besides for that time, this natural pull is not revealed.

## The Depth of The Final Challenge

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Just as that concept existed in the side of holiness, so does the power of impurity contain a magnetic connection. The Gemara says, “Heresy [once committed] becomes attached to a person”<sup>2</sup>, and *Chazal* also taught us that “there is no generation that is not more cursed than the one before it”, the generations sink lower and lower - until the final generation, where people are pulled after evil like with a magnetic connection, where the “50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity”, or the evil imagination which fuels evil, creates a magnetic pull towards evil (not just heresy).

Most people do not know what a magnetic connection to holiness is, so when they encounter the magnetic connection to evil that exists today, they do not even see the corresponding forces of good and evil at work here. When they find themselves being strongly drawn after evil, they conclude, “It must be that I have a very big *yetzer hora* (evil inclination)” They think that just like people used to be drawn after the *yetzer hora* for idol worship and they would run after it, so is there a pull today towards the various evils of today that a person can see and become connected with.

But if one recognizes what the magnetic pull to evil is, he knows exactly what is meant by this struggle that exists with the attraction towards evil today.

These words are the root of the challenge of the final generation. The root of the challenge is not just how to deal with the evil that exists today – that can only be the outcome. The root of the challenge is that the person doesn’t even see the evil – and because he doesn’t even know of a corresponding force in the side of holiness that can compete with this evil. If one knows what it’s like to be strongly pulled towards holiness, he has a power that can match the strength of the pull towards evil that he feels. But if he has no such power in his arsenal, he will simply interpret the struggle on various levels.

This can all be compared to when a child sees an object and tries to put in his mouth, who thinks of everything in terms of food, then gets older and plays with everything he’s given. He sees each object according to the world he lives in – when he is a baby he thinks that everything is food and when he gets older he thinks that everything is a toy to be played

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<sup>2</sup> *Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 3b*

with. If one doesn't recognize the strong pull towards holiness and then he meets the strong pull towards evil, he has never recognized this kind of pull before so he interprets it based on what he personally understands. He thinks of it as something else that has to be dealt with, it's another challenge, but he doesn't recognize where it's coming from. Only one who recognizes what a strong pull to holiness is, someone who lives with Hashem and has a loving connection with Hashem and he feels Hashem strongly – he is able to understand what a strong magnetic connection is, and he can recognize well how the pull towards evil today is here to counter the strong, magnetic connection towards holiness.

Recognizing the reality of the evil itself today is what's not clear to most people, and that is why people do not even see why it's the final test. That is exactly the depth of the test given to the final generation. The evil in the final generation is a force that stands on its own, and it clothes itself in many different ways, namely in all the devices that exist today. But the devices are merely one way of how the evil manifests. The evil itself that stands behind these devices is a force that's pulling the entire world with it, like iron after a magnetic stone – and to where? Not just to *She'ol* (one of the bottom levels of Gehinnom) but to *Avadon* (the final level of Gehinnom), the place of total destruction.

Any sensible person understands that if there is one single device which can pull the entire world after it - something which never existed in all other generations, a device that pulls every single person after it, in an unlimited manner, with no bounds of time, regardless of one's age - it's clear that there's a new force here in the world that has never been here before. Every generation had its test, the specific sins that people were falling into: stealing, immodest clothing, *lashon hora*. But today there's something pulling the entire world with it after every single sin. This is a deeper test than anything else we recognize.

There are equally countering forces here. There is the 50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity that has a magnetic pull towards evil, which counters one's strong pull towards Hashem. When we understand the depth of the evil today we can see that it's a new kind of *nisayon* (test) entirely. The purpose here is to gain an inner perspective on the matter – when it comes to how to act practically, each person should go according to what his Rabbonim tell him to do. We are only explaining here the depth of the final test, of what's taking place here. If a person today just allows himself to be open to the pull that exists today, this pull that is

pulling the whole world after it and with it, he must certainly realize that this is a whole new kind of test to us that has never been here before. Though our *Raboseinu* said a long time that it would come and they spoke about it – the “50<sup>th</sup> level of impurity” - it’s still hard to comprehend logically how the world got to this point of where it is today. But it came.

