

ימים נוראים - בלבבי משכן אבנה

DRASHOS ON YOMIM NORAIM

{Elul, Rosh HaShannah, Yom Kippur and Sukkos}

Adapted From The Hebrew Shiurim of "Yomim Noraim"

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Section I
**ELUL and
PREPARING FOR ROSH HASHANAH**

Chapter One

Elul – The Power To Renew Yourself¹

Creation Took Place During Elul

Chazal say that Hashem created the world on the 25th day of Elul. It seems that Hashem only created the world thousands of years again, but Chazal tell us that Hashem creates the world every day anew; it is written, “*He renews every day in His goodness, constantly, the act of Creation.*” Hashem is constantly renewing the world.

What is the difference between the first time Hashem created the world, (which the Midrash reveals was actually on the 25th day of Elul), and the creation that always takes place every day? What does this mean for us that the world is a continuous creation?

We will explain the difference, in a way that can affect us very practically.

Our Ability of Renewal

Hashem commanded Adam and Chavah not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, but they sinned. Ever since then, Creation has been altered and things have never been the same. The world was ruined from its pure state.

But, since Hashem is always renewing Creation, Hashem is always giving us the ability to start anew and begin from a totally pure place!

There are two ways how Hashem allows us to have a recognition of Him on this world. One way, which is superficial, is to look at our whole life as just another year getting added on and on, and that everything is just being repeated. We know that when a person dies, he comes down as another gilgul (reincarnation); a person can

¹ This is adapted from a shiur of the “*Avodas HaChodesh*” series, given to women, in Elul 5753.

look at this as just “another” lifetime. He sees how everything continues, but he doesn’t see the renewal in everything. That is one way to look at it; a person just sees the continuous cycle of the world as more and more years passing by.

Or, a person can look at this in a way of renewal – that each day we are being renewed, and each *gilgul* is a new lifetime; he sees everything as a new opportunity.

Renewing Our Past

We know that there are all different kinds of people, and all of us have our own problems. Some people are naturally sad; some people are very fearful; some have very low self-esteem; some are very mistrusting of others. Whatever the case, these emotions all make up our personality, and each person mainly exhibits a different emotion.

A person has to think deeply: Where do my feelings come from? Why do I feel this way? Maybe it came from a childhood trauma; maybe it came from a previous *gilgul*. If it is from a previous *gilgul*, that means that in our last *gilgul* we became scarred with a particular negative emotion, which is still imprinted on our soul. Whatever our problem is, there is a way to start anew – even if our problems came from a previous *gilgul*.

If we each had only one problem, then it would be a lot easier to fix ourselves. But the fact is that all of us are a combination of a vast amount of problems.

Sometimes we can solve all our problems at once when we find the root of our problems; usually there is a root emotion in us that is causing all our problems. When we find our root negative emotion, then we can heal our emotional problems.² But there are some problems which we have no idea where they come from; we don’t know how to find the root of such problems. There are also problems which we have from a previous *gilgul* and we don’t know where the root of such a problem comes from. How do we solve those problems?

Even the problems which we have no idea how to fix have a solution. From the depths of our soul, we can uncover a solution: the power to renew ourselves.

Renewal Can Solve Even Our Deepest Issues

² See *Getting To Know Your Feelings*.

This is the concept we mentioned in the beginning. Hashem renews creation every day; we must believe in this, that He renews us every day. If we believe in this power of renewal, we can renew ourselves and solve even our worst problems which we have no idea how to solve.

This is what is described in the Mishnah in Avos, “Be like a fresh piece of paper.” We need to look at ourselves as always starting fresh. When we wake up in the morning, we usually have a general picture of what will happen that day, and we have all kinds of worries. But there is a deep place in our soul which is able to renew everything. This is an ability that only a Jew’s soul has; a non-Jew does not have this ability. Only a Jew’s soul is able to refresh itself, just like a baby is born anew or like a person who just came out of the *mikveh*.

The Jewish people were in the desert for forty years, and every day the Manna was fresh. Why did Hashem give the Manna every day? Why didn’t He just make manna that would last fresh for forty years? The answer is because each time the Manna fell, our Emunah was strengthened. The white layer inside the Manna showed us that on our inside, we are always pure, because we can renew ourselves.

The outside layer of our soul tries to tell us that things can’t change, but if we listen to the inner layer of our soul, it tells us that we can always change, because we can always renew ourselves.

Listening to your Heart

In order to listen to our heart, we need to be in a quiet place and try to listen to what’s going on inside our heart. Make sure there is no physical noise going on (as well as even spiritual noise). A person needs to say to himself, “Hashem is creating me anew, every moment.”

Everyone should sit with himself\herself and try to feel how Hashem is with us, and that He is giving us renewed energy every day. Forget about all your past failures; if today wasn’t good, remember that tomorrow you are beginning anew. Forget about all your disappointments; when you get disappointed, remember that you can begin anew and move on.

The more you do this, you will begin to feel great power that will help you strengthen yourself throughout the day, even when you go through disappointments or failures. You will see how your past failures don’t have to affect you now, and you will see great changes in your life. You will see how you can always recreate yourself like new!

When we strengthen ourselves by renewing ourselves, Hashem helps us renew ourselves even more. May we be *zoché* to have a good year, and to receive the power of renewal -- and have all our good requests fulfilled!

Chapter Two

*Feeding Your Soul*³

Our Body and our Soul

The following is not mere ideas, and it is our hope, with the help of Hashem, that these words be very effective in your life; and that it should affect you practically in at least one area of your life.

It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that the word “*Elul*” has the same *gematria* (numerical value in Hebrew) as the word *chaim* (life). Why? This is because in Elul, we can receive a new kind of life. We are asking for life – “*Zochreinu lechaim*”.

What is the kind of life we are asking for?

When Hashem created man, He breathed into him a “*nishmas chaim*” – a “breath of life”. All of us as well, who are modeled after the first man, Adam, have in us a *nishmas chaim*.

Hashem gave us a body and a soul. The body by itself, and the soul by itself, cannot survive alone. We need both. But we must realize that Hashem placed a soul inside our body, and that the definition of our existence is that we have in our body a *nishmas chaim* - a soul.

Feeding the Soul

We all know that our body needs to eat in order to live. We need to eat, drink and sleep in order to survive. But just as our body needs sustenance, so does our soul need to be sustained in order to survive. For this, Hashem gave us the 613 *mitzvos*, which keeps our soul nourished.

³³ Adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim*, p.22

On Rosh Hashanah, as well as on Yom Kippur, we nourish both our body and our soul. On Rosh Hashanah, there is a *mitzvah* to have a festive and joyous meal, and it is called a Yom Tov. As for Yom Kippur, although we don't eat, we still have some connection to eating, as the Sages say that if someone eats a meal on Erev Yom Kippur, it is considered as if he fasted on Yom Kippur.

This is how we feed our body – and it is also a *mitzvah*. But we also have a soul which needs to be fed as well.

How do we feed our soul?

The Hunger of the Soul

We can learn from our body how we can feed our soul, because it is written, “*From my flesh I see G-d.*” Our body can teach us how to feed our soul.

What do we see from our body? If a person isn't hungry, he doesn't eat. At the end of a fast, a person feels an intense hunger, and no explanation is needed as to why he must eat. But when it comes to our soul's hunger, most people do not feel it; people do not feel thirsty for *ruchniyus* (spirituality). People can **know** quite well that we must feed our soul by learning Torah, doing the *mitzvos*, *davening* and doing *chessed*, yet they don't feel the soul's ***hunger*** for these things as much as they feel their hunger for physical food.

If we would feel our soul's hunger as much as when we feel hungry for food, we wouldn't even have to go to an inspiring *shiur* about *machshavah* (Jewish thought) or *hasbkafah* (Jewish ideology). We wouldn't need any *hisorerus* (inspiration). We would almost have no need for this. Why?

Compare this to your physical kind of hunger. Just as you don't need to be inspired to eat breakfast, lunch, or supper – because you are naturally hungry for it – so would we require much less inspiration to feed our soul, if we would be able to feel our soul's hunger for *ruchniyus*.

Identifying The Problem

Before we go into Yom Kippur, we have to first identify what exactly is our problem. Why aren't we ever growing spiritually? Why aren't we advancing in our Avodas Hashem (service towards G-d)?

In order to fix our problems, we must get to the root of the problem. When a person goes to the doctor, and the doctor can't figure out why his patient is sick, he sends the patient to get an X-Ray, and if that still doesn't pick up the problem, he has to undergo even more tests that will pinpoint the issue. When we can't find what is causing the problems, we have to keep probing deeper and deeper until we find it.

The same applies to our spiritual situation. Throughout the course of the year, we encounter many difficulties. We find it hard not to talk *lashon bora* (evil gossip), how to honor our parents properly, how to keep being modest, etc. The problems we have are many, but these are just the "branches" of the real problem. We need to figure out is what the root of it all is.

What is the root of all our problems? These days in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are given to us so we can reflect and make a self-accounting to figure out what the root of our problems is.

The root of our problems lies in what we have started out saying. *Baruch Hashem*, we have merited to be among those who keep Torah and mitzvos, but let us think deeply into ourselves: are we just **keeping** the Torah and the *mitzvos*, or are we also **hungry** to keep them?

With our bodies, we are hungry, so we feed it. But we don't feel our soul's hunger for spirituality, and that is why we don't feed it. We all try to keep the Torah, do the *mitzvos*, and engage in good deeds, but how hungry is a person to want to do any of this?

For example, we *daven*, because we know that we have to; but how many of us feel a hunger to *daven*?

We all identify with our body's hunger. If someone doesn't feel his physical hunger, he is clearly suffering a disorder. Yet, when it comes to our soul's hunger, we don't feel it - and this is causing all the problems. It's wonderful for a person to take on resolutions for the year and strengthen his weak areas, but this is not addressing the root of our problems. The root of our problems is that ***we don't feel our soul's hunger.***

How Are We Spending Yomim Tovim?

Let us take a look at the way we spend the Yom Tovim (Jewish holidays). Are we just living Yom Tov through our bodies, or through our soul?

What do people talk about on Yom Tov? On the day that Yom Tov sets in – let's take Erev Rosh Hashanah for example – what are our conversations about? Some people are speaking about the inner meaning of the Yom Tov, but most conversations go like this: “Which seat did you get in *shul* for the davening?”, or “Who's babysitting your kids when you are in *shul*?”

What are we thinking about as we prepare for Yom Kippur? Most people are busy with how to eat and drink enough before the fast so that their fast will go easy.

And what about Sukkos? As Sukkos is about to enter, people are busy with how to have the nicest looking *sukkah* on the block. Now there are even contests in communities who can build the nicest *sukkah*...

Chanukah comes, and people talk about how to make the best doughnuts, and what the best jelly is. People are mainly busy with where the Chanukah party will be this year: by the parents, by the in-laws, or by the cousins...?

Purim comes, and the focus is about how to make the fanciest *Mishloach Manos* (baskets) – the fancier, the better...

Pesach comes, and people are talking about how the cleaning is going, or “When did you finish the *sefer* last night?” and “Which of your small children asked the Four Questions?”

As for Shavuos, it has basically become a holiday devoted toward the best dairy recipes. *Baruch Hashem*, the dairy suppliers are making a lot of money this time of the year!

When it comes the Nine Days, people don't know what to make of it, so they turn it into an extension of Shavuos – with the eight days before *Tisha B'av* being a time for the tastiest dairy recipes out there.

We all recognize that this is the reality of how we are living. Can we call this the way a Jew is supposed to live?? True, no one is breaking the laws of *Shulchan Aruch* here. It's all within the bounds of *halacha*; no one would dare eat meat during the Nine Days, and we are all careful to carry out exactly what it says in *Shulchan Aruch*. But this way of living is sapping all the *ruchniyus* out of these special times and leaving us with just the physical, superficial shell of it. These holy days have become emptied from their *ruchniyus*.

Can we say that Pesach to us is our “*zman cheiruseinu*” (“time of our freedom”)? Is Shavuos to us a time that the Torah was given? Is Sukkos to us really our *zman simchaseinu* (time of joy)?

What is our joy on Sukkos – about how nice the *sukkah* is?! What will happen then if we see our neighbor with a nicer *sukkah*?! All our happiness will go down the drain! And whatever happened to just being happy with the Yom Tov of Sukkos *itself*? Who talks about it, who thinks about it?

We have become used to experiencing only the superficial layer of each Yom Tov, with just the traditional aspect of it – and even secular people can do that part. If so, have we become satisfied with that level?! Statistics show that on Erev Rosh Hashanah, the most honey in the world is sold, and even secular people are buying honey, not just observant Jews. It’s not a big deal to dip the apple in the honey.

Rosh Hashanah must have more meaning to us. A person has to come into it with a hunger for it, and after it is over, he has to see if he has indeed filled that hunger. We need to come into Yom Kippur as well and feel a hunger for it, and then to see if we have indeed satisfied it. The same goes for Sukkos, Pesach and Shavuos: we must always check to see if we have filled ourselves up from it spiritually, or if it just another Yom Tov that comes and goes.

We all have gone through Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkos more than once. Have we ever gone through any internal change from them, or have we remained the same exact as before?

We are at the beginning of a new year. Can anyone say that he has grown this year since last Rosh Hashanah? Are there any goals which we have set for ourselves and achieved? For most people, the answer is, “No.”

Why?

It is for two reasons. The first reason is as we have said before, that we don’t feel our soul’s hunger. We know about Yom Tovim and the *mitzvos* they entail, we learn about them on an intellectual level, but we don’t feel a ***hunger*** for Yom Tov. Just knowing about the *halachos* of Yom Tov will help us keep its *halachos*, but in order to live like a true Jew, we have to come out of Yom Tov satisfied spiritually. And when the eight days of Sukkos end, we are supposed to come out of it with a happiness that can accompany us into the winter months.

We need to change our whole attitude towards the Yomim Tovim. We usually do not feel our soul's hunger, and maybe it's because we don't think that it's necessary for us to feel. We have become so used to the routine of life – we get up in the morning, run to *davening*, get through it, learn, and attend social events. Each day passes by, but are we ever feeling a spiritual hunger? Or are we only hungry for food, social acceptance and success...?

“No hunger for bread...only to hear the word of Hashem”

We are all descendants of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov. We all stood at Har Sinai. Hashem gave us all a power for spirituality – the Torah, and the soul that is in us. How much are we exercising our soul, in comparison to our body?

It's possible that a person lives in a very *frum* (observant) community, yet his entire day is spent about gratifying the body, from morning until night. Although a person often does much good deeds, much *chessed* and *mitzvos* – where is his soul at? Is his soul hungry to do *chessed*, just as when his body gets hungry? We are much more accustomed to getting things done than to feel a hunger for what we do.

We need to get to a situation in our life, (and when it comes to Yom Tov especially), to reflect what is written in the possuk, “*No hunger for bread and no thirst for water, except to hear the word of Hashem.*”⁴ If we are hungry during these days for more spiritual growth, we are setting forward on the proper path.

Some people think that this possuk is only referring to people who were never *frum*, and that in the End of Days they will merit to join Judaism. But this possuk is not just a prophecy for the End of Days – it is referring to us, even now.

It's possible that a man wears a hat and jacket and that a woman dresses very modestly, but inside, he\she isn't hungry to carry out the “word of Hashem.” Maybe the person feels a hunger to eat good food on Yom Tov, but not more than that...

To be hungry for the word for Hashem means that a person feels hungry before the Yom Tov comes to grow spiritually from it, and that if he doesn't fill that hunger, he is left feeling very unsatisfied.

Rosh Hashanah has passed. What do we feel now that it's over – do we want Yom Kippur now? Do we feel a hunger for it?

⁴ *Amos 8: 11*

“How Are You?”

We are living in a certain system that causes us to be superficial. Our learning, our social life, our dress code and all our behavior are things we do because we are in a certain system, and the purpose of conforming to this system is so that we should be sheltered from secular society. But, although our system accomplishes this, at the same time it causes us to be satisfied with being superficial and to look good externally, to appear *frum*. Besides for conforming to the system, though, we need to reveal *ruchniyus* in our life.