## Countering The Pull

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There are always equal forces of good and evil, because of the rule of *zeh l’umas zeh*, “This one against that one G-d made.” The only thing that can deal with the evil of today that’s pulling everyone in with it is by having the strong pull towards holiness – to be magnetically and powerfully drawn after our connection with Hashem. The holiness that’s needed in order to counter the evil of today must be a holiness that can take us beyond our own thinking and senses.

When we envision the time of the Holocaust, it’s clear that besides for all of the challenges which that generation faced, the general *nisayon* they had was that they needed to give up their lives, out of love, for Hashem. It was like the deaths of *tzaddikim*, such as what happened with Reb Elchonon Wasserman before he was killed by the Nazis, who gave up his life happily and submitted to Hashem’s will, realizing that Hashem wanted him to die *al kiddush Hashem*. The *nisayon* then was to have literal *mesirus nefesh*, to give up their lives. But in the last generation, which we are found in, the *nisayon* which we have is not to die, but to penetrate so deeply into our *neshamah* and thereby be drawn after Hashem, in a magnetic connection, just as a piece of iron is pulled after a large magnetic stone. In that way, we will become part of an opposite current that can pull us away from the entire movement of *tumah* (impurity) that’s found today.

In front of us stands the depth of good being pitted against the depth of evil. The *nisayon* we have is not to die *al kiddush Hashem*, but to live *al kiddush Hashem*, every day, hour by hour. That is the test which the final generation is being given. But in order to withstand the test, we must enter deeply into our *pnimiyus* (internal world).

## The Inner Attitude Towards Our Final Challenge

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Certainly there are external measures we can take to protect ourselves from the *tumah* of today, but these guidelines can only protect us partially and in the practical sense. Each person has to follow whatever their *Rav* tells them to do. But all of that is the external part of the matter. Here we are talking about the root of the matter, the inner attitude which we need to have towards it. What is the inner attitude we can have that can protect us?

Throughout all the generations, there were those who went out to work to earn livelihood and there were those who sat and learned in the Beis Midrash, each person did according to his personal share in the world, and in that way each person sanctified Hashem's Name in his day-to-day living. In the last generation, there is one *nisayon* that applies to both those going out to work as well as those who are found in the world of Torah learning, the Beis Midrash – all of us together need to understand that we are all being given a unique *avodah*, which in the past was an *avodah* that was only for rare individuals. In today's times, it is absolutely necessary for one to penetrate deeply into his *pnimiyus*, to find a place where there is an internal light shining.

*HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is becoming more and more revealed on our world! If there is so much evil and *tumah* today, then there has to be an equal amount of good that is continuing to become more and more revealed. But in order to find it, one needs to attach his soul deeply to the Torah of Hashem, His Wisdom and His will, the Torah of light. Through this one can become deeply attached to Hashem in the depths of his soul, not in a weak way, but a connection that is deep in the depths of the soul.

In previous generations, most people couldn't even read Torah. There were very few *Talmidei Chachomim* and most people didn't own a full set of *Shas* in their homes, they would have to borrow it from the *Rav* of the town. Ignorance in Torah was the norm. This is no longer the case in today's generation. There is an inner depth available today for anyone who wants to connect to the Torah. Certainly there's a lot of Torah being spread today through all the means of technology. Not only is there so much Torah available today in the world, with so many *sefarim* and so many *Talmidei Chachomim* today, more than



there ever was before in our history. But even more than this is that there is a certain inner depth, a *kedushah* (holiness), which one can especially connect to, in today's times.

## Preparing Ourselves For A New World

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There is only one real choice today to choose. The *nisayon* of *Klal Yisrael* used to be “Educate each child according to his path”, and each individual had to grapple with how to do it, but today, the *nisayon* that each individual has is - to choose a life of eternity. To prepare oneself for *Olam HaBa* (the Next World) where there is nothing but *tzaddikim* enjoying the rays of the *Shechinah*.

We don't know when Mashiach will come, but we are very close, we are at “*Erev Shabbos* after *chatzos* (noon) on the cosmic global clock (where each of the 6 days of Creation correspond to the 6000 year era we are in) as the *Gra* writes, so we are preparing for “the day that will be entirely good”, the revelations of the Torah's secrets, when the *tzaddikim* will enjoy the *Shechinah*. We can connect our souls deeply to the “day that will be entirely good”, and to prepare ourselves for it.

If someone is told that he is a few more days to live, he prepares for it and makes the necessary changes in his lifestyle and mentality so that he will make the transition properly. We are in a similar situation. We are at the end of time, the end of the current life we recognize (though we don't know when exactly Mashiach is coming, one thing we can say for certain is that we are very, very close), for we can see that in this generation Hashem is preparing the generation for the Redemption - by allowing all of the most unbelievable evil to be unleashed all over the world, with everyone being pulled after it, but at the same time Hashem is also making it possible for everyone to become pulled deeply after the Torah like never before. There is a choice of two equal choices in front of us, and that choice is about where we want to place ourselves for the rest of eternity.

## In Conclusion

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These words are what is meant by the verse, “*Write this for the last generation*”, that we in this generation should know what kind of reality we are in, and accordingly to know what

the depth of our *avodah* is that Hashem asks of us, so that we will gain eternity, with the coming of Mashiach speedily, Amen.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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**QUESTION 1:** What practically should a person do to gain a connection to *pnimiyus* today? **RAV'S ANSWER:** After one becomes clear about the reality which we are amidst, the deep *avodah* in our souls that we have (which is more of a mindset rather than a practical course of action to take) is, to be clear that since **This World is about to end**, one is now standing and choosing: What do I truly love, what do I truly wish for? Will I direct myself to a true place, or will I continue to allow myself to follow the way the world is going, with no end in sight to this? What does a person today love, where is a person today placing his main thoughts and focus on? Where is his soul found? Certainly a person can't change his entire lifestyle at once, but a person has to slowly start placing himself in the right direction.

Another way of looking at it is that if we realize we are about to all leave This World behind, it's not an "*avodah*" to stop loving This World – for if a person is told he will soon leave the world, and still he continues to love the world and go on with his life as usual, then he's simply not mentally well. He knows his life is about to end, so that clarity will naturally change his heart and feelings and all that he senses.

**QUESTION 2:** Today when there's so much evil, has it become easier today for a person to connect to holiness? **ANSWER:** Very good question. On one hand it's more difficult and at the same time it's easier. It's more difficult because there's a very strong attraction today towards the forbidden, but at the same time if one is *moser nefesh* [if he goes against the trend] and he disconnects from all of these things [internet devices] then it becomes easier for him to go inward into his *pnimiyus*. There is an equal strong pull in the other direction, towards evil, so it is more difficult. But if one tries to connect to the good today, it is easy to get there.

**QUESTION 3:** What if a person lives a more external and superficial kind of life and he can't be *pnimi* (inward and spiritual)? Will he have an easier time with the challenge, does he have less of a need to connect to *pnimiyus* (innerness) and to holiness when he feels pulled towards the *tumah* (impurity and bad influences) of today's times? **RAV'S ANSWER:** To live totally in *pnimiyus* (one's internal world of spiritual truths) is a high level which isn't for most people. But every person must attain some strong connection to something inner. As for what to do practically in order to become connected to *pnimiyus*, which was the previous question, the most fundamental way which connects a person to an inner point is the power of *mesirus nefesh* (giving up one's will to do Hashem's will). There is *mesirus nefesh* of dying for Hashem and there is *mesirus nefesh* of living life for Hashem. Any person needs to choose for himself one point in an area of *ruchniyus* and give his soul towards it. The best area to work on this is in Torah learning, to be *moser nefesh* in exerting oneself in Torah learning. But not everyone is at this level, so for anyone else who can't do this, he should just take one point and be *moser nefesh* in that one area. That *mesirus nefesh* will be enough to connect him deeply to a reality of *kedushah* (holiness). Though it's not the most complete level, this bit of *mesirus nefesh* can connect him to the inner world

so that nothing can disconnect him away from it. So it is upon every single individual – in order to enter inward – to choose just one area which he will be *moser nefesh* in, and that connects him to the inner world so that he won't be easily be pulled away from it.