It's possible that a person is very *frum*, always conforming to the rules of *yiddishkeit* – yet at the same time he is buying himself in the “four cubits” of a dead person. Why? It is because his daily life is focused on gratifying his body, not his soul.

It used to be that when two Jews would meet each other in the street and ask, “How are you?” it meant “How is your *neshamah* (soul) doing? Are you growing (or not)?” And the answer, “*Baruch Hashem*”, meant “*Baruch Hashem*, I have gotten more *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven).” Such conversations were very normal and natural.

But today, there is a new language going around. Today, “How are you?” means “How is your job? How are your kids?” and the intention is never about the situation of the soul.

Unfortunately, the average conversation of today between two Jews is identical to a non-Jew's conversation, *l'handil*. When two gentiles meet each other in the street, they also ask, “How are you?” and there is no difference between today between what a Jew would respond to how a non-Jew responds. The conversation is never about *ruchniyus*. From the perspective of our body, there is no difference between a Jew and a non-Jew – after all, we all need to make a living and we all have all kinds of pressures in life.

What, then, *is* the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew? The difference is that a Jew has a *neshamah* (G-dly soul), while a non-Jew doesn't. Because most people are living life only through their body and not through their soul, when they hear “How are you?” they respond in terms of how their body is doing, and the soul is always left out of the picture.

It is not only our daily life which is devoid of our soul. Even when we come to the holiest days of the year, it is basically a foreign subject for people to discuss one's feelings about the coming Yomim Tovim. People get uncomfortable when they have to talk about matters of *ruchniyus* and would rather avoid such a conversation, and in

addition to this, it is considered “getting too emotional” for a person to talk about his feelings about Yom Tov. Why?

It is because we have become so affected by society. As an example, when you open up the newspaper (*a frum* one), all of the articles have nothing to do with *ruchniyus*, and at best, there might be a little column to the side with a *d’var Torah* for Shabbos (and often much of it has nothing to do with Shabbos...). It is rare to find an article about something to do with *ruchniyus* in our newspapers, and it’s a well-known fact.

Even the advertisements on the kosher buses are all screaming out to us, “Gratify your body more.” Never is there a hint about *ruchniyus*. It’s always another kind of fashionable clothing, a new kind of treat or delicacy, or a new music CD. All of these advertisements are directed toward our body, not toward our souls.

The newspapers are all talking toward our body, not to our soul. It would be nice if someone would make a newspaper about “soul news”: “Who grew in their *ruchniyus*? Why not advertise *that* to the masses? If someone wins the lottery, he makes it into the news, but if someone reached a higher level in *ruchniyus*, this wouldn’t merit an article in the paper; not because the person isn’t interested in fame, but rather because people aren’t interested in such news...

Hashem Wants the Heart

We are made up of a body and a soul. Our soul has to be priority to us, with the body only being secondary to it.

We do not mean to imply that one has to ignore his body from now on. This is too lofty of a level for us to be on. We mean a very basic level which we can all be on. Just spend 1% of the day about caring about your soul’s needs; the other 99% can be spent about your body.

We need to at least feel some hunger for *ruchniyus*. Just **one percent** of the day to spend about your soul! For example, in our conversations, let just 1% of it be about our hunger for *ruchniyus*.

If we go through how we spend our day, we might feel that we spend a large part of the day about our soul – after all, we *daven* three times, we learn Torah, and we do *chessed*. It seems that we do much more than one percent of the day about our soul. But these are just our deeds, and it will not suffice. Hashem wants our heart to be in

it, as Chazal state, “*Rachmana liba ba’ee*” - “Hashem wants the heart.” It is also written, “*For all hearts seek Hashem*”⁵. “*My son, give your heart to me.*”⁶

It is not only good deeds which Hashem wants from us; the Golem of Prague was also able to do good deeds! We have a soul in us, which the Golem did not have; and we need to utilize it.

Our Generation Is Missing A Heart

Let us be very clear that we are not discussing high levels over here. We are discussing the bare minimum of *Yiddishkeit*.

The truth is, though, that we are living in a generation which is dead from *Yiddishkeit*.

Maybe one will counter, “What do you mean? There are so many yeshivos, *batei midrashim*, and seminaries today. Fifty years ago there wasn’t so much Torah like there is today.”

But we are missing one thing in today’s times: the heart that a Jew used to have. There used to be true warmth for Shabbos, a yearning for *Yomim Noraim*. It is like what the giants of *mussar* have written – “Gone are those who have fear.”

It is all because we have gotten so used to conforming to the system of *Yiddishkeit*, which, although this is a good thing, it has also gotten us used to just doing things without thinking. People aren’t thinking into what their priorities in life are. Without this introspection, it is no wonder that people are not feeling their inner hunger of their soul.

If a person wants to make sure that he isn’t disconnected from the true purpose of why he was put into this world, he must be connected to a hunger for *ruchniyus*. There must be an aspiration in life of, “When will my actions reach those of my forefathers?” We need to at least touch this level a little bit.

We all do *chessed*, for we are all descendants of Avraham Avinu, who ran after *chessed*. Every Jew does *chessed*, even the most wicked Jew in the world. But doing *chessed* alone isn’t yet resembling Avraham Avinu. Avraham Avinu did *chessed* out of his heart; he couldn’t sleep if he couldn’t do *chessed*, because he felt a hunger for it. Since he felt a hunger for *chessed*, he was able to welcome guests even when he was weak. This wasn’t

⁵ *Divrei Hayomim I: 28: 9*

⁶ *Mishlei 23: 26*

because he “knew” what *chessed* was on an intellectual level or because he heard a *shiur* about it. It was because his soul burned with a hunger to do *chessed*.

Of course, we cannot reach the level of spiritual hunger that Avraham Avinu had, but we are supposed to aspire to be like the *Avos* (forefathers) in that our actions should come from an inner hunger to do them.

We have explained clearly what our problem is. Now we will try to give a practical solution to the problem.

Daven To Hashem About This From The Depths of Your Heart

If we just continue with the routine of life as it is until now, we will not have a better year than the year before it. If we want to have any hope of a good and sweet new year, it can only be done if we think a little about life.

“To think about life” does not mean that we need to sit for three hours in deep thought. Even two or three minutes a day to think about the words here will be enough. The point is that we need to get used to *thinking*.

What do we need to think about?

Remember Who created you, how He created us, and what we are made up of. Then think: I have a body and soul in me. I feel my body’s hunger, but I almost never feel my soul’s hunger.

Once you conclude that it is indeed a problem, begin to daven to Hashem. Beseech Hashem that He should remove your *lev even*, heart of stone, and give you instead a *lev basar*, a soft heart of flesh.

How do we transform our hearts? Improving our deeds alone will not do it; people do many *mitzvos*, but it doesn’t affect their hearts to change. Although there is a rule that “the heart is pulled after the actions”,⁷ we see that people can do thousands of *mitzvos*, yet they remain unaffected. The reason for this is because people aren’t looking to awaken their hearts as they do the *mitzvos*, and they are only focused on getting the deed done.

But when a person realizes that “Hashem wants the heart” – that Hashem wants us to have a spiritual hunger, and to seek to satisfy ourselves spiritually – if one is aware of this, his deeds will be done to fill that spiritual hunger.

⁷ *Sefer HaChinuch*

Our problem is that we don't feel this hunger, and it is for this reason that Hashem has put us here on this world.

What does a Jew do when he feels that he's missing something? Where can he turn to? Hashem. He is close to anyone "*who calls out to Him in truth.*" If someone truly turns to Hashem in prayer, Hashem listens to him. Hashem hears every prayer - "*For You hear the prayer of every mouth*" - but we must turn to Him and initiate the relationship.

So we have to first realize that the root of all our problems is that we don't feel our soul's hunger, and then we need to talk to Hashem about this problem, from the depths of our heart: "Hashem, please open my heart that I feel this hunger, no less than when I feel physically hungry."

Reb Yisrael Salanter zt"l said that if a person davens for physical matters, sometimes he is answered and sometimes he isn't. But when it comes to davening for spirituality, he will always be answered!

Think About Your Life

The problem is that we never think, and we definitely don't *daven* about it. People just take life as it comes and remain the same when they are seventy years old as when they were fifteen or twenty.

If our physical heart is having a problem, we go to a doctor. But with our spiritual heart, there is only One whom we can turn to for help: Hashem. We must beg Him that He open up our hearts to have a hunger for *ruchniyus*, but we have to really ask this from the depths of our heart, and not just as a lip service.

When a person wants a *shidduch*, he cries. There is no parent who doesn't cry when he davens that his child should get a good *shidduch*. Just like we cry to Hashem when we need a *shidduch*, because we really want it, so must we cry to Hashem to feel a hunger for spirituality.

The words here are really quite simple, but they are like as the *Mesillas Yescharim* writes, that because they are so well-known, that is why they are so overlooked.

Is there any hope for us to have a good year? Yes – there is. It is our choice! It's our choice if we will have a good year or not. If we realize how empty our souls are, we

have hope for this year. We must remember Hashem, who created us. Then we must daven to Him to feel a hunger for spirituality.

The words here are a simple guidance for life, to live life through our soul in very simple terms.

My Main Message To You

I usually don't speak in front of women. It's not my type to do this, and I'm not used to it. But I made a *chesbbon hanefesh* (soul-accounting) with myself and I realized that it is necessary to speak, because the situation today in the world is so far from the true way a Jew lives. I am not saying we have to do major things, but just to live our simple, daily life the way it should be. What will be with us? What will be our end...?

Unless a person feels a hunger for spirituality and to feel that we are missing something spiritual in our life (and to daven to Hashem for help), he has no hope on this world. Even if a person does a lot of *chessed* and davens with a lot of concentration, it won't do anything for him unless he feels hungry for spirituality.

I came here to speak for one reason alone: that all of you should know that Hashem gave us the choice to talk to Hashem and beseech Him. It is a very simple choice we can make, but it is just that we aren't used to thinking about it.

Without realizing this, a person can daven his whole life and even concentrate on the words, but he won't feel a thing. We need to realize that we are able to talk to Hashem, just like we can talk to a parent or a friend. Daven to Hashem that you should feel like you are deriving a vitality from spirituality: "Hashem, please open my heart! I daven, but I don't feel anything. I do *mitzvos*, but I'm lacking *chiyus* (vitality) in them."

The soul within us thrives on Torah, on *mitzvos*, on *davening*, on having *emunah* in Hashem. If we aren't feeling a *chiyus* from this, we need to daven to Hashem that He help us feel it.

I hope that these words have pierced your heart; the words here are really very simple, and they are not my own. May Hashem merit each of us to have a good year, a year of true *chiyus*.

Chapter Three

*Real Life*⁸

Meaningful Life, Not the Life of an Animal

Once there was a man who made himself a list on Erev Rosh Hashanah, a list of his needs for the coming year, in order not to forget what to on Rosh Hashanah that Hashem should fulfill his heart's desires for the good. The list included *parnassah* (livelihood), health, well-raised children who would do good, and other similar requests.

Three days after Rosh Hashanah, the man died. He got every one of his wishes fulfilled, but he died. Health - he was not sick; *parnassah* - his family inherited; well-raised children who would do good, but would do so as orphans.

How could such a thing happen?? He asked for everything, but he forgot to ask for life itself! So he got everything he asked for, but that.

The first thing a person needs to ask for is life itself! Once he has life, he can ask for *parnassah*, health etc., in order that his life is not full of burdens that prevent him from fulfilling his goals, but all of that can only be if he has life itself.

That is indeed why we daven on Rosh Hashanah, "*Zochraynu L'chaim, Melech chofetz bachaim, v'chos-vaynu b'sefer bachaim l'maan'cha Elokim chaim.*" – "Remember us for life, King who desires life, and write us into the book of life, for Your sake, the living G-d."

We must reflect on this a bit: What do we mean by "*chaim*" (life)? To live and not to die? Horses live, geese live. Does anyone want Hashem to give him the life of a goose

⁸ Adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim, p.59*

or a horse? "Inscribe us in the Book of Life together with all the geese!" . . . Nobody wants that. We want life - meaningful life.

If so, when we say "*Kosvaynu b'sefer hachaim*" and then on Yom Kippur, "*Chosmaynu*", we do not mean to ask for life in the same sense that animals and birds are granted life, but rather that we want the life of a human being.

Where does this "inscribing" and "sealing" take place? Is there a big thick book somewhere up in heaven where the names of all creatures is written?

Obviously there isn't a pen nor parchment, nothing is written down in a physical sense. It's simple to understand that we are talking about something spiritual. What indeed is it?

The Maggid of Mezeritch used to say that the inscription and sealing take place on each person's **heart**. That's where a person's life-force is. When the heart ceases to function - that is death. "Inscribe us for life" - we are asking Hashem to write on the tablet of our **heart**.

In order to understand the depth hidden in these words, let us contemplate the year that's gone by, and what we want for the upcoming year.

A Life of "Chiyus" – To Have Real Vitality in our Life

Everything needs *chiyus* - some kind of life-giving force that sustains it. If it doesn't have *chiyus*, it disintegrates, it cannot go on to exist. Plants require irrigation, animals need food and water in order to live, and human beings too require a life-giving force in order to continue to exist.

When we reflect on what is it that gives us life, we can divide the answer into two categories: there are things that give us our **existence**, and there are things that give us **pleasure**. In order to exist, it would be enough to have "bread with salt and measured amounts of water". That will enable a person to live, not to die. Yet just to keep staying alive is not enough for us to really survive; a person needs a source of pleasure in his life as well in order to really stay alive.

For example, let's say a person is accustomed to eating three meals every day: three types of cheese for breakfast, four types of meat for lunch, and similar fare for supper. One day he attempts to change over at once to eating bread with salt and measured amounts of water. His body will undergo physical madness.

Why? Isn't he eating enough? Yes, he is, but this alone will not enable him to survive. Why not? It is because there are two kinds of things that give humans their life: things that enable us to subsist, basic food and the like; and things that give us pleasure. A person who has no points of pleasure in his life cannot really live. There is no such thing.

Each person has the choice as to what kind of pleasure he needs. There are people who derive their pleasure from a certain type of food, while others get their enjoyment in life from reading. Others derive their pleasure from a captivating *niggun* (Jewish melody), while someone on a higher level gets his enjoyment from Torah, mitzvos, and connection to the Creator of the world.

Every day, a person has some kind of pleasure. Most people get their pleasure from delicious food, a bit of honor or a compliment, maybe a few other external feelings from the material world - these are pleasures are giving people their *chiyus*.

But we are not street people. We are *maaminim bnei maaminim* (believers, sons of believers), and we believe that we must derive our pleasure from our **inside** - not from the external world.

Let us stop to think about this. A man arises in the morning, davens *Shacharis*, and goes to eat breakfast. *Boruch Hashem*, he doesn't eat just eat "bread dipped in salt" - he eats more than that. What did he really enjoy more - *Shacharis*, or his breakfast?

After all, if he were exempt from davening due to a situation beyond his control, he wouldn't have to daven. If he's busy with a mitzvah that no one else besides him can, or if his wife gave birth and he took her to the hospital and he needs to attend to her there - the halachah is that he is exempt from davening. One doesn't have to daven in these situations - not due to forgetfulness and not *chas v'shalom* with malicious intent. But when it comes to eating breakfast, even if he is exempt from eating it, that exemption won't do a thing. He must eat in order to exist!

When we come to request life on Rosh Hashanah, "*Kosvaynu L'chaim*", we are requesting both types of life: 1) Life in its simple meaning - that we should live a long life, and not be written in the opposite book, *chas v'shalom*. 2) That there will be *chiyus* in that *chaim* - that besides for being allowed to live, we should have a feeling of vitality (*chiyus*) in our life.

There are people who live, but their life is a kind of death - they are living a life of internal *yissurim* (suffering). This reflects the possuk in Yonah, "Ask for their soul to die".