**QUESTION 4:** If one is prepared to be *moser nefesh*, does he need to have all of the clarity too [about why he needs to separate from media-devices]? **RAV'S ANSWER:** Clarity is relative to each person, but in any case a person has to be clear about the basic idea, that there is a war today taking place between absolute good and absolute evil. There has never been as much absolute good revealed as in today's times (except for the time of the giving of the Torah). Though there have been many levels of good that we could tap into throughout history, but now we are close to the light that will be revealed in the End of Days, though we don't know how long it will take. Against all of this good is a force of absolute evil that has never been here before in history. This very idea is the root that everyone on any level needs to be clear about.

**QUESTION 5:** But many times a person wants to want only the spiritual and has a lot of aspirations, many times he can't fulfill it, it's all just in his inner feelings but practically he finds it too hard to be better? **RAV'S ANSWER:** You are certainly correct. For this, let's go back to the example of a person who is told he will die soon, who naturally begins to let go of the world. Today there are foolish people who react in the opposite way - when they are told they will soon die, they go indulge in every worldly pleasure before it's all over for them. These stories happen every day in the world. These are people who live totally in superficiality. But a Torah-observant Jew, and certainly one who learns Torah (each person according to their level), if he is told that today is his last day on earth, to what will his soul feel connected to? Certainly he connects himself to *kedushah* when he knows that soon he will be leaving the world.

Now, practically speaking – if a person strengthens his *emunah* every day of waiting for Mashiach, and he truly feels that maybe today is his last day on the world – maybe – that itself will make him deeply disconnect from the entire way of living that is in today's world. **It is clear that if the Chofetz Chaim or Reb Chatzkel Levenshtein would be here today, what would they say about the events that are happening in the world today? If we look at the words that they said regarding the world events in their times, certainly what they said will apply to our days.** Any person who lives inwardly in their *pnimiyus* today is able to grasp the following attitude: **Though it's not guaranteed that Mashiach is coming today and it's not guaranteed that the war in Russia is Gog-Magog and that the world is ending – even if we would find hints and signs that it is indeed so and even if we assume it is all accurate, still we can counter to it that “Hashem wanted to make Sancheriv into Gog-Magog and Chizkiyahu into Mashiach” already a long time ago and it didn't happen in the end. All of the hints and signs, even if they are accurate, still do not mean that this is certainly it. But it's certainly a possibility. Therefore, if we see that Hashem is running the world in a way where there's a very clear possibility that we are about to greet the end of the world – though it can certainly take more time until this happens - what happens in the meantime until then? It should become natural for us to let go of any connection that we feel to the world.**

But what happens? Certainly a person knows that believing in Mashiach's arrival is one of the main principles of having *emunah*, but not always does he always live it with his heart. Then he sees the world continuing on with life as usual, and he tells himself that just as there were wars in the past so are there wars today, but the world certainly, or almost certainly, is going to continue on as usual. So he doesn't end up feeling the disconnection from the world.

There is an *avodah* for a person to remind himself of death, but people don't like to think about death. **The simpler way to disconnect from life on this world than thinking about death is to think about Mashiach coming.** If one is truly living in a reality that "Maybe Mashiach will come today", and when he knows that the way he looks today is the way he will look for the rest of eternity – this will cause him to slowly let go of his connection to the world today. A person who lives all day with the feeling that "Maybe today is my last day on earth" will have a much easier time disconnecting from the world, and it will become much easier for him to connect to *kedushah*.

One just has to do this in the actual sense and internalize the fundamentals of *emunah*, and clearly feeling those truths, because a person might say all the 13 *Ani Maamin*'s every day, he might say it thousands of times in his life, but he doesn't live it. If he will live by it though, his connection to the world will begin to weaken.

We aren't speaking here of lofty, esoteric things that are far away from us to do. We aren't speaking here of deep spiritual concepts that are hidden which require a person to know the secrets of Torah in order to decipher. We are speaking here of *emunah peshutah* – just, it has to be an *emunah* that one can also feel, in the coming of Mashiach. It is when a person feels, "Maybe today is my last day on this world." If one has that attitude, he will begin to feel less and less connected to the world and it will become much easier for him to return, and to connect, to *kedushah*.

**QUESTION 7** So our *avodah* now is not to do anything in the actual sense but just to gain clarity? **RAV'S ANSWER** Acting practically and doing what we have to do is the basis of keeping *halachah* and keeping all of the *minhagim* (customs) and *chumros* (stringencies) that there are, but will increasing doing *mitzvos* enable one to practically feel that Mashiach is coming more? We can't say it's not the right thing to do, but this alone doesn't bring a person to the inner place that is needed in order to practically await Mashiach.

**QUESTION 8:** A deathly ill person is able to quickly let go of everything on the world and embrace *ruchniyus* as being the only thing that matters to him now, but a regular person living day-to-day life needs to live normally and there are things he needs to regularly take care of **RAV'S ANSWER** You are asking a good question. On one hand a person lives on the world, if he is married then has a wife and family to support, he has debts to pay, etc. Many of these things he is obligated *halachically* to do. Certainly if a person feels that this is his last day on the world and because of this he shirks his responsibilities, it only means that he is not perceiving the situation correctly. That is why we emphasized that although one must believe that Mashiach can certainly come today, there is also the other possibility that he might not come today. If let's say we have experts who come say that there's a 50% chance that there will be an earthquake tomorrow which can shake half of the

world, how would we react? Would a person say that it's only a 50% chance and it might not happen so we shouldn't be concerned about it? The right thing to do would be to take both possibilities into account, to take each possibility seriously. That is exactly how to relate to the situation of today. We aren't getting into percentages and odds of certain things happening, but the attitude has to be, that (a) on the chance that Mashiach doesn't come, we are still continuing all of our responsibilities tomorrow no less than how we are responsible to do them today, because maybe the world will continue the way it is and our obligations tomorrow will be exactly the same as our obligations today, but also (b) we should take the other factor into account – that it's very, very possible that this is the end. We should take both possibilities seriously, and that will be enough to help us disconnect internally in our souls from our connection to the world. For when we know that everything might end today, naturally our connection that we feel to the world will wither away.

**QUESTION 9:** So this is not just the attitude to have about disconnecting from internet-devices, it's really something that has to be expressed in all of our *nisyonos* (challenges)? **RAV'S ANSWER** Let us review and emphasize again, that the main point here is not the device [smartphone]. There is an inner force in the world that's pulling all of mankind beyond all limits to a connection with evil. It is just that the main way by which this inner force is being revealed is, through internet-devices. If we think that our challenge is only with internet-devices, then the way to deal with it is through *takanos* (guidelines) of how to successfully deal with the challenge – but we need to be dealing with the inner root of evil that's behind all of the internet-devices.

**QUESTION 10:** Can it be, then, that a person has no connection whatsoever to any internet-devices and yet he still has no *pnimiyus*, no internal world of truths within him to be connected to, then he will also end up going lost? **RAV'S ANSWER** That is true, but really there's no person today who's completely disconnected from all internet-devices, because the reality doesn't allow this. The question here is how much a person will be connected to these devices – by force or because he has to use them, and if he will use it himself or through a second-party. Each person has reasons in which he will need to make use of these devices at some point. It's clear to any sensible person that even if we take the most kosher cellphone, it still works through the same waves [of internet connection] and although a person isn't directly connected to it in the end he is still using it. So we need to understand that the entire world is going in one direction, in which even the streetlight that a person needs to get to the other side of the street is also working with the same things [using internet connection]. That is exactly the difficulty. In previous generations there would be an obligation for a person to move to the deserts in order to escape a bad environment, and there was a possibility of building one's own private life, like being in an Ark of Noach, where one could build a life of *kedushah*. But today this wouldn't even help. The electricity for the Beis Midrash runs through internet connection, etc. Of course, a person enjoying electricity today isn't being affected from the Internet nearly as one who is sitting in front of a computer [on the internet], but still, it is impossible for a person to have a complete disconnection from it. The only way would be to leave this world entirely, to live alone in a desert somewhere so that one doesn't have to be involved with anything that will require him to use Internet connection, and of course that is not feasible. A person has to live on this world normally and with his family, and we never found any Gedolim who divorced their wives so that they could run away to the desert and not have to deal with the bad environment of the world. It's obviously not what Hashem

wants. Hashem wants us to live in the reality of the world today, but within that we need to disconnect as much as possible. The more one is connected to the tide of *kedushah*, the less he will be influenced by the world today.