The fact that a person is alive doesn't mean that he has *chiyus*. He may be alive, yet he can still be devoid of any *chiyus*. A man can sit by the Gemara an entire day – he is immersed in “Toras Chaim”, the “Torah of life” - yet he himself is kind of dead inside! Yes, he learns Torah, but it can all be for many external factors: because he has no other choice...because he needs the income he gets from the kolel... because it would be more uncomfortable for him to leave than to stay... or simply because he has nowhere else to go to. The learning itself gives him no *chiyus* and no pleasure.

If so, when we come on Rosh Hashanah and ask Hashem to give us life, our first request, most external and basic, is simply for life itself - that we should not die, and in this concern we are no different from animals and geese. Our second request, though, is that we should get *chiyus* - real pleasure in our life, and that this pleasure should come from learning Torah and keeping mitzvos.

Many times a person only focuses on external needs, such as that Hashem should give him life and that he not die; he also asks for a variety of needs - *parnassah*, health, *shalom bayis*, children who are *tzadikim* and so on - a long list in all, each person according to his needs.

All this is from the point of view of externalities, but where is the **internal** focus of the day?

Two Judgments on Rosh Hashanah

There are two days of Rosh Hashanah. It is explained in *sefarim hakedoshim* that the judgment on the first day is concerning what will be with our *neshamah* (soul), and the judgment of the second day is concerning our body's situation.

Why should it make a difference to us when our *neshamah* is judged and when the body is judged? Whenever Hashem wants, let Him judge; what purpose is there in us knowing this information?

It's clear that the judgment on our *neshamah* on the first day relates to the **internal** life the person will have for the year. The person is being judged as to how much internal ***chiyus*** he will have, how much "neshamah" he will have this year.

It's possible that person will receive life on the second day's judgment. He is already 90 years old and he is being given another year. And yet on the first day, he was judged to die. What will be with him? He will not be eligible for the cemetery's guest list that year, but he will have physical existence and no more, life with no content. He will sit in the house with no taste to his life, no *chiyus*.

And that's not only true with a 90-year-old. Even a young 20-year-old, he too can have no *chiyus*! How many days pass over us in a year that we feel have no *chiyus*! We daven, we do mitzvos, we may even be immersed in Torah from morning until night, but our *chiyus* in learning is missing - the possuk that says "*V'chai bohem*" - "*And you shall live by them.*" The person doesn't feel any pleasure in an inner way.

Even if a person contemplates the year just gone by and feels that he did receive life, let's analyze that a bit. For 24 hours in a day, normally a person sleeps between 6 and 8 of them, during which he certainly wasn't feeling much *chiyus*. So there are 14-16 hours left.

Now make a cheshbon (accounting) one day; not about what he did - that's a cheshbon hanefesh that relates to the second day of Rosh Hashanah, what he did, did he keep mitzvos or, *chalila* (Heaven forbid) did he do aveiros. He checks out his actions seeing how they fell short, or how they can be improved, he does *teshuva sheleima* (complete repentance) including *charatah* (regret), *viduy* (confession) and *kabala l'assid* (resolving not to sin again), just like the Rambam says to do. Certainly this kind of cheshbon must be done too, but the cheshbon hanefesh of the first day of Rosh Hashanah is to figure how much time per day did we have *chiyus*. Before we even check out where the *chiyus* came from, first of all, how much actual *chiyus* did we derive from that day?

A person arises in the morning, and he runs to his day's activities. Maybe he goes to the *mikveh* too; then he goes to daven. Did he derive *chiyus* from his tefillah? He should check it out. If he did, how much of the tefillah gave him *chiyus*? He finishes davening, and then he attends to his various responsibilities that each person has. He eats breakfast, goes to *kollel*, learns for four hours of first seder. But how much *chiyus* was there?? The comes lunch break, and he continues on - each person according to his own schedule.

Thus, we have to make for ourselves a double *cheshbon hanefesh*: The first stage is what we did, and for this we are judged on the second day of Rosh Hashanah; but the second part of our *cheshbon hanefesh*, which is the more internal stage, is: How much *chiyus* did we have throughout the day?

Of course, not all days are equal. Some days there we have more *chiyus*, and some days we have almost not *chiyus*. If a person will be honest with himself, he may find that the *chiyus* he had on a particular day was possibly the omelet he ate for breakfast, or a certain nice smile that someone cast his way at a particular time of the day. And that's it! Beyond that he was simply running all day long without feeling any internal *chiyus*.

Then there are people who won't understand what exactly we mean when we say "*chiyus*" - they're not sad, not happy, just "alive"! They will hear this and wonder, "What are you talking about here...Why do we need to have *chiyus*...?"

If a person knows himself just a little, he knows that when his wife gave birth, he was very happy. At that moment, he understood very well what we mean by "*chiyus*". When he ate a food that he really likes, he felt *chiyus*, each according to his own tastes and values. It's not possible that he gets no *chiyus* from anything. One can just check and identify what he "lives" from. How much time out of the day did he have *chiyus*, and from where did he derive it? That is the question one has to ask myself: Where am I getting my *chiyus* from?

If an average person finds that he has more than ten minutes a day of *chiyus*, this is already an accomplishment.

To Feel that Torah Gives Us Life

How many people are really *zocheh* to learn Torah and every moment to feel the pleasure? Not just to finish the sugya and know it - that's also essential of course, but to receive the *chiyus* that Torah gives to those who learn it?

The Torah after all is *Toras Chaim*, it gives a person *chiyus*. The Mishnah in *Avos* states, "How great the Torah is, that it gives life to those who learn it in this world and in the next world, as it says, "For they are life to those who find them and a salve for all flesh", and it says "It can heal your flesh and nourish your bones", and it says "For they will add on to your days and years of life, and peace and well-being".

It's not sufficient just to know what is written in the *seforim* that Torah gives life, nor is it enough even to realize that it's true. If the Torah gives us life, we need to be able to *feel* this truth.

A person who has a heart attack, *chas v'shalom*, goes unconscious, and they are trying to resuscitate him. The fact that resuscitation procedure works is not just something that is written in medical books, we see that it really works: one moment ago he was lying on the floor lifeless, then they got him to breathe, and gradually he regained consciousness.

It is written in many *pesukim* and in the words of Chazal that Torah literally gives life to those who learn it. Mitzvos also give us life, and so does tefillah. If that's what's written it must be true, the question is whether we feel this truth within our **heart?**

This is the depth of what the Magid of Mezeritch was saying: that the inscription and the seal take place on each person's **heart**. One has to be aware that the decree for the year is not only written in heaven - it is revealed also within one's heart. When life is decreed for a person on Rosh Hashanah, the decree is written on his heart; how much *chiyus* he will feel.

This is not some "segulah" whose reward will be felt at some time in the distant future. The Torah gives life to those who learn it and carry it out, right here in this world! If a person learns all his life long but he's not tasting its enjoyment and the life that the Torah can give him, then he is learning Torah only because he believes that in the distant future he will be rewarded; Hashem will give him his due reward, but this is not the way true life was meant to be.

Even a *gadol* (Torah leader of the generation) cannot learn for 12 or 14 hours without tasting enjoyment in his learning. If a person receives a satisfying taste in learning Torah, then he will find that he is able to learn even when there is he temporarily loses his taste in it; but to learn his entire life without taste, only because he wants to get a graduation certificate (*semichah*), or for all sorts of other reasons - that's death, not life! He would be fulfilling the mitzvah of *Talmud Torah* and will receive his due reward for it, but he is missing out on the real concept of life!

Without Chiyus One Will Never See Success

If we contemplate these things, we will find that a person can think he's all prepared for Rosh Hashanah, when in reality, he has already decreed upon himself to be judged on the second day, and not on the first.

How? He made for himself a cheshbon hanefesh: what did I do this year, what aveiros. He knows that he failed at times guarding his eyes, in *loshon hora*, in embarrassing someone, in wasting time of Torah learning, davening too late; each person knows for himself what his aveiros are. He made a cheshbon hanefesh on what he is trying to rectify these areas for next year, and he feels that this alone will help him succeed...

If he does this, it's not a question of a 70% chance that he will not succeed, not 80% and not 90%. It's 100% for sure that he will not succeed! Why?

Have you ever seen a dead body that can get up on time for *Shacharis*? So too a person cannot fight for an entire year to get up on time; there is no such thing! We are not such strong people who can fight every morning to get up on time. One day or two

we can persevere, at very best a week or two; if one makes it all the way to *Hoshana Rabbah*, he's really accomplished something . . . but beyond that there is no chance!

We all know very well: every year we make *kaballos* (resolutions), and 99% of them do not stand up to reality. Why? Is it that we don't really want? We do want. We're not serious? We are serious! So what then is the problem?

The answer is very clear: when a person judges what he does and what he doesn't do, he is making a *cheshbon hanefesh* and organizing for himself what he will do in the upcoming year. By doing this he has already decreed his own *gzar din* for the first day and the second. He did real *teshuva* concerning his *maasim* (deeds); Hashem accepts his *teshuva* and will give him physical life on the second day. But as far as the *neshamah* goes, - the *chiyus* one will have - he has never even considered this, and he certainly didn't do *teshuva* on it; so how could he possibly receive *chiyus* for the upcoming year?!

We can compare this to a someone who comes to the king and asks him, "Give me precious stones, give me a house." If he didn't specifically request a car, though, he won't get one.

If a person comes on Rosh Hashanah and asks for health, *parnassah*, a good memory for his learning - each person with his own bag of requests - but he neglects to ask for *chiyus* - he will not receive *chiyus*! He wants to remember what he learned? He will be like a camera, a computer disc, remembering everything, but he won't have *chiyus*.

A computer, even the kind that has on it the entire Torah, can never be considered a live entity. Even though it remembers better than anyone - there's no one in the generation who can remember as well as a computer can - in the end of the day, it's an inanimate object, not living. The fact that we remember things doesn't change a person into a living being.

When a person sees how learning the Torah gives life to him, and he enjoys learning it, that's when he goes beyond being a computer and becomes a person who knows the Torah. This is a simple and obvious difference, but when we get to our actual daily life, many times we are occupied more with knowing and keeping the Torah, and less with the *chiyus* that our learning (and keeping the mitzvos) can give us.

It's actually impossible to keep Torah and mitzvos according to halachah when a person lacks the *chiyus* they give. A person cannot fight the whole year long with such a battle. Ten days - somehow you can pull it off, but that too is a lot. Everyone understands that if we need to fight the entire year in order to change ourselves - there's not a chance in the world that we'll succeed!

How then can we ever succeed?

We've never seen a *chosson* whom they need to drag to the *chuppah*. If they need to drag him to the *chuppah* - better he shouldn't get married, it's 100% clear that in the end there will be a divorce. Why? Because it's not possible to build a life of 70 years on the basis of a forced marriage! If he understands that this lifestyle has pleasure in it and he is happy with the notion - sure there will be difficulties, life is full of challenges, but he has some *chiyus* out of it, some pleasure, and on the other hand - challenges, but the *chiyus* gives him the power to handle. This is a healthy world, a good world.

If a person who doesn't feel a taste for davening, why would he have the motivation to get up in the morning? Of course, he believes as his fathers did in the holy Torah, and that Hashem gave us a time to daven and a time to say *Shema*, and that whoever doesn't do it will go to *Gehinnom*, and because of this fear he wants with all his heart to get up on time. But a person is not capable the entire year to live on the basis of a fear of *Gehinnom*. Fear of *Gehinnom* is needed, absolutely; it's not okay to get up only when we feel like it, so we do need to make use of our fear of *Gehinnom* at times. But it's also impossible to get up an entire year only on the basis of fear of *Gehinnom*!

If a person has a taste in *tefillah* - even if at times he doesn't have the *cheishek* (desire), he can awaken his fear of *Gehinnom* to get out of bed, but together with it he has to have some *taam* in the davening itself too, or else he won't be able to get up.

There are people who get up every morning on time, but it's not because they have a *taam* for davening. It's just that they have a nature that thrives on structure. If they would get up half an hour late - their head would already feel dizzy. *L'havdil*, there are also people who get up and 6:30 every morning to go to work and arrive at 7:00 on the dot. This has no connection to Torah and mitzvos, it's just on account of their structured nature, but it's still totally possible that they have no *taam* at all in their *tefillah*.

***When There is Internal Chiyus -
There is Less Reason to Turn to Outside Chiyus***

Let's stop and think a moment about a regular, simple day out of the year that has passed.

Boruch Hashem we all daven, put on *tefillin* and learn Torah. Certainly we always need to do more and more in every way, but before we get to that, let's consider what we already do: how much *chiyus* is in it.

We walk down the street, and how many happy people do you meet? Very few. We go into the beis midrash, how many happy people do you see? Also, very few. There are very few people who are truly happy.

How can this be?? A person is *zocheb* to learn Toras Hashem for seven or eight hours, and he doesn't have a joy in it?!

We believe that the main part of our life is Talmud Torah that brings us to good deeds. That's the purpose of life. If so, a person who was *zocheb* to dedicate most of his day to learn Torah, why would he not be happy? It makes no sense!

The problem isn't a logical one. The problem is not with people's heads – it's a problem in the heart: **the heart of a person is desiring other things.**

In his head, a person truly arrived at the very clear recognition: there is a Creator, He gave us the Torah, and the existence of the entire world depends on learning Torah...and this is what I must do. The recognition may be crystal clear – none of us have any doubt about it. The problem is that these conclusions are located in our brains, not in our hearts, and you can't derive any *chiyus* from them. A person needs some *chiyus*, and he cannot live without *chiyus* – so he has to get it from other things. He may receive it from eating delicacies, from reading books, or from all manner of other external things, but it's not possible to live without feeling *chiyus*. If a man doesn't receive his *chiyus* from Torah, from mitzvos, from tefillah, from emunah and from his relationship with the Creator- he is forced to receive it from some other place.

It can be that a man sits and learns, keeps all the mitzvos and davens, but he gets his *chiyus* from totally other things, just like a man of the street – not less, and not more! He does 1000 times more than the man of the street does, but his *chiyus* he derives from outside, not from inside.

When he finishes davening, he feels no *chiyus*. At the end of first *seder*, he also doesn't feel *chiyus*. So he needs to go outside a bit during lunch break to derive *chiyus* from something else: a cup of coffee and a cigarette, gadgets or something. But he needs to get some *chiyus*.

When a man eats physical food, he enjoys it, it feels very good inside, he doesn't need explanations why. Two years olds run after sweets, even though nobody ever explained to them that sweets are tasty. They feel it for themselves.

When a man enjoys his learning, at the end of first *seder*, he feels good about himself. The Torah gave him life because he has a *neshamah* within him, and the *neshamah* gets

its nourishment from toiling over Torah. He was *zocheb* to learn, to understand, to attach himself to the Torah in the depth of his soul, and he goes out with a very good feeling. As a direct result, when he goes out to the street, he quite naturally does not need to satisfy his eyes by looking at other things because he has *chiyus inside*.

A man who has what to live off of within himself is less likely to turn to the outside, but a man who does not have as much to live off of within himself naturally will look more to the outside for pleasure.

First Get Chiyus Before Your Work To Improve Yourself!

Throughout the year we need to handle many challenges, and everyone knows the difficulties that he must face.

Usually the solution does not involve making more *kaballos*. Certainly one needs also to make *kabolos*, but they are not the solution itself.

It's like a man who doesn't feel well. He goes to the doctor who examines him and prescribes three pills a day – morning noon and evening; take these pills and you will get well. The man goes back home and stops eating and drinking. What's wrong with that? Didn't the doctor tell him all he has to do is take three pills a day, so then – why should he need to eat and drink too?...

His family urges him: If you carry on like this, in a few days you will die! “But I don't understand”, he complains, “didn't the doctor tell me just to take three pills every day?”

The answer is: “You need to eat properly, drink properly, and in order to cure the illness you need to take the three pills daily, but you can't survive on just three pills alone!”