**QUESTION 11:** But even if one would have nothing to do with internet-devices and he would live in the desert, if he has no *pnimiyus* that he's connected with, he won't be able to survive anyway, so the evil in the world today isn't limited to internet-devices. **RAV'S ANSWER:** True. The waves are beamed all over the world, so it doesn't matter if there's a device or not to house it, and even a person going to the desert is still within the grasp of these waves. The same technology that's photographing everything in the world is photographing him too.

**QUESTION 12:** So is all evil today coming through internet-devices, or can evil affect people today even without internet-devices? **RAV'S ANSWER:** The true answer to this is that the power of evil can affect people even without having any devices to house it. Evil is also being clothed in these devices today, but it stands on its own...Certainly a person who's using it is being much more affected than one who merely gets some bad influence from it. Yet a person can be sitting in the desert far away from these devices, and his mind can still be affected by the world today, since he will always be affected to some extent by it - unless he can quickly return afterwards to a deep connection to his *pnimiyus*.

**QUESTION 13:** Just like any *shefa* (Heavenly bestowal) from *kedushah* (holiness) needs something to contain it in order for it to take effect, does *tumah* (evil, impurity) also need a container in order for it to become actualized? **RAV'S ANSWER:** *Kedushah* needs something to contain it so that it remains permanent, but now we live in a world where all of the air is filled with impurity. Just like there is the holy air of Eretz Yisrael which makes people wiser, so is there a concept of impure air, such as today when the entire air of the world is filled with impurity – even before these devices came. But the devices enable the impurity to be settled somewhere permanently and where it can be activated. But the truth is that even if there would be no internet devices today, the air of the world is filled with a certain impurity, and even if a person is thousands of miles up in the sky he is affected by it, that is the reality.

**QUESTION 14:** So in the end of the day, internet-devices are the tools today which are enabling the *tumah* (impurity) of the world. **RAV'S ANSWER:** That is true, and that is why on one hand we have an *avodah* to separate from these devices as much as we can so that we never have to use them. But we also have to understand that these devices are merely devices, and there is an evil behind it which is what we mainly need to be dealing with. On one hand it's clear that we need to actively deal with the challenge of these devices by staying away from them, but we also have to realize that it's not the internet-devices that are the entire problem here, rather it's that there's a powerful evil behind it which just so happens to be clothed in these devices.

**QUESTION 15:** So there is an external *avodah* here as well as an internal *avodah* here to do. **RAV'S ANSWER:** Very good – exactly so.

**QUESTION 16:** How can we raise our children to live more with *pnimiyus*? We, ourselves, can try to become more connected to the internal world of *pnimiyus* – but our children are much more mingled with the world so

it's not going to be as easy for them. **RAV'S ANSWER:** On one hand it is very hard to raise children today, because the *nisayon* of everything that exists today in our generation today is so difficult to deal with. On the other hand, it is easier to explain it all to them because we can see, in our great pain, so many people who have gone off the *derech*, not only young boys and girls but even entire families have become completely irreligious [because of using internet-devices]. When we see what happens to the *sotah*, “the wayward wife in her disgrace”, then it's easier to explain to the child how we must learn from this and become a *nazir*, “to abstain from wine”, to stay away from the things that lead to such repercussions. We would need to know exactly what happened in each individual instance. But generally, throughout the world there have been between 10 and 15% percent of those who completely abandoned Yiddishkeit. They include entire families who have gone lost, and even those who didn't go lost certainly went down a lot in their level, in a very recognizable way. This is something that children today don't know. Every community, and almost every family, has people that have left Yiddishkeit. When we see that this is the result of those who use internet-devices, it's much easier to explain to our children that unless they have the right attitude about internet-devices, they will slowly end up like all the rest. This is the reality. Even people who were Roshei Yeshivos, Roshei Kolelim, authors of well-known sefarim! They completely left Yiddishkeit [after falling in with these devices]! There are well-known stories of what happened. It shows us that the evil today [of internet-devices] is able to uproot even those who were firmly attached to the Beis Midrash. There used to be a discussion about hanging out in the wrong places and going off there. Today, everything has changed totally – even a person who is part of the Torah world and found all day in the Beis Midrash, even if he has hundreds of *talmidim* – there were already stories that happened – they left everything, they're gone. This is all saying to us that sitting in the Beis Midrash and learning in the same way that one learned yesterday, will not necessarily be enough to save him. It seems that Hashem wants a deeper kind of Torah learning and a more inner kind of *mitzvah* observance. He wants something from the generation that's more inner.