We have problems, all kinds of illness and diseases, and we need our ‘pills’, prescriptions to heal body and soul; but before anything else, we need to eat the “bread” of Torah and “drink” its water and its wine. Once we have a source of *chiyus* internally from the Torah and its mitzvos – it's like we have a proper diet of food, and now when problems arise we can look for solutions like *kabolos*. But if we aren't going to eat a constant and proper diet of food next year, how can we fix what needs to be fixed?!

It's clear to me that everyone has good intentions and deep desire to be better than last year, but an earnest desire alone will not help.

For example, a man wants to be *mezakeh es harabim*, and he wants that every Jew throughout the world will say Tehillim. So he gets an idea: publish 6 million *sifrei Tehillim*, for the *zechus* of the *rabim*. The problem is that each *sefer Tehillim* costs 10 shekel, meaning that he needs 60 million shekel that he does not have.

His intention is very good, his desire is excellent, and he can pour out his heart before the *Borei olam* to be *mezakeh* him, but in the meantime he doesn't have 60 million shekel at his disposal, so he cannot just yet approach a publisher and order 6 million *33esham Tehillim*.

We all desire to correct the coming year, but if we don't have a source of *chiyus*, how will we do anything?!

There are many problems, and people try to fix up all sorts of things: one works on *tznius*, another on internet issues, a third on *shmiras haloshon*. They are all right. All these really are *aveiros* and we need to correct them. But what is the **root** of these issues? Why is it that people actually reach the point of having these problems in the first place?

Sure it's easy to say: Look, it's the generation, it's the street, the *yetzer hora* today is so strong. . .

True and good, but where is the root of the problem? The root of the problem is that when a person does not have life internally, he has to look elsewhere. "*Batallab* (Boredom) leads to insanity."

What is meant by "*batallab*"? That a person doesn't have what to do? No. A person can sit in a *beis midrash* from morning till evening and learn, and not waste a moment, and nonetheless he is like someone who sits idle, as if he was asleep! His heart has no *chiyus* in his learning! The brain is working – sure; he understands the material very well, he even exerts himself, but his **heart** is disconnected from his learning. He is lacking *chiyus*, and he needs it, so what does he do? He goes outside to search for some kind of fulfillment. He looks at this, reads that, is drawn after whatever is available.

It is like what the Rambam writes: "A person only thinks a lot about immoral relations if his **heart** is empty of wisdom." If the *heart* is filled with wisdom of Torah, the Torah would be to him a *Toras chaim*, and then he would have satisfaction from his *ruchniyus*.

A person who has satisfaction is much less likely to look for things outside. For example, people who have problems in their home look for fulfillment outside of it.

By contrast, a person who lives in a good home will naturally, quite naturally be less drawn toward things pulling him from outside.

Someone who has in his heart a source of *chiyus* from a day of toiling in Torah and keeping the mitzvos, davening, *emuna* and connection with the *Borei olam* – he comes out feeling truly alive. Such a person isn't going to be looking outside for *chiyus*, because he has something inside giving him life. A person looks outside only when inside he is empty, inside he is missing something, and if that's the situation, he doesn't have the self-control to handle the enticements that he sees. If he doesn't have *chiyus* inside – he will search for it outside and he is liable to be drawn there.

We should understand that before making any *kabolos*, and before any corrective action on all sorts of things that need to be corrected – in order that we be able to correct them, we need a source of *chiyus* within ourselves.

We do not mean to say a person shouldn't daven for his needs, but like we said before, **first** he should understand that what's lacking for him in life is *chiyus* from holiness. It could be that he has very many *maasim* that are holy, yet he has very little *chiyus* from the holiness.

So the first thing he has to daven for on Rosh Hashanah is “*Zochraynu l'chaim*,” that we should have *chiyus* in the life that we have! How many people live without *chiyus*! How much *chiyus* is there within each one of us? We need to request and to plead, every one according to his where is at in life: “Ribono shel olam, Give me more *chiyus* in my life, allow me to feel internal *chiyus* within myself.”

When one has *chiyus* inside, he can then ask for *parnassah*, health, and whatever he needs, but the preparation for Rosh Hashanah needs to begin with *hisbonenus* about how much *chiyus* he had in his life last year, and from where he derives it. When a person contemplates this, he will be astonished what he is really “living” off of.

Once it's clear to him what he's living from, he can come and pleads honestly before Hashem: “*Zochraynu l'chaim*” – but which kind of *chaim*? “*L'maan'cha Elokim Chaim*”, the kind of *chaim* that my *chiyus* will be in serving the Creator. *Chaim*, that when I learn Torah in first *sefer*, I will leave at the end with an inner feeling in my heart of someone who feels “alive”. *Chaim*, that when I finish *Shacharis*, I will go out of shul with the inner feeling of *chiyus* that results from the connection with Hashem when I talk to Him.

When tefillah is done with *chiyus*, and the Torah is learned with *chiyus* – then upon that, it's possible to correct all the rest of our actions too.

What's Left – Only Torah and Maasim Tovim

In *Olam haba* (the World to Come), there are no actions; “*La-meisim chof-shi*” – it is free of mitzvos. The dead do not do mitzvos. When the *neesbamah* goes up to Gan Eden – there are no mitzvos there to do. No *tallis*, no *succah*, and no *shofar*.

What then exactly is the life of *Olam haba*?

Life for us in the next world is made up of these points of *chiyus* that a person had here in *olam hazeh*! The *chiyus* that a person received from his learning Torah, the *chiyus* that he received from doing mitzvos, the *chiyus* that he received from tefillah, from *emuna*, from connection with the *Borei olam* – that is what remains for him on the day of death. “When a person is *niftar*, nothing accompanies him – not money and not gold and not precious stones, only Torah and *maasim tovim*.”

What is meant by “Torah and *maasim tovim*”? Does it mean that if he published a sefer, they will put a copy of it together with him in his grave? No. What it means is that the very same *chiyus* that he got when he was learning Torah and doing mitzvos – that’s what remains with him. The actual physical mitzvos will be long gone from the world. The *succah* that he used has already been disassembled; the *esrog* has. What remains from the mitzvos is the impression on his heart, the *chiyus* in his heart that he had from it.

The Torah is *Toras chaim*, and the mitzvos are mitzvos of *chaim*. What remains to a person after he has learned and after he has done the mitzvah?

True, with learning you might say: What is meant by Torah remaining with me? It means that I will remember what I learned! But with mitzvos you can’t say that, nothing is left, the objects of the mitzvah are no longer in existence.

And even with Torah, remembering is only the outer part of what remains for us from the Torah we learned. The internal part is the *Toras chaim*, the *chiyus* from holiness that is within the Torah.

A man goes through a day of learning Torah and doing mitzvos. At the end of the day he contemplates what he got from it. How much *chiyus* he had today – **that’s** what remains.

A Huge Difference – Chiyus in Learning

The words of the Gemara are well-known: “Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah, one for the completely wicked, one for the completely righteous, and one

for the *beinonim* (average). The righteous are written and sealed immediately for life, the wicked are written and sealed immediately for death, while the *beinonim* – are held in suspension from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. If they are *zocheh*, they are written for life, else – they are written for death.

Tosafos (Rosh Hashanah 16b) asks: Don't we see each year many wicked people who continue living, and many righteous people who die during the year? *Tosafos* answers that "What here is called death for the wicked and life for righteous refers to the life of *Olam haba*."

What is that supposed to mean? If it means *olam haba* – let them judge him in the future, when the Great Day of Judgment of the future comes, at which time they are going to judge every person whether he is *zocheh* to *olam haba*. Why do they need to judge him now regarding *olam haba*?

The answer is: In *olam haba* there is no outer life, only inner life. "A person is judged regarding *olam haba*" doesn't mean that he is judged what will happen to him when *olam haba* comes, but how much *chiyus* – which is the stuff of *olam haba* – he will get now.

It could be that on Rosh Hashanah it's decreed on a man on the one hand that he will live 356 days, and it's also decreed that he will live 15 minutes. How can that be? He lives for an entire year, but only 15 minutes of *chiyus* will be contained within that year. He will have a few moments of *bisromemus* (elation) when he will feel some level of *chiyus*. Beyond that – until next Tishrei he's dead inside his *chiyus* for the year is over.

That is to say: if you see a man who gets through a year, it's not necessarily true that he "lived" the whole year!

Here we are before Rosh Hashanah of a new year. The first thing we need to ask for is that we should have *chiyus* in our lives.

People naturally are accustomed to focusing on requests for more quantity, and that certainly is a positive thing, but in parallel with asking for more in quantity, we need to ask for more in quality – inner quality in our nefesh, how much a person feels alive.

Herein lies the difference between those who have *chiyus* and those who don't. They may both sit by the Gemara four hours without lifting their eyes from it even once, they may both invest their whole brain in understanding the *sugya* – and despite all that, the one with *chiyus* was "alive" for four hours, while the person next to him is alive from it maybe for a minute, maybe two or three. Why? Because on Heaven, it

was decreed that he would get four hours of *chiyus*, and on the other person was decreed that he would get four hours of just learning, without *chiyus*.

This is a huge difference!

We ask to be *zoche* to learn Torah, to know Torah, but we need to ask to be *zoche* that the Torah will be “*ki heim chayeynu*” Torah, that we will learn it with a feeling of life, that we will get out of it a source of nourishment.

Who among us can say he’s had a happy year? A person says: “How can I be happy? I had a medical problem with one of my children, hardly any *parnassah*, debts, etc.” Everyone has his issues. But these issues are not the source of why people aren’t happy! The reason why people aren’t happy is that they are missing a source of *chiyus*. When a person has no *chiyus* in his life, all he has left with is just his various problems.

If a person has a source of *chiyus* the whole day long, life will look different. Not that he will have less problems; our problems are indeed disturbing, but they haven’t got the power to uproot the *chiyus* one gets from the Torah and the mitzvos. When a person has *chiyus* from Torah and mitzvos, he “lives” in them, and from there he gets his nourishment. The problems he has will only be painful and unpleasant, but they will not sap the joy out of his life, when he has *chiyus*.

Knowing the Reality, Not Just an Idea

All we have said is not a “*shmuez*” of *hisorerus*, or *mussar*, or an idea. It’s simply reality!

This past year is not a “concept” mentioned in a *sefer*. Each one of us lived it. We are not little children who relate to life lightly. As adults we know what it means to go through a year in *olam hazeh*, with all its attendant difficulties.

We understand also that next year is not just something that’s written on a calendar. The coming year is an entire *masechta* that each one of us will go through, and no one knows what lies hidden in it for him in the days ahead.

This is reality. Now we have the choice which reality we will go through in the coming year.

It the nature of this world that no one is given everything. Even the Avos, if you contemplate their lives just a little we see that they lacked things, you can see that they did not have everything. Not on every one of them was the *gzar din* of Rosh Hashanah one of abundant health, plenty of *parnassah*, great *shalom bayis*, good well-raised children.

Look at the life of Avraham Avinu. He had no children for 100 years. Each Rosh Hashanah, during that time he undoubtedly *davened* for a child – and was he was not answered for 100 years. Yitzchak and Rivkah could not have children. Did they succeed in altering their decree on the very first Rosh Hashanah? No. Yaakov too, he had nothing to eat. What *did* our Avos have? They had *chiyus* in the heart! Even though they were barren, even though there was a lack of *parnasah*, even when Yosef was lost to Yaakov – they had what to live off of.

Certainly it was hard for them. Yaakov Avinu was a father, his son disappeared for 22 years, and he mourned for him many years. But besides mourning, he still had a source of *chiyus* to provide him with life.

There are people today who have gone through the pain of losing a child. They often feel like there's nobody to talk to about their pain. This is really because all they have is a tragedy, without any source of *chiyus* in their life. They find it impossible to cope, but if they would have *chiyus* in their life, they would be to find the inner strength to be able to.

If a person has *chiyus*, even if *chas v'shalom* some tragedy comes upon him – it's difficult, it's very unpleasant, it needs strong *emunah*, but he will have what to live off of and where to draw strength from.

After all, we don't fool ourselves that really in the coming year no one will lack anything. From the day the world was created, ever since the sin of, people have always lacked some things. Only when *Moshiach* comes will there be abundance of everything for everybody.

What we *can* hope for, though, is that in this year we will derive *chiyus* throughout the year, that our *neshamah* will be open and we'll feel alive inside, and then we will have the strength to deal with all the things that happen to each one of us in our lives. Hashem gives us that inner strength to face anything, but we need only to ask for it, that we should have a source of *chiyus* in our life.

“*Kosvaynu l'chaim*”. We are asking for another year of life, but what we really should be asking for when we say this is that we are asking of Hashem for a life that has within it *chiyus*.

May we all be *zoche* to recognize that true life is the nourishment of the *neshamah*, a life of feeling connected to the Creator of the world; and that we be *zoche* to uncover our inner strengths – through Hashem writing us in the “*sefer hachaim, lmaan'cha Elokim, chaim.*”

Chapter Four
*Five Minutes A Day of Introspection*⁹

Caught Up in Pre-Yom Tov Stress

In Navi, we learned about Jerusalem and the great people that lived here.

We are now in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. What is our current day situation? We are in the center of Jerusalem. How is Jerusalem supposed to look? What should the streets look like?

Everyone is buying *s'chach* and walls for their Sukkah. We are looking to beautify our Sukkah...

What about our souls? Are we looking to beautify our souls?

Are we running to put together our Sukkah because it is a mitzvah or because that's what everyone else is doing?

When we walk in the streets, do we feel that it is almost Yom Kippur?

We are caught up in life. Our souls and our Yiddishkeit is missing. Non-Jews also fill their streets with holiday shopping when it comes to their holidays. What is the difference then between us and them?? We are just being caught up in the upcoming Yom Tov – our Yiddishkeit is missing.

The entire way we live our life is lacking any direction. We are just going through motions. Yom Tov to us is just a hectic time full of running around and shopping.

⁹ *Adapted from a derashah given to women during Elul. Note: This is only a summary; the complete version of this shiur appears in sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim, p.49*

We do not feel in the streets that Yom Kippur is any day now. The streets are full of pre-Yom Tov stress.

Stop and Think

We have to be connected to the purpose that we came down onto this world for. Everyone – without exception – should stop once a day and think for a few minutes: Who am I? Why did I come onto this world?

You can't do this when you are on the bus or while you're talking to your friends. You need to be alone and think: What is my life about? And why did we come onto this world? For our friends?? Of course we need friends, but that is not why we came onto this world.

Our Purpose on this World

We have one purpose on the world – only one: To be close to Hashem. Whatever we do in our life are the tools we need to get close to Him. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkos, Yom Tov and our friends are all tools that help us get there, but they are not the ultimate goal. Our ultimate goal is to get close to Hashem.

Someone came to me once with a problem that he cannot control his eating habits. He loves food and eats too much. He asked me what he can do about this. I told him, "Before you eat something, think: "Will this bring me closer to Hashem – or further?"

Every day for a few minutes, think: "I came onto this world for a purpose." We all know this, but because we are so caught up in life we forget it.

When you get up in the morning, think: "Why am I getting out of bed in the morning?" Your soul returned to you after a night's sleep; others do not wake up sometimes. Why did Hashem return your soul to you? For what purpose?

Ask a teenager: What do you want? A boy will say, "To learn good." A girl might say, "To be popular and have lots of friends." When they get older they say, "To get a good *shidduch*." But none of them are thinking what they really want out of life. No one is thinking why they even came onto this world!

We learned Navi; we learned about great people like Yechezkel HaNavi, Dovid HaMelech and Shaul HaMelech. Is there anyone here who thinks that any of these *tzaddikim* would want to walk down modern day Jerusalem, even in the most *chareidi* neighborhoods? The streets are full of restaurants and shopping centers. There is

nothing wrong with eating food or buying clothes, but the streets of Jerusalem do not look the way they are supposed to! We are missing the truth.

Just think for a few minutes a day what your purpose is on this world. This advice is not from me – it is from the Ramchal in *sefer Derech Eitz Chaim*.

We Ask for “Life”

Hashem gave us life. On Rosh Hashanah we ask, “Remember us for life.” But what is the **life** we want...?

It is impossible to change our life in one day. But this we can do – once a day, let us stop for a few minutes and think why we are living, what our purpose is.