When a child sees the reality of those who went off, he understands what the ideal way to live life is. In the past, when one person would go off the *derech*, this was not because of a decline in his *ruchniyus* but because he wasn't emotionally well, but today in a Chareidi neighborhood on Friday nights we can see everything that goes on in the streets, it's obvious to anyone who sees it and even children see it, and sometimes the children are even afraid to hang around in the streets from fear of meeting all those who are in this category. The children see the results with their own eyes.

**QUESTION 17:** At what age do we need to begin teaching our children about this? Can we explain it to a 5 or 6 year old? **ANSWER:** You don't have to explain this deeply and intellectually, just speak about simple concepts to them. For example how do we explain to a 6 year old child that we need to learn Torah? Do we explain to him the depth of Torah such as how the Torah is part and parcel with Hashem, or do we tell him simple concepts such as how the Torah keeps all of Creation in existence, the Torah is the treaty between us and Hashem, etc. We can teach them fundamental, clear concepts without getting into the subtleties. If we make clear to them when they're young that we need to separate from all of these devices, this will become *girsas*

*d'yankusa* (what they learned as children) to them, which is the most impressionable kind of learning. There is no need for deep explanations, just simple and clear concepts.

**QUESTION 18:** Do we need to speak [to our children] about how we must “stay away from bad” - staying away from these evil devices - or do we also need to speak about “do good” [what we can do proactively to be protected from them]? **RAV'S ANSWER:** We need to speak more about “doing good” than the amount we speak of “staying away from bad.” But if we only speak about doing good and we don't speak about the need to stay away from evil, then they won't know to stay away from it and then nothing we teach them will help them.

It's clear that we cannot be busy all day talking about the problems in the world. It's insensible for a person to even take upon himself a resolution that every day when he comes to the Beis Midrash during the first hour of his learning session that he will stay away from all the *tumah* in the world. Such a resolution can't last, because the Beis Midrash has to be a place of learning from day until night. It is just that we also need to mention to our children all the time that there are bad things in the world which we need to keep away from. We cannot be busy with this for most of the day or even for a large chunk of the day or even for just the beginning of the day. We need to instead be firmly and deeply immersed in the world of Torah learning, and it is just that we also need to remind our children, on the side, that there's something today that's threatening us.

**QUESTION 19:** When speaking to our children, do we need to tell them openly that there is a Hashem Whom we need to live with. **RAV'S ANSWER:** I don't even hear how you can think how there are two options here. The only question is if you need to explain it to them deeply or simply. Certainly the younger a child is, the simpler we explain it to him so that he can better absorb what we are telling him, and when the child gets older and matures, that is when he will usually want to understand things more. With a child we should begin by telling him simple concepts, such as *Shema Yisrael* and *Torah Tziva Lanu Mosheh* – two *pesukim* about emunah and Torah, which are elementary concepts. Since we are found in a generation where evil is dominating everywhere, the simple concept we can teach our children is that there is something bad in the world and if one doesn't protect himself from it, he will fall into destruction. But again, this cannot become a topic to talk about several times a day with them. A child just has to hear about the true good, the purpose of life, which is *d'veykus* to Hashem and to His Torah, and how this is the main point of life. The topic of protecting ourselves from evil should also be spoken about with them, but it should not become the central topic that we are busy talking about all day.