I hope you listened to these words. These are not ideas – these words are practical guidance for life. If we do this, everything will change, because this is the root of all that we need to do. If we do this every day, we will see improvement in all areas!

Chapter Five

*Coming Out Of Your Self*¹⁰

The Hint of the Shofar

On Rosh HaShanah, we have a mitzvah to blow *shofar*. A *shofar* is designed in a way that one side of its opening is narrow, and the other opening is wide.

The sound of the shofar comes out from a narrow opening, but it is heard on the wide end of the opening.

The Gemara states that the sound of the shofar sounds like someone crying. That is why we blow different sounds that resemble crying (*shevarim* and *teruah*). These are two kinds of crying that a person exhibits. When does a person cry? When he is in pain. When a person feels confined by something, and he wants Hashem to release him from his confined state, he blows (and hears) the *shofar* in order to come out of his “confines” and reveal instead an “expansion”.

The purpose of the shofar is not just the sounds that come out from it – the shofar is an expression of our soul’s mission during these days: “*Shapru maaseichem*” – “Beautify your deeds.” The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:4) writes that the shofar comes to awaken those who are slumbering.

The shofar is narrow in the place where the sound comes from, and it is wide in the opening that the sound escapes from. This reflects what a person’s *Avodah* is during these days: to come out of his “narrowness” and expand from his “confines”.

What do we mean by this?

¹⁰ Adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim*, p.89

In the physical world, we can understand well what a confine is and what an expansion is. When a person's monthly income isn't enough to cover his expenses, this feels like he is confined. When he has adequate livelihood, Baruch Hashem, he feels widened from his confines. A person wants to escape the confines of having to live so frugally and instead to live comfortably, without having to worry so much about every penny he spends. People like to be free from any confines.

The lesson of the shofar, though, is not just about escaping your confines when it comes to the physical. It is a lesson about escaping confines *within our own soul*, and it is upon us to understand how we can leave our "confines".

There are many ways how we leave our confines, and we will try to go through each of them.

Leaving Your Narrowed State

Every person worries for himself. There is no such person who can say about himself that he doesn't worry about himself. On the other hand, every person also has some caring for others. There is no person who only cares for himself his entire life and never worried about another person.

The higher level a person is on, the less he worries for himself, and the more he worries for others. The less of a level he is on, the more self-absorbed he is, and he is less worried for others.

To come out of your "confines" means to come out of your narrowness and instead expand beyond yourself. A person has to leave his private little life and look at the world with a widened view, thinking: "There is such thing as the Jewish people, and there are 600,000 souls who are one collective essence. My existence is only one out of these 600,000."

When a person leaves his self-absorption in this way, it's like experiencing redemption in his own soul.

Rosh HaShanah is the Day of Judgment. Hashem writes for each person on this day how much income he will make this year, what his health will be like, and all the rest of his needs. We want to have comfort in all these areas. But if we want to take care of our body's needs, we need to understand that it depends on a healthy soul. If our soul is stuck in a narrow confine, than this will manifest itself in our body. So if a

person wants to be comfortable, he has to make sure his soul is comfortable – in other words, he has to make sure that his soul is not stuck in a narrow confine. If a person succeeds in that, his body's needs will be affected as well by this, and he will have all his physical comforts.

A person expands beyond himself starting by expanding his internal world, and this slowly spreads outward onto his physical body.

A husband and wife can live together in a house, but it can be like a narrow confine – when each of them is living for themselves. If a person only thinks about himself and only worries for himself, that is a confine. When a person understands and feels that there is another person living with him in his house, and he is involved with giving to that other person – he has left the narrow confines.

A person comes to Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment. He is thinking about himself and he wants to merit a good judgment. Is he only preparing with himself for Rosh HaShanah, or is he thinking about others too, about how he can help them come properly into the Yom Tov? Is he concerned for anyone either for their physical needs or their spiritual needs?

If a person comes to Rosh HaShanah only thinking about himself, he has basically already signed for himself his decree....

“Every person signs with his hand on it.” Every person seals his fate on this day. How do you seal your own decree? Aren't we on this physical world, while the decree is being made in Heaven? Don't we need to ascend to Heaven to sign a decree?

The simple answer to this is that our soul goes to Heaven at night when we sleep, and then it signs the decree. But the depth of this matter is as the Maggid of Mezritch z"l explained: the way a person lives is what signs the decree. Everyone signs his own decree! How? If a person has left his “confines” and he has expanded beyond himself, he has signed for himself a decree that he has left his confines. If a person still remains in his own personal confines, it is as if he never heard the *shofar*, from an inner perspective.

If a person blows shofar and one of the openings is closed, he hasn't fulfilled his obligation of shofar. The mitzvah is only fulfilled when you blow from the narrow opening and it comes out of the wide opening. In terms of our own soul, we need to come out of our narrowness and expand beyond ourselves.

But if a person comes to Rosh HaShanah and he only thinks about himself, from an inner perspective, he has not performed the purpose of the mitzvah.

There is a well-known story that Reb Yisrael Salanter was walking on the street on Erev Yom Kippur, when a certain pious individual walked by him. Reb Yisrael Salanter gave him a blessing, but the person looked so serious about the *Yom HaDin* that he failed to respond “*Shalom*.” Reb Yisrael Salanter remarked about this, “This is not righteousness. True righteousness is when a person leaves his confines and expands beyond himself, and he isn’t self-absorbed and only worrying for his private life. If it is Erev Yom Kippur and he is so absorbed in himself that he can’t greet me with a *Shalom Aleichem*, he is missing the whole point.”

Every person signs his own decree. The narrower a person is, the narrower his income, health and happiness will be. The more a person expands beyond himself, the wider his blessings will be – he will widen his life, his marriage, his income and all other areas.

Inner Redemption by Nullifying Your Private Life

How can a person expand beyond himself? He has to realize that there is no such thing as a “private” life.

Reb Zusha of Anipoli zt”l merited to see Eliyahu HaNavi, who told him the following: Chazal state that Moshiach will not come until all the *peratiyos* (coins) from every wallet will be used up. *Peratiyos* can also mean “private.” The real depth behind why Moshiach hasn’t come yet is because every person is worrying only for himself!

People will for sure react with a question: “Is this the only reason that Moshiach hasn’t come yet?! He hasn’t come because there are still many people who aren’t keeping mitzvos, and even those who fulfill the mitzvos aren’t doing so perfectly. We can make a long list of all the problems in this generation.”

But if a person wouldn’t be thinking only of himself, he would be serving Hashem perfectly.

A person commits a sin not because he wants to do something good for others, but because he only cared for himself at the moment. He cheated in business to make a good deal – why? He only cared about himself at the moment. He might pat himself on the back that he gives *maaser* up until a fifth of his money, and he might even give

half of his money to *tzedakah*, but that still doesn't erase his sin of stealing. The reason why he sinned was because he only worried for himself and thus he wanted some pleasure.

If a person erases his private life, he wouldn't come to commit a sin. A person only sins because his *yetzer hora* convinced him that it will be good for him to do so. In other words: "Just worry about yourself...."

It seems simply that to get rid of our private life means to have a positive attitude toward others and to give more *tzedakah*, but really, it means much more than that.

If a person reflects about his life in a true and deep way, he will conclude with absolute, simple clarity: **The root of all problems is when a person only thinks and worries about himself.** Sometimes a person isn't necessarily having a forbidden thought, but sometimes a person commits a sin simply because all he thought about was himself.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* writes in the introduction: "A person was not created except to help others." If that would be a person's perspective in whatever he does, he would ask himself each time: Is what I'm doing now for myself, or in order to help others?

When a person eats something with a questionable *hechsher* (Kosher certification), what is the real reason that he did so? If he thinks about it a little, he will discover that it was because he only worried about himself at the time.

Donating Some of Your Learning

If we would succeed in uprooting our self-absorption, we wouldn't even come to one sin. "There is no righteous person on the earth who only does good and never sins." It is impossible for a person to totally get rid of his self-absorption, but he still must try to balance his needs with others' needs. The Gemara¹¹ says that one should combine *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motives) with *lishmah* (pure motives).

It is a person's job to examine his deeds and make sure that he's not only acting for his own concerns. We will give a few examples.

A person goes to a *shiur*. Why did he come to the *shiur*? We are not speaking about someone who is bored in his house, so he comes to a *shiur*. We are speaking about

¹¹ *Pesachim 50b*

someone who comes to a *shiur* because he really wants to learn Torah. Why, indeed, does he want to learn Torah? He knows that Chazal say that if a person doesn't learn Torah, he won't be resurrected from the dead in the future. A person wants to live forever, and he knows that in order for this to happen, he has to learn Torah. It seems like such a simple reason.

Is he coming to learn only for his own survival, or because he is also worried for others? If he's only concerned for himself, he will still get rewarded for his mitzvah in learning Torah, but he has taken the holiest thing in Creation, the Torah, and he has used it all for himself.

We can compare this to a guest who visits the king's palace, and he takes the king's crown off his head and wears it. Such a person is really rebelling against the king and deserves the death penalty. If a person is coming to a shiur to learn Torah only because he is concerned about his future, he is taking the most precious thing in Creation – the holy Torah – and using it all for himself.

A deeper kind of person not only worries for his own learning, but he worries that others should learn too. Even if he doesn't get another person to come to a shiur, he can decide before the shiur that he will give a percentage of his reward to other Jews.

How many Jews unfortunately haven't been worthy to have the Torah in their life! How will they get up by *techiyas hameisim*? What will be with them?! But if certain righteous individuals give them a percentage of their reward for learning, they will merit to be revived.

If a person gives away some of his reward for learning to other Jews, first of all, he might very well bring other Jews to complete Teshuvah, in the merit of the Torah that he has given to them which can awaken their inner world. On a deeper note, a person like this can help other Jews merit eternity!

The Gemara states that ignoramuses who don't learn Torah still have hope. If someone benefits a Torah scholar from his assets, it is considered as if he clings to the Shechinah. But many people, besides for not learning any Torah, don't even help a Torah scholar. They give charity, but not for Torah causes. What will be with them? How will they get up by *techiyas hameisim*?!

There are millions of Jews all over the world who have no Torah in their life, and they have never even said *Shema* once in their life. If a person wants to care about any of

these Jews, what can he do? People usually don't have the strength to open up a new kiruv organization, and they aren't interested in going around raising money. So what can a person do if he wants to help all these Jews?

There is something you can do. You can sit in the *beis midrash* and hear a *shiur*, and as you listen to the *shiur*, you can be giving merits to the whole world. How? By giving away part of your reward to those who haven't merited to learn Torah yet in their life.

The point of meriting the public (*mezakeh es harabim*) is to leave one's private life.

Donating A Building...For Who?

A person donates a building to become a shul. He gets his name plastered on the entrance so everyone should see his name, and he gets the rights to the first *Mi Shebeirach* every Shabbos. He has all kinds of demands.

Now, if he would donate the building so that it should be a place of learning and closeness to Hashem, why would he need to donate the building in his name? Does Hashem not know who donated the building? Hashem knows every private thought; He surely knows that someone donated a million-dollar building.

But the donor is thinking about himself. He wants the whole neighborhood to know that it was him who donated the building, and he wants to be in all the newspapers. Even though much Torah will be learned in this building due to his charity, all he thought about was himself.

If a person would really search to live a true kind of life, and he wants to donate a shul or beis midrash, I am not saying he has to do this purely for the sake of Heaven, but at least he should be ready to give up some of his reward to others who have no Torah or mitzvos in their life. Is he prepared to do this, or is he just thinking the whole time: "I donated it, I'm the boss over here, It's all about my name...!"

The Root of Arguments – Thinking Only About Yourself

If we reflect, we can see that this point affects all areas of life.

Most marriage problems are not because a person has a bad heart and is mean to his wife. There are many husbands who are wonderful, nice people – yet they still have serious problems in their marriage. Why? It is because people are simply absorbed in themselves and only worry about themselves.

When a person lives with the goal of how he can nourish others, and *Baruch Hashem* he gets married, he sits for at least two minutes a day and thinks: “How can I give more to my wife? How can I help her more?”

There are some people who think all day about how they can get more out of people, but there are others who think: How can I give to others?

When a person gets into a fight in shul about certain honors and privileges that he feels should go to him, or when people are involved in strife and heated arguments, the root of this all is because each person is thinking only for himself.

This is an internal kind of question: How does a person look at his life? Is he looking to unify with others by giving to them (which is what Hashem intended the world to be like when He created it), or is he just living life as he naturally does, worrying only for himself since the time he was a little child? When a person only cares for himself in his life, he thinks that everything is about him, and he resembles someone who lived in the Generation of the Flood, who were erased from existence due to their selfish lifestyle.

Giving Must Be Truthful

Many people give *maaser*, yet it doesn't make them into better people. Why is this so? It is because although they are involved with giving, they are not doing so out of concern for others, but simply because they know that Chazal say that giving *maaser* makes one wealthy...

We can see that many people give *tzedakah*, yet their money isn't going to the right places. Chazal indeed say that a person has to be worthy of his *tzedakah* going to the right places. A person donates a new shul, and they can barely get a *minyan* to come....

Why do these things happen? It is because when the person gave the money, he didn't give it with the intention of helping others – he did it all for his own merits. If that his intention, his money won't end up in the right places.

But if a person gives something to another with his heart, he is truly giving, and Hashem helps such a person's money go to the right destination.

How This Affects Your Own Spiritual Situation

If a person looks at life with this proper attitude, he will find himself not only improving his interpersonal relationships, but even his relationship with Hashem will improve.

“What you don’t want done to you, do not do to others.” Hillel said that this is point is the entire Torah. How can this be the whole Torah? How can interpersonal relationships be everything? What about one’s relationship with Hashem?

There are many answers to this, but along the lines of our discussion, the answer is because our issues with Hashem and our issues we have with people are all the same issue: that a person is thinking only about himself, lives for himself and worries only for himself.

But when a person gets used to giving to others with the right kind of attitude – because he has a desire to bestow good upon others – he is fulfilling the purpose of creation, which is to help others. He will also find that he has an easier time when it comes to holding back from a sin.

The root of sinning is because a person is used to thinking and worrying only a about himself. When a person slowly gets used to giving to others, he leaves his selfish mindset that everything is all about him; if a certain evil desire comes to him, it will be easier for him to control himself from giving in to the yetzer hora, because he has already gotten used to the idea of not only worrying about what’s in it for himself.

If a person doesn’t get used to giving up something for someone else, then when is faced with a sin, it will be hard for him to have self-control, because he is so used to always fulfilling what he wants. But if he has gotten used to nullifying his desires for other people, this will weaken his selfishness, and when he faces a temptation to sin, he has given himself more tools to deal with it. He has learned how to not give in to something he wants, and with Hashem’s help, he will be able to overpower his evil desire.

Worry That Another Person Should Have A Good Year

We are in days of mercy, a time in which anyone who feels a little bit of spiritually aspires to prepare properly for Yomim Noraim and merit to be written for a good year. What can a person do to merit a good year?

There are many tips to merit a good year, but often these tips are superficial and do not get to the root. For example, if a teenager doesn't want to get up in the morning to daven, you can offer him a prize for getting up, and if he is being too fresh toward his parents, you can get him to stay out of the house when there is any tension going on. There are all kinds of ideas out there.

But there is another way to deal with problems in a child, and that is to treat the problem at its root. You need to get through to his soul. If you solve the root, everything else will get solved with it, if not for the most part.

When a person arrives at Yomim Noraim, if he all cares about is that he should have a good year, he is already preparing to fail. If someone really wants to have a good year, he should first care that other people in the world should have a good year.

How can a person do this?

The first thing to do is that a person must look for ways how he can worry that others should have a good year.

There are people who feel inspired one day to buy a present for their child, so they go into a store and ask the salesperson what to buy. Such a person isn't giving from himself – he's getting advice from the outside. The deeper a person becomes, the more he searches within himself what to give to others.

If a person is waiting to be told what to do in every situation, he is like a toddler who has to be told everything: do this, do that. A person who matures doesn't need others to tell him what to do.

Therefore, a person has to first think to himself: How can I worry that others should have a good year?

Even if he doesn't come up with a way, the fact that he is thinking that others should have a good year is already a big accomplishment. He is preparing for Rosh HaShanah with a deep perception that he doesn't only live for himself. This is the root of being to improve oneself.

We are all hoping to have a good year, but have we changed at all since last year? Have we tried to improve ourselves at all?

Take at least a minute a day and think how you can help someone – whether physically or spiritually. The point is to get used to thinking for just a minute a day in which one is not just living for himself, and to see if he is really giving to others. Don't give to get honored or even to get Olam HaBa – just give for the sake of giving!

If a person takes these words to heart, then just as he will learn to worry about others, so will Hashem worry about him, measure for measure. Just like a person will get used to giving to others without expecting to gain something in return, so will Hashem give to him.

This growth process must be done slowly and step after step. Don't try to jump to high levels so fast. Just take this one point with you throughout the rest of the year – it is not difficult.

May Hashem merit us and all of Klal Yisrael to have a good, sweet year.

Chapter Six

The Avodah of Rosh HaShanah ¹²

Malchiyus – Declaring Hashem’s sovereignty

Hashem says on Rosh HaShanah, “Declare before Me *malchiyus*, *zichronos*, and *shofaros*; declare *malchiyus* so that I should rule over you.”¹³

The truth is that in all of the *davening* on Rosh HaShanah, the only time we mention “*zichronos*” and “*shofaros*” is in the *tefillah* of *Mussaf*. Throughout all of the *tefillas*, however, we mention *malchiyus*. This shows us that *malchiyus* is the main aspect which we mention on Rosh HaShanah.

“There is no king without a nation.”¹⁴ In order for Hashem to be King on us, so to speak, we need to declare ourselves as His servants. In other words, the *avodah* we have on Rosh Hashanah is not just to declare Hashem as our King. It is mainly that we become *His servants*.

Now that we have clarified that the main *avodah* on Rosh Hashanah is to accept our servitude to Hashem, we must know what it means to be an *eved*, a servant. If we truly know what it means to be an “*eved*”, we can understand our mission on this day.

“Eved” – Derogatory or Praiseworthy?

The Gemara¹⁵ says that when we do Hashem’s will, we are called a *ben* (son) of Hashem, and when we don’t do His will, we are called *eved* \servant. It seems from this

¹² Adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, p. 262

¹³ *Rosh HaShanah 16b*

¹⁴ *Kad HaKemach*, *Rosh HaShanah 70a*

¹⁵ *Bava Basra 10a*

statement that *eved* is a derogatory title, something we are called when we don't do Hashem's will.

However, we find that Moshe Rabbeinu is given the unique title "*eved*" of Hashem. He is also called "*eved ne'eman*" – "trustworthy servant of Hashem".

This is a paradox. Is *eved* a derogatory title, or is it a praiseworthy title?!

Three Levels

It depends, because there are two implications of the word "*eved*."

1. One person serves his king, not because he loves him, but because he needs the king to fulfill his needs. He's serving the king all for himself. An *eved* like this is the negative implication of *eved*, because all his service to the King is for his own benefit.
2. There is a higher implication of *eved*, and that is when the servant doesn't serve the king for his own personal interests, but because he's devoted entirely to the king. This is the deeper meaning behind why "whatever a servant acquires, his master acquires it" – it is because ideally, a servant has no personal life of his own, and his whole life is devoted to his master. This is the desirable level of *eved* – and one who acts like this fulfills the purpose of Creation. This was the kind of *eved* that Moshe Rabbeinu was. It is the meaning behind the Mishnah in Avos, "Do not be like servants who serve their master in order to receive reward, rather, be like servants who serve their master not to get a reward."

We see from the above that it's possible for a person to act selflessly and be considered "*eved*", and that one doesn't have to be on the level of "*ben*" in order to reach this. *Ben* is when a person goes even beyond that and serves the king out of his love.

A person needs to have selfless devotion to Hashem, and this is "*eved*." With this as well, a person needs to have serve Hashem out of a love for Him, and this is called "*ben*." If so, we have altogether three levels:

1. The lower kind of *eved*, one who serves Hashem only because he needs Him.
2. The higher kind of *eved*, one who serves Hashem because he lives his life for Him.
3. *Ben*, which is when one serves Hashem out of a love for Him.

Practical Guidance for Utilizing Rosh Hashanah

If we want to prepare ourselves for Rosh Hashanah and declare Him as King over us – and that we become His servants – we must understand that if we feel as if we are forced into serving Him, we are being the first kind of *eved*, and then the whole purpose of Rosh Hashanah will be lost. Our main task on Rosh Hashanah we must do is to be like the second kind of *eved*: that our whole lives should be about one goal alone – serving Hashem. This should be why we live our life, and we shouldn't have any other personal desires. This is the inner meaning behind all of our avodah on Rosh Hashanah.

It is not enough just to daven slowly and with concentration on Rosh Hashanah. Our main job on this day is to come to a decision that we will change our lives and live only for Hashem – and not for ourselves.

This job obligates us to make a deep internal clarification. We must know exactly what we want to get out of our life, and to examine our deeds to see if they are line with the goal we are striving for. If one truly decides to live a life of serving Hashem, he has to see if all that he does 24\7 is reflecting this.

How We Can Let Rosh Hashanah Affect Us For The Whole Year

If a person accepts upon himself to become a true *eved* of Hashem, then Rosh Hashanah must not end for him on the third day of Tishrei; Rosh Hashanah has to carry over into the rest of the year as well, until the next Rosh Hashanah! If a person examines his situation and finds that on Purim and Pesach he doesn't think about Hashem, it must be that he did not have a good Rosh Hashanah. It shows that he did not accept upon himself on Rosh Hashanah to become an *eved* of Hashem.

May Hashem merit us that we all accept His sovereignty on Rosh Hashanah, and that we should become His true servants – and through this, we can merit to have the light of Rosh Hashanah affect us the whole year round.

Chapter Seven

*A Woman's Avodah for
Yomim Noraim (For Mothers)* ¹⁶

*Men serve Hashem through their Thoughts,
Women serve Hashem through Actions*

A man uses his faculty of thought to serve Hashem, such as by learning Torah. What is the Avodah of a woman?

A woman doesn't use the power of thought to serve Hashem – she mainly uses her actions. A woman mainly is involved in her home, with her husband and children. She nourishes them and provides them with their physical needs. In addition to this, a woman also is involved in *chessed*; we will soon explain what this means.

These are the two main aspects of a woman's Avodas Hashem: her home, and her *chessed*.

The home comes first; it is more important than any *chessed*. But, although running the home is her first priority, it is not good either if a woman is only focused on nourishing her family with their physical needs. A woman who wants to improve herself needs to do *chessed* as well with her family; we will explain what we mean.

Part One: Why We Must Do Chessed

Rav Chaim Volozhiner zt"l wrote in his introduction to *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*, "A person was only created in order to help others." There are people who do a lot of

¹⁶ Adapted from a shiur given to women in Elul, in Woodmere, NY.

chessed, but only because “it’s a *mitzvah*.” But this is not the purpose of why we do *chessed*. We need to do *chessed* because we were created to help people!

There are many ways to do *chessed*, but the main thing is that we must have a general attitude of always doing *chessed* in our life. When we do *chessed*, are we realizing that we are fulfilling our purpose on this world? It’s not mainly about how much *chessed* we do; that is one thing. It is more about what our attitude toward *chessed* is.

A Mother’s Role

A Jewish mother is doing *chessed* all day; all day, all she is concerned about is her family’s needs. This indeed is her main Avodas Hashem. But she must realize that she is doing all this because of *chessed*, not because she was thrown into these responsibilities. She didn’t “happen” to fall into this role.

A woman doesn’t learn Torah; her whole life is *chessed*. So *chessed* has to be her whole attitude on life! She does *chessed*, and in this she doesn’t need to improve, because it is all she does all day. But she must do it with an awareness. A woman doesn’t do *chessed* because she “happens” to fall into this role of being a housewife; it is part of the way Hashem designed creation, and this has to be her attitude on life: My whole Avodas Hashem on this world is to do *chessed*.

That is one part of her Avodah: knowing why she takes care of her family. She must realize that this is her whole life’s mission, not something she “happens” to do due to life circumstances.

Part Two: Giving Over Proper Values

The second part of a woman’s Avodas Hashem is the actual *chessed* she does. This is not the same thing as before; we will explain what this is.

It is written, “*Do not forsake the Torah of your mother.*” What Torah do we learn from our mothers, if our mothers did not learn Torah? A woman is exempt from learning Torah; what Torah does she give over to her children? Does she learn *Mishnayos* and Gemara with her children?

The “Torah of a mother” is that she gives over to her children the values of life. She doesn’t teach her children what to do and what not to do; that is the father’s job in *chinuch*. Her job in *chinuch* is to give her how the Torah “smells” – the beautiful fragrance of a Torah lifestyle. She gives over the attitude we must have toward life.

The husband learns Torah, and his role as a father is to teach them right from wrong. But his learning doesn't necessarily give over the proper values to the children; it is the mother who accomplishes this. Why?

When the father goes back to the *Beis Midrash* to learn, it is the mother who remains in the house with the children. They are around her much more than they are around their father. It is she who is giving over the proper values to her children when their father isn't around. She shows her children how to live the Torah lifestyle.

How The Mother Teaches Her Children

In order for a mother to accomplish this, she must practice what she preaches. If she tells her children to live a Torah kind of lifestyle but she herself doesn't keep to her own words, her words will be ineffective on her children. Her words can only penetrate the hearts of her children when they are truthful and come from her heart, when she is an example to them. This is only when she herself lives by the words she says.

This is a woman's role in the home: she brings up her children. This is the real *chessed* that she does in the home. It is not simply that she provides them with their physical needs and nourishes them; her role is to bring them up with the proper values in life, to show them the how fragrant and sweet a Torah lifestyle is.

She teaches them the proper aspirations to have in life. She teaches them to be happy with life, happiness when doing the *mitzvos*, and what to want in life.

In this way, she does *chessed* her whole life, not just by rote, but as something which personifies her very life.

In Conclusion

If Avraham Avinu would have done *chessed* his whole life because simply "it's a *mitzvah*" to do *chessed*, he wouldn't have gotten anywhere. It was only because he viewed *chessed* as his whole purpose in life. *Chessed* personified him; it was his whole attitude about life.

This is the kind of *Chessed* we need to have: not that we should do *Chessed* because we **have** to, but because it should be **how we live** our life.

Section II

**TESHUVAH and
YOM KIPPUR**

Chapter Eight

*How To Do Teshuvah*¹⁷

Two Ways of Doing Teshuvah

Rabbeinu Yonah¹⁸ writes: “Know that anyone who sins in a happenstance manner, due to a strengthening of one’s passions and a loss of self-control, firstly, he has to regret what he did, and reflect with his heart on his sin...but if someone is always on an improper path, and his sins overtake him each day and he is always repeating his behavior, the first thing such a person must do is to leave his evil ways and thoughts.”

In these words, Rabbeinu Yonah is telling us how to act in the superficial sense: don’t sin. But there is also an inner point contained in his words – let us explain.

There are some people whose deeds are connected with Hashem, and there are just some points in their life that are missing connection to Hashem. Their self-improvement is to work on those areas in their life that are missing connection to Hashem.

But there are some people, who even though they keep Torah and do all the mitzvos, they are still missing the inner meaning behind Torah and mitzvos. They don’t act upon love for Hashem and aren’t joyful as they should be; there is no feeling of any relationship to Hashem in their life; they do not feel that Hashem is our Father in

¹⁷ This translation is adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim*, page 249. It is based on *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Volume V, p.40*, which was written by the author himself.

¹⁸ *Shaarei Teshuvah 1: 11*

Heaven, and that we can have a father-son relationship with Him. Such people are not living their lives properly at all. They are disconnected from the true meaning of life, from the purpose we are created for.

For such a person to improve, taking another *chrumra* (stringency) is not enough to be considered Teshuvah. He has to change his entire attitude toward life. He must leave the superficial kind of life he is living and connect with the One who created this world. If someone doesn't feel a love for Hashem burning within him – if he doesn't feel yearnings for his Father – this is a definite sign that the way he is living his life is totally wrong.

The Root of the Problem: Mistaken Notions

This is a point which many people forget and are thus mistaken about.

When a ben Torah (one who keeps the Torah) decides to do Teshuvah, and especially in Elul and *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, he thinks into the way he is living his life and examines his deeds. He usually finds that he needs improvement in *shemiras halashon* (guarding his tongue from evil speech), *bittul Torah* (wasting Torah study time), he has to concentrate better in his davening and when he makes a beracha, etc.

What does he do? He takes on various resolutions in all of these things, so he can improve all these areas.

We can see that most of the time, these resolutions don't last for long. Even if they do last for a while, they do not produce a truly growing person.

Where is the root of the problem?

It's exactly what we started out saying. People are doing the first kind of Teshuvah that Rabbeinu Yonah mentioned, which is to avoid sins that come happenstance. But really, people often need the second kind of Teshuvah – they need to get back onto the proper, good path.

If not for Hashem, it would be impossible

Let us elaborate.

The two kinds of Teshuvah which Rabbeinu Yonah mentions are totally different. One who sins only happenstance doesn't need to change his whole life; it is enough

for him to accept upon himself that he will avoid those sins which he stumbles in. But if someone in general isn't living in the right way, he has to change his whole way of life, and after he gets back onto the right path in life, he can then fix up his sins.

If we reflect on our situation, our shortcomings which we find in ourselves do not have to do with the sin itself. It is really because we don't feel the inner meaning behind what a sin is. This is all because we aren't on the right path in general.

There is another reason why our resolutions often don't last. Chazal say that the evil inclination gets stronger each day, and if not for Hashem's help, a person cannot overpower it.¹⁹ When does Hashem help a person? He only helps a person when the person is found with Him and lives with Him, connected to Him. Only then does Hashem help him.

We must understand that a person does not have the strength to keep his resolutions. It is way above what a human being can do. Only when a person is connected to Hashem in every time and situation can he be helped – at all times, and in every situation. The further away a person is from Hashem, the less help he gets from Hashem. When a person isn't connected to the inner meaning of life – Hashem – he will have no chance in keeping his resolutions.

There were definitely be people who will read these words and not understand it. They will react, “Are we far from Hashem?! We learn ten hours a day and do all the mitzvos properly. Aren't we attached to Hashem already from Torah and mitzvos? What else connects a person to Hashem other than Torah and mitzvos?!”

But if someone has this question, it shows how far he is from what it means to love Hashem, from the inner meaning of life...from Hashem. They do not understand that there is a more inner world than the kind of world they are living in. They think that a Jew is only “Torah and mitzvos”, and they aren't aware that their *chiyus* (vitality) in life is superficial. Such a question shows that they aren't really getting any life from the Torah and the mitzvos!

Connection with Hashem At All Times

What does it mean to get an inner kind of vitality? What does it mean to have connection with Hashem?

¹⁹ *Sukkah 52a*

There are two layers to this.

The first layer of this is that a person has to recognize that he is living in Hashem's world, and that everything as we know it belongs to Hashem. For example, look at a pen. Think how it belongs to Hashem. He created it. Look at your hand too and realize that Hashem created it. Your soul, which is the life-force in you that makes your body work, was also made by Hashem, and it too belongs to Hashem.

This is just food for thought, but when you think about it, you can see that the entire universe is calling out the Creator. A person should reflect into this a lot, until he naturally develops an outlook at everything from this recognition – that he is only a creation of Hashem. This attitude has to envelope a person in every part of his life, 24/7.

The second layer of this, which is higher than the first, is to realize the inner point of life – that Hashem is our Father, and we are His children. A person has to look at everything in life with this father-son relationship – a relationship that involves love and a desire for closeness. Just like a son wants to speak with his father and be with him, so should a person feel the same way towards Hashem. (Unfortunately, some people don't even feel closeness with their own fathers, and Hashem should have mercy on them, because they will not be helped by the words here). In whatever action a person does, he has to feel how "my Father" is asking me to do this.