**QUESTION 20:** What happens if a person has aspirations to be better and he really tries to grow, but practically speaking he meets up every day with the challenges of the street or with anything he's involved in, and it bothers him that he's not reaching his aspirations and he's not actually making progress even though he wants to. **RAV'S ANSWER:** Let's go back to what we said before and sharpen the point: If a person lives every day with the feeling that this might be his last day – as a simple example, before going to sleep, a person thinks that maybe today was my last day on the world – this should not cause him to be sad. To the contrary, if he is truly awaiting the period of Mashiach, then he should be happy, when he thinks that today might be his last day on This World [the world before the times of Mashiach]. One has to have a happy attitude towards life and this



is how he has to view life - that maybe today is his last day - and therefore as a result of that awareness, every day he can feel that he's becoming more and more disconnected from the world. But again, this should not be making him sad. A person does not grow when he is sad, especially in our generation. Rather, **the attitude has to be that it's possible that today the Creation will reach its purpose and this will lead to the complete revelation of Hashem on the world, which will be followed by *Techiyas HaMeisim* (the revival of the dead) when Avraham, Yitzchok, Yaakov and all the tzaddikim will get up again, as well all of Klal Yisrael who have a portion in Olam HaBa. A person who lives all the time with that reality and he is clear about it, that the world is heading to its purpose and that he is certainly very close to it – though we don't know exactly when it will happen, but it's a very big possibility that it will happen today – a person is able to live clearly, and happily, with such a mindset.**

So, along with carrying out our daily responsibilities – which Hashem wants us to fulfill – at the same time, we also have to think that today might be our last day on this world, and that mindset will help us disconnect every day from the pull of evil that exists today. This is the healthy and true way to live life. It's clear that this is how the Chofetz Chaim lived, without a doubt. Maybe he lived with an even deeper awareness than this, but certainly not less than this.

**QUESTION 21:** The Rav mentioned how there are so many people learning Torah today more than there ever were before, but why is there so much sadness today even though people are learning Torah? **RAV'S ANSWER:** Do you know anyone who is truly immersed in learning Gemara and understanding his learning, who is also sad and depressed? When someone is immersed deeply in his Torah learning and he is enjoying his learning, can he be depressed? There are those who are learning Torah for the sake of honor and there are also those who are not learning their proper share in Torah, so their learning doesn't make them happy. But when a person is truly attached to his portion in the Torah, when it his life's work and it's his whole existence and when he's enjoying his learning, it's not possible for him to be depressed. Sometimes he encounters difficulties in his life and this saddens him, but the average person who lives a life of exerting himself in learning his personal portion in Torah will not become easily saddened (unless he has deep emotional issues). The problems you are seeing in which people are learning Torah and still they are depressed, is because you are seeing people who learn Torah only by rote, or because they are currently learning a part of Torah that isn't part of their personal portion, or because they want to get a position or any other wishes they have which aren't happening. In any of these cases a person is not truly connected to his Torah learning. But when one is truly connected to the Torah, the *"laws of Hashem are upright and gladden the heart"*, this is not only a fact stated in a possuk but something which we can plainly sense. When a person is learning Torah and he is enjoying his learning for a good chunk of the day (even if he is not enjoying his learning every second, because sometimes it gets difficult, like when he doesn't understand something, or if he's tired or if it's hard for him to learn for whatever reason) and he is clear in what he learns (whether he has *chiddushim* or not, just having clarity in his learning will be enough to make his learning enjoyable), when he consistently lives in this way, it cannot be that he's regularly enjoying his learning yet he's also regularly depressed.

**QUESTION 22:** Maybe people today are sad even though they learn Torah because our connection to our Torah learning is weaker than it was in previous generation? **RAV'S ANSWER:** The reason for it is because in previous generations, there were very few people learning Torah, and the few that were truly learning Torah therefore became very successful. But today a Beis Midrash is full of people learning Torah in it, and on one hand this is a plus over the previous generations where this wasn't common, but at the same time it also gives a disadvantage to our generation since not everyone found within the Beis Midrash today is absolutely choosing to be among those who are sitting and learning Torah all day. Each person has his reasons for learning, so naturally there will be a certain percentage of people whose connection to their learning is weaker. But there aren't less people connected to Torah today than the previous generations. Though in general the level of the generation goes down and the Torah giants of the past far eclipsed our generation, still there aren't less people connected to Torah today than there were in the previous generation. Certainly we have external distractions today, such as all of the devices that exist today, which cause a person to become very connected to the world, and this certainly has a negative effect on him. But even in our generation, there are still individuals who are removed from all of this, and it's possible that they parallel those very same individuals who learned Torah in previous generations. May Hashem save us, may we be *zocheh* to the *Geulah* (Redemption) amidst *kedushah* and *taharah* (holiness and purity).