In short, all of life is really the mitzvah of "honoring your Father" – our Father in Heaven. We need to view every situation of life like this. To live life on such a level is the whole depth of Teshuvah. (How we actually acquire this outlook on life is something else, which we will explain later.)

Teshuvah: Returning to Hashem

Teshuvah means "to return." To where are we returning? To Hashem!

The main point of Teshuvah is not to leave sin, but rather because sin distances a person from closeness to Hashem, a person has to do Teshuvah so he can remove the barriers between him and Hashem, which got created from the sin. But even if a person manages to leave the sin, that still doesn't mean he has become close to Hashem. He might be avoiding every sin, but he still doesn't have a deep connection with Hashem.

A person has to create a deep, internal bond with Hashem, like a father-son relationship. That is the essence of Teshuvah. If a person just leaves his sins but he doesn't develop this bond, he is missing the whole point of Teshuvah.

This is written as well in the words of Rabbeinu Yonah: "His heart should understand that it is evil and bitter to abandon Hashem." That is the main part of Teshuvah!

Teshuvah Out of Fear Isn't Enough for This

The Gemara states that if one does Teshuvah out of *yirah* (fear), his intentional sins do not get transformed into merits, but into unintentional sins; if he did Teshuvah out of *ahavah* (love of Hashem), then his intentional sins become transformed into merits.

Here we see that doing Teshuvah from fear of Hashem alone isn't enough to break the barrier that separates between one and the Creator; it doesn't erase the sin, and it merely becomes like an unintentional sin. It is only when a person does Teshuvah out of love for Hashem that his sin is erased and it becomes a merit for him. Only such Teshuvah removes the barriers between him and Hashem.

Sin Ruins Our Connection with Hashem

What does it mean to do Teshuvah out of love for Hashem? It means like how a son loves his father.

The true Teshuvah is that a person leaves his sins because he wants to be close to his Father. The first thing a person must do is to realize that he is dealing with his Father, and that each sin distances him from his bond with his Father.

Many people struggle with this point. They do not feel how a sin distances one from having a bond with Hashem. They know about it intellectually, but they do not feel it.

The root of the problem is really that such people never even once felt a true connection with Hashem in their life. Thus they do not realize how a sin is so damaging to one's relationship with Hashem; they don't have the bond to begin with.

If a person is still at this level, he has to form a relationship with Hashem – before he begins to do Teshuvah on his sins. The way to do this will be explained soon.

When a person comes to the clear recognition that sin ruins one's bond with Hashem, and he reflects into this, he can find different ways how this feeling gets expressed.

Recognizing the Damage

We will open up our words here with a physical parable – how a father and son relate. Through this parable, we will learn about what it means for a Jew to have a relationship with his Father in heaven.

When a son rebels against his father, there are four factors that are included in his act of rebellion. 1) By rebelling, he has lost a loving connection with his father. 2) The son is ashamed in front of his father and can't look in his face, because of what he has done to him. 3) The son feels lowly inside that he has fallen so low and angered his father. 4) The son has pain, because he knows that his father is pained at his behaviors.

The same goes for one's relationship with Hashem. When a Jew commits a sin, there are four parts to what he must now do.

1) He has to feel that he has weakened – and perhaps disconnected totally – his loving relationship with Hashem. This was explained before.

2) He is ashamed to look Hashem in the face. This is a little different than the parable of a father and son, because by a regular father and son, the son is only ashamed when he's in front of his father. But in our relationship with Hashem, a person is constantly in front of Hashem, and Hashem always sees him; thus, a person has to always feel ashamed in front of Hashem. (This is a point which many people struggle with, because they do not constantly see Hashem. The first thing they must work on is to feel that Hashem sees them every second. Only after this can one feel a constant shame in front of Hashem).

This is mentioned explicitly by Rabbeinu Yonah, who writes: “The sixth part of Teshuvah is shame, as it is written, *“I am ashamed and humiliated, for I have borne the disgrace of my youth.”* A person is very ashamed to sin in front of people, because they will humiliate him for his sins. How can a person then not be ashamed from the Creator? It is only because Hashem is far from his understanding, and that is why his afraid of humans, but not from Hashem.”

3) A person has to feel lowly inside: How can I have been so brazen to disgrace Hashem and to rebel against His will?

This is also expressed by Rabbeinu Yonah, who writes, “One must have pain and think how evil it is to rebel against his Creator...that he did not remember his Creator who made him from nothing, and he forgot His kindnesses done to him...and how his heart could have the audacity to anger Him.”

4) A person also needs to feel pain that Hashem also feels pain at His son who has distanced himself. This is really *tza'ar hashechinah* – the “pain of the *Shechinah*.” It is already explained by Chazal and the *sefarim hakedoshim* about how a Jew must feel the pain of the *Shechinah*.

This last point itself has three parts to it.

1) Pain over the fact that his son has distanced himself from Him, and that Hashem misses His child, since He can't be with him due to the child's sins that have separated the bond.

2) Since Hashem created this universe in order to bestow good upon all of Creation, by sinning, Hashem has to punish him and He can't (so to speak) bestow the good He wanted to bestow. A father has great pain when he can't be good to his child.

3) It is written, “*Everything created in My Name was created in My honor.*” The purpose of creation is to reveal the glory of Hashem in the world, as explained in *sefer Daas Tevunos*. Thus, when a person sins and conceals the glory of Hashem from being revealed upon the world, the purpose of creation has been held back, and this causes great pain to the *Shechinah*.

Closeness to Hashem: The Beginning of our Mission

Most people, upon reading the words up until now, will feel that these four levels are very far from us. Most people do not feel any of these four levels in their life, and some people feel a little bit of it in their life.

What is the root of the problem?

Rabbeinu Yonah has already answered it: “How can a person not be ashamed in front of Hashem? It is only because Hashem is far from his understanding.” When a person doesn't feel ashamed in front of Hashem, it is really because he is far from Hashem to begin with. His Avodah is to begin a relationship with Hashem.

How can a person do it? Can it be done through Torah and mitzvos alone? We can all see that we have been learning Torah for many years and have been doing all the mitzvos, yet we are still far from Hashem!

The solution will soon be explained.

The Motivation for Teshuvah – The Soul

It is now upon us to figure out what is the proper way to doing real Teshuvah – how to feel that Hashem is our Father and we are His child. First, we need to think: what is what drives us to do Teshuvah?

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: “The level of Teshuvah depends on the amount of bitterness and pain that one expresses over his sins. This is repentance which comes from a purity of the soul and clean mind. Such pain comes from the purity of the Heavenly soul.”

Here it is explained that the true Teshuvah one can do is only when one is being motivated by his soul. To feel closeness to Hashem is only through one’s soul, and only the soul can recognize its Creator and feel love toward Him, like how a son feels love to his father. It is thus upon us to understand how one can reach a level in which his soul is awakening him to Teshuvah.

Three Ways to Reach the Soul

A person is made up of a body and a soul, and the body conceals the soul. If a person wants to reveal his soul, he needs to remove the barriers of the body that conceal it. How can a person do this? There are several ways.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: “A person can reach shame when he sits in solitude and reflects on the greatness of Hashem, and how evil it is to rebel against Him, and by remembering always that Hashem sees his actions and inspects his innards, and views his thoughts.”

In his words are contained three ways how we can get through to our soul: by sitting in solitude, by thinking about the greatness of Hashem, and by remembering always that Hashem sees what we do.

Let us explain each way.

The First Way -- Solitude

The soul is like a *kol demamah dakah*, a “soft, subtle voice.” The body, by contrast, is like a “great, noisy voice.” The body and its desires are very strong and are felt easily, while the soul’s desires are deep and subtle, not easily felt.

Therefore, if a person’s body is always at the fore of things, a person can’t reach his soul, which is a “soft, subtle voice.” A person needs to bring himself into a state in which he hears an inner voice.

The first step in doing this is *hisbodedus* (solitude). Many great leaders of previous generations practiced it, and the Chofetz Chaim practiced it for two hours a day. (We are not advising here that everyone do *hisbodedus* for two hours a day). When a person has *hisbodedus*, he has an inner silence, and through that it is easier to get through to his soul and leave his noisy bodily state. He can leave the noise of the body and enter into the soft, subtle voice of the soul.

Hisbodedus cannot be done in a pressurized way. A person has to be calm and relaxed for it; if not, the body still has a hold on the person, and a person will not be able to reach his inner world. It is recommended for this to do it outside your house, faraway from people. A quiet surrounding can give a person an inner calm.

The Second Way – Reflecting on the Greatness of Hashem

What should a person do during this time of solitude?

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: “To think about the greatness of Hashem.” This is a general term; let us explain it more in detail.

A person has to think and remember that his limited, while Hashem is unlimited. First, a person should look around at the world and see, “*How great are Your actions, Hashem.*” After this, a person should see himself as only a small part of the world, and how the world is thousands of times greater than his eyes can see. Then, a person can reflect that there are even more planets and stars which he cannot see, and he begins to realize how small of a speck he is in comparison to Hashem. Eventually, a person will feel how big Hashem is, in comparison to how small he is.

Then a person can reflect that he is only small in terms of his physical body, but he has a G-dly soul, which is a “portion of Hashem.” Since the soul is a piece of Hashem,

it cannot be small. Now a person can feel a need to connect to his own soul and come out of his tininess, and to connect to Hashem, who is endless. Slowly more and more, a person can awaken a desire to reveal his soul.

The Third Way – Hashem Sees Everything

The last point which Rabbeinu Yonah writes is that a person should reflect that Hashem sees all that he does. Let us elaborate on this point as well.

A person should think that Hashem is actually found right next to him, for “His glory fills the entire world.” Just like there is a floor underneath you and a table to sit by, so is Hashem next to you as real as can be, and His presence is even more real than anything else you see. Think about this for many hours, until you begin to actually feel it.

When a person hasn't yet reaches his soul, he won't come to do proper Teshuvah. Only when a person feels his soul can he feel closeness with Hashem, and when one feels that closeness, he is bothered by a sin and feels how it distances him from Hashem. He will be awakened to feel shame and the pain of the *Shechinah*, which are natural feelings of the soul.

To feel closeness with Hashem is not just about leaving our sins. It is a concept which must envelope every aspect in our life. Whatever we do, we should feel that we are doing it because this is the will of our Father, and when we merit this awareness, all our life is spent on the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av* – honoring our Father.

Chapter Nine

Yom Kippur –

*Disconnecting from the Pleasure of Sin*²⁰

A Day of Soul With No Body

It is written, “*For on this day you shall be forgiven and be purified.*” Yom Kippur is the time of purity, in which Hashem purifies the Jewish people. The words of Rabbi Akiva are well-known: “Praiseworthy are the Jewish people – before Whom are they purified, and Who purifies them? Just as a *mikveh* purifies those who are impure, so does Hashem purify the Jewish people.”

Let us think of how our purification process is compared to that of a *mikveh*. In the *sefarim bakesodoshim*, it is brought that one should immerse in a cold *mikveh*, because the words “*mayim karim*” (cold water) has the same *gematria* (numerical value in Hebrew letters) as the word “*meis*” – “corpse.” In other words, when a person immerses in a cold *mikveh*, he is considered to be like a dead person.

What is the gain in being considered like a dead person? Hashem doesn’t want us to die – He wants us to live. A dead person cannot serve Him and do *mitzvos*. So what is the gain in being considered like “dead” when one goes to a cold *mikveh*?

There are many meanings behind this concept, but we will focus on just one point, with the help of Hashem.

²⁰ Adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim*, p.149

What, indeed, is death? When a person dies, does he stop existing? We know that of course not. We are made up of a body and a soul; by death, the soul leaves the body, the body is buried and the soul rises to Heaven. So the whole concept of death is that the soul leaves the body.

If we think about it, this is what Yom Kippur is all about. We have a *mitzvah* on this day to fast, and our body is denied certain pleasures. We have to be like angels on this day – souls without a body. Only our body suffers from this, though – not our soul. The soul actually receives greater vitality on Yom Kippur (as the Arizal writes). Normally, we need to eat and drink physically in order to be alive, but on Yom Kippur, we receive vitality from above, and thus we do not need physical food or drink.

The Arizal would stay up all night on Yom Kippur. Simply speaking, this was because he didn't want to take a chance of becoming impure at night (from nocturnal emissions). But the deeper reason behind his conduct was because Yom Kippur is a day in which we are angelic, and we don't need sleep. Yom Kippur is a day of soul with no body.

On every Yom Tov, there is a *mitzvah* to eat. Although Yom Kippur is also a Yom Tov, we don't eat, because it is a day of soul with no body. It is the only day of the year in which we live through our soul and not through our body. The rest of the Yomim Tovim involve *mitzvos* that have to do with our body.

It is also the only day of the year in which we resemble the dead. We wear white, and there are two reasons for this: the inner reason is because we are resembling the angels, and the external reason is because we want to remind ourselves of death, who are clothed in white shrouds. The truth is that these are not two separate reasons – they are really one and the same: a dead person is a soul with no body, just like an angel.

Let us stress the fact that we do not mean to remind ourselves of death in order to scare ourselves. Although there is a concept of holy fear, that is not our mission on Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah is actually scarier than Yom Kippur, because it is the day of judgment. The point of reminding ourselves of death on Yom Kippur is because Yom Kippur is a day in which one is a soul without a body, resembling an angel.

The Purity Available Only On Yom Kippur

That is the clear definition of Yom Kippur, and now we must think into what our actual *avodah* is on this day. We mentioned before the custom to immerse in a cold *mikveh* before Yom Kippur. It seems that this is because when we immerse in cold water, we are considered dead, and thus we are purified. But on a deeper note, the death which a person must accept when he immerses in the *mikveh* is so that he can realize that he is really a soul, without a body. Hashem purifies us on Yom Kippur – when we consider ourselves to be like a soul with no body.

Our purity does not happen on Rosh Hashanah or on Sukkos. It does not happen on Pesach or on any other Yom Tov. We are purified only on Yom Kippur – the time in which we are a soul without a body.

The Lesson We Learn from Yom Kippur for the rest of the year

The Gemara²¹ brings that there are four categories of sin. Some sins require just teshuvah, while worse sins require teshuvah as well as Yom Kippur. The Kamarna Rebbe asked: If someone sins the day after Yom Kippur, must he wait a whole year until the next Yom Kippur when the effects of his sin are removed? He answered that although Yom Kippur atones one's sins, it is still possible for a person to make for himself during the year a "mini" Yom Kippur. How? If we understand what the concept of Yom Kippur is, we can learn for the rest of the year how to use this point.

There are people who look at Yom Kippur as "a day on the calendar", and as soon as Yom Kippur ends, they run to "go build their *sukkah*" (and maybe even earlier than this)...What remains from this holy day? The beautiful singing, the holy atmosphere, the feelings of elation? We do not mean to detract from the importance of these things, but they are not the purpose of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is given to us so we can know how to use its power for the rest of the year.

When a person learns how to drive a car, he's not learning how to drive the car just for one day – he's learning how to drive for the rest of his life. The same has to go for Yom Kippur. How should we view Yom Kippur? What do we want to take out of it?

The simple way people view Yom Kippur is that we merit that our sins be forgiven. "For on this day you shall be atoned from all your sins, before Hashem you shall be purified." This

²¹ *Yoma 86a*

is the clear, simple concept of Yom Kippur. We cannot say this isn't true – but it is still not the inner point of Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is a time in which we take out a lesson for the rest of the year. It is a day in which we can come learn about how to live throughout the rest of the year without sin.

Maybe a person will counter: What does Yom Kippur have to do with the rest of the year? On Yom Kippur we are in *shul* all day, and it's almost impossible to sin. The day after Yom Kippur, we go back to routine, we're back on the street. How is it possible to live throughout the rest of the year without sinning?

However, Yom Kippur is not defined as a day in which it is impossible to sin. Although that is true, it is only the superficial layer of Yom Kippur. The essence of Yom Kippur is that our sins are forgiven, and that we are purified.

We don't just learn from Yom Kippur how we can avoid sin for the rest of the year. We learn from Yom Kippur *how to cleanse ourselves from a sin, after we fail*.

A person definitely has to protect himself as much as possible from a sin, but we have to be concerned as well that if we do fall to a sin, that we should know how to deal with the setback, to be able to uplift ourselves even though we have failed.

Compare this to someone who doesn't get himself car insurance. He's confident that he won't get into an accident, so it's not worth it for him to buy insurance for his car. Now, if this is because he has a high level of emunah, that's wonderful. But if he doesn't have a high level of emunah, then all is fine and well only until he gets into an accident. Then he has to pay a heavy sum to fix up his car.

So of course a person has to make sure that he won't come to sin during the coming year, and that it should be a year without sin, with the help of Hashem. But if *chas v'shalom* one does fail to a sin, how should he help himself? He shouldn't wait until next Yom Kippur. He can learn from Yom Kippur, now, how he can purify himself from sin throughout the rest of the year.

Thus, preparing for Yom Kippur is not just a preparation for one day alone. It is essentially how to prepare for the rest of the year – that if we *chas v'shalom* fall to a sin, we should know how to get up from it and purify ourselves.

However, we need to understand: That would be fine if we are totally a soul during the rest of the year without a body, but don't we have a body as well? How then can we learn from Yom Kippur as a lesson for the rest of the year, when on Yom Kippur we are totally a soul with no bodily drives, and during the rest of the year we have a body?

In order to answer this question, we need to know what the inner essence of this holy day is.

Disconnecting Completely From Impurity

It is written (Yechezkel 36:25), “*And I will sprinkle upon them pure waters.*” Hashem sprinkles upon us “water” that purifies us. From a superficial perspective, it seems that this resembles how a person's impurity from being contaminated to a corpse gets removed by having the *parah adumah* sprinkled upon him. But the inner depth to this purification process is as follows.

In order for one's sins to be forgiven by Hashem, it is well-known that he needs three conditions: regretting the sin, confessing the sin, and resolving not to commit the sin again. All of these make sense. Regret makes sense, because if a person doesn't feel bad that he sinned, why should he be forgiven? Confessing the sin is a little harder to understand why it is necessary; and resolving not to sin again is so that he shouldn't just go back to his old ways.

That is the superficial understanding, but there is greater depth to this.

We can learn from our first redemption, our redemption from Egypt, on how we can disconnect from impurity.

Sins are impurity. The first impurity which the Jewish people went through was in Egypt. When the time came to exit Egypt, they disconnected from the impurity there, and then they were fit to receive the Torah. That was the first cleansing process which the Jewish people went through – a cleansing from the 49 Gates of Impurity.

Hashem commanded the Jewish people that we have no more reason to fear Egypt's oppression on us, and that we will never see them bear upon us again (*Shemos 14:13*). What is the depth to this? Simply, it was to calm them, that they shouldn't fear Egypt. That is true, but the hidden inner point here is that when we left the impurity of Egypt, we gained an ability to totally disconnect from evil and impurity. Because we

were promised by Hashem that we will never be oppressed by Egypt again, we were able to totally disconnect from impurity.

Confessing Without Regretting Is Pointless

Rav Dessler zt"l writes that even on Yom Kippur, when a person is saying *viduy* (confession of his sins), he might be really having a downfall all along, rather than growing from it.

How can this be? Isn't he fulfilling the *mitzvah* to say *viduy*?

The answer to this is that as he is saying *viduy*, he is remembering his sins and then experiencing them again; and he has some good memories...he hasn't yet disconnected from them, and he still gets a little nostalgic when he revisits those experiences in his mind. Such a person is ruining himself in the process of trying to fix himself!

Without truly regretting the past sin before one says *viduy*, the *viduy* becomes a person's downfall, and instead of growing spiritually, the person remembers his past sins. For example, if a person *rachmana litzlon* (May Hashem have mercy) saw an improper sight and he is trying to do teshuvah over it, he thinks about the improper sight again and stumbles again.

But if a person has true regrets over the sin, then every time he remembers the sin, he is filled with pain and remorse. He realizes what he lost by sinning, and it is no longer enjoyable to think about it. When a person loses \$100,000, the mere memory of such a loss is very painful. People love to remember their past positive experiences, but no healthy person likes to think about his past negative experiences.

A person committed an *aveirah*, and he enjoyed himself too while he was at it. If he truly regrets what he did, he will find that what was once joy to him has now turned into pain. It's like someone who stole a lot of money and ended up in jail. Every time he thinks about the money he stole, he groans in sadness, and he does not look at it as a sweet memory. He realizes that he didn't gain anything by stealing the money, and all he did was that he landed himself in prison.

Thus, if one confesses the sin before he regrets it, it's pointless, because he still remains with the pleasure he had from the sin and savors it. As he confesses it, he remembers those "good times", *rachmana litzlan*, from the sin. Sure, he has some pain

from it too when he remembers it, but he remembers the enjoyment as well. He's confessing the sin, but while he's at it he's enjoying the memories.

In order for a person to have a true *viduy*, he has to first build up his regret over the sin. And what indeed is that regret supposed to be?

To feel regretful over the sin, a person has to think about how much he lost out on by sinning. By sinning, he gave up eternal rewards. When a person thinks about this deeply, he can come to the recognition that the sin was truly a loss for him, and it pains him to think about it. *Now* he can confess the sin. Without coming to this feeling of regret, he resembles what is written, "*In his mouth and lips he honors Me, but his heart is far from Me.*"²² The possuk is referring to how a person confesses his sins, yet he's still connected to them.

The Meaning of Regret: Giving Back The Evil Enjoyment

We have thus learned that the depth of regretting a sin is to erase the pleasure that one had from it. When a person sins, on what he is doing *teshuvah* for? Simply, it is because of the act he committed. This is true, of course, but it is still only the lower aspect of *teshuvah*. The inner essence of *teshuvah*, though, is as follows.

In this physical world, nothing can be taken for free. If someone steals, at some point he will have to give it back. If someone took pleasure from this world that he wasn't supposed to take – it must be given back.

How can one return his wrongful pleasure he had? He has to come to the same amount of pain as the enjoyment he felt from the sin. Only by countering the evil pleasure with true remorse, equal in strength, can one uproot the evil pleasure which he partook from. Without experiencing pain equal to how much he enjoyed it, he has basically stolen pleasure from the Creator. It as Chazal²³ state, "Anyone who enjoys this world without a blessing, it is as if he stole from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*." How much more so does this apply to one who commits a sin and enjoyed himself at it; he has stolen this wrongful pleasure which he was not supposed to have, and it is upon him to fix this up.

²² *Yeshayahu 29: 13*

²³ *Berachos 35b*

When someone steals, he has a *mitzvah* to return the stolen object; it won't be enough if he just feels bad that he stole, or that he confesses what he did and resolves never to do it again. He has to actually return what he stole! The same is true with one's sins toward Hashem. If a person took wrongful pleasure from a sin, it's not enough to feel bad about it – he has to return what he took. He can return it by feeling pain equal to the amount of enjoyment he had from it.

Hashem created such a thing as Gehinnom – a place where souls have to endure great suffering. Why did Hashem make Gehinnom? Doesn't He love us? Why does He have to pain us so much with Gehinnom? So that this will force people to regret and confess their sins and resolve never to do it again? Why must there be such thing as Gehinnom?

It is because a person took wrongful pleasure from this world, and he never felt pain at this. He remains with the pleasure he had from the sin, and now he must give it back. He has to feel pain equal to the amount of how much he enjoyed.

If two people sinned, and one of them enjoyed himself more than the other one did during the sin, the one who enjoyed himself will have a worse Gehinnom than the other one who didn't enjoy it as much. The more evil pleasure one had from this world, the more he needs to undergo Gehinnom.

We do not want to be in Gehinnom. We want to be forgiven. How can we be forgiven? There are no shortcuts. One has to give back to the Creator what he wrongfully took; the way one reaches this is through enduring physical suffering. The sin was pleasurable to the person, and suffering is the opposite of taking pleasure.

On Yom Kippur, there is a *mitzvah* to feel physical affliction. “*And you shall afflict your souls*”. Why? Does Hashem want us to suffer? No. It is because we enjoyed the sin, and for one day of the year, we have the opportunity to give back that wrongful pleasure – by physically suffering on this day, the evil pleasure from sins throughout the rest of the year that seeped into our blood is drawn out, and this is how we are purified.

A Day To Disconnect From Physical Pleasure

Now we can understand why there is a concept to be as if we are “dead” on Yom Kippur, which we mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.

If a person on his deathbed is offered an ice cream or some other enticement, the average person would refuse it; even if he loves ice cream. He knows he's about to die, and he realizes at this moment of truth how futile everything on this world is. A person about to die is disconnected from all physical pleasures, and he realizes with certainty that it's all worthless.

The Vilna Gaon said that the greatest pain one has when he dies is that as he is being escorted to the Heavenly court, he sees all that he could have gained, and all that he has lost. He sees that he took pleasure from all the wrong places, and that he gave up the real pleasure he could have had.

A dead person can be defined as someone who doesn't feel alive, someone who has no real enjoyment. "A dead person cannot feel anything."²⁴

Thus, if a person wants to prepare himself properly for Yom Kippur, he needs to be like someone who is dead – in other words, he needs to return all the wrongful pleasure he had during the year, especially forbidden pleasure. If he is on a higher level, he fulfills the words of Chazal: "Sanctify yourself with even what is permissible to you." But the first thing one must do is to begin by returning the wrongful pleasure he had from his sins. If he spoke *lashon hora* and enjoyed himself while he was at it, if he ate something of a questionable *hechsber* and enjoyed it – he has to return that pleasure.

Someone who is level-headed builds for himself a way of life for the rest of the year in which he will be able to return all the wrongful pleasure.

*"Praiseworthy is the man who is afflicted by Hashem, and who learns from Your Torah."*²⁵ Who is someone that "learns from Your Torah"? This is someone who sits and learns Torah, even though it's hard for him (for example, when he's tired); but he understands well that by enduring pain for the Torah, he purifies himself from the evil pleasure he had from sin, and in this way he returns the evil pleasure to Hashem.

Yom Kippur is a day in which a person has no physical enjoyment. Any pleasure one has on this day – for someone who does – is pleasure of the soul. The only physical pleasure one can have on this day is to smell spices, but even this is not really physical pleasure; it is well-known that smell is a sense of the soul, not of the body.

²⁴ *Shabbos 13b*

²⁵ *Tehillim 94: 12*

The concept of Yom Kippur is, firstly, to disconnect from all physical pleasure. What is left for us to do? We have to fix up what we did wrong this past year; for this we have a *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*, which is to regret the sin, to confess the sin and to resolve never to do the sin again. By regretting the sin, one can erase the evil pleasure which he had, since he now has pain over it.

The Pain Must Equal the Pleasure

Now we are able to understand how it can be that a person goes through Yom Kippur so many times in his life – expressing regret over their sins, confessing them, and resolving never to do the sin again...yet a person does not feel that his *teshuvah* amounted to anything. Why do people feel this way?

It is because people “regret” their sins only superficially. They make a list of all their committed sins and then express regret over them...although this can go under the category of regret, a person still has to come to a situation in which the amount of pain he has over the sin is equal to the amount of pleasure he had from the sin.

There is a well-known statement of Rav Nachman of Bresslov: “With my *chassidim*, I have succeeded in at least taking away their pleasure from sinning. I can’t stop anyone from sinning, but at least I have helped them get rid of the pleasure they had from it.”

The truth is that Chazal state that ever since the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, a person no longer enjoys committing a sin. Hashem desires that we be able to do *teshuvah* easily, so He made it easier for us by taking away a lot of pleasure from committing a sin.

Thus, the inner point of *teshuvah* for us is to first understand that the problem is not the sin itself we committed, but the connection that we still feel toward it; as Chazal²⁶ say, “He is attached to it like a dog.” Why does a person feel attached to his sins? It is because since he enjoyed it, he has become attached to it. He has to uproot this connection by regretting it. After that he can have a true *viduy*, because when he remembers his sins as he regrets them, instead of remembering how much he enjoyed it, he feels pain over it. And when he resolves never to commit the sin again, it will be a true commitment. Without true regrets, it is pointless for him to resolve never to do the sin again, and it will be like resolving that he will separate himself from his own foot – a decision that he will of course never carry out.

²⁶ *Sotah 3b*

When a person is still connected to evil, it has become a part of him; if he resolves never to sin again, it will not be enough, since he still feels connected to the sin. What can he do to disconnect from the sin? Just deciding not to sin again will not help, unless he has disconnected from the pleasure of the sin. Only by disconnecting from the pleasure of the sin will it become easier for him to hold onto his resolutions.

If someone is in a place where he is in danger, the best solution is to get out of there! That was what Yosef Hatzaddik did when he was tempted to sin. He ran away from the place. If a person is still connected to evil, to the pleasure of a sin – either he has to run away from the evil, or he must chase out the evil from within him.

This is the deep difference between a righteous person and a wicked person. A righteous person may have committed many sins, but he has truly done *teshuvah* over them – he has separated from the evil enjoyment he had. He doesn't want to return to that place or ever feel connected to it. But a wicked person is essentially someone who, although he has done *teshuvah*, he still has some “good old memories” from his past...

Purifying Ourselves

This is essentially what it means to become purified on Yom Kippur from the “pure waters” sprinkled upon us, which we mentioned in the beginning from the possuk.

When a person gets dirty and sweaty from a long day, he can take a shower that will remove all the dirt from him and make him clean. The same can be said of a person who wants to come and cleanse himself from sin. Although the evil deed has been committed a long time ago, the pleasure from it has remained, and the person is dirtied from it. Just like the body becomes dirtied, so does the soul become dirtied from the pleasure of a sin. By removing the pleasure one had from the sin, the soul becomes cleansed by “pure waters.”

We are taught by Chazal²⁷ that “A person who sins and [only] confesses and doesn't return to it, to what is he compared to? To a person who immerses [in a *mikveh*] and is holding a *sheretz* (insect) in his hand; even if he immerses in all of the water in the world, his immersion does not count.” It's possible that a person goes to the *mikveh* on Yom Kippur and immerses himself 310 times, but it can all be worthless! If he

²⁷ *Yalkut Shimeoni, Mishlei, 961*

never disconnected from the pleasure of the sin, going to the *mikveh* will be ineffective. His soul is still connected to the sin.

This is the secret behind the custom to go to a cold *mikveh* on Erev Yom Kippur; to remind us that we need to be “dead” – to disconnect from evil pleasure. Yet even this is not enough. One has to feel personally in his soul that he is “dead”, so to speak. A dying person has no interest in this world’s pleasures, because he knows he is about to leave them eternally.

If a person would give up on this world’s pleasures, he would no longer be interested in them, and he can be confident that he won’t return to those pleasures. He is using the power to be “dead”, in a holy way – like the words of the Rambam, that one has to “kill himself in the tents of Torah.”

It’s possible that a person is sitting all day in the *beis midrash*, yet he’s really living outside of it: someone who only wants pleasures that come from the outside world. Someone who “kills himself in the tents of Torah” means someone who gives up his desires for externalities. This is a Torah that purifies him; this is the *mikveh* that purifies him – when a person erases from himself the pleasures of this world.

Erasing the Connection To Evil

If we understand these words, we are able to understand a lot better how a person can take Yom Kippur with him for the rest of the year. On the calendar, Yom Kippur is only once a year – but there is a way for a person to always have Yom Kippur. How?

Let’s say a person, *rachmana litzlon*, falls to an *aveirah*. What should he do? The first thing he needs to know is that he is connected to the evil act, and that is the problem. His job is to uproot that connection, to uproot the desire to do something evil.

It is written, “*On my bed at nights, I sought that which my soul desired.*”²⁸ Sometimes a person isn’t aware of what he wants during the daytime, but at night, he can begin to see what exactly he likes...

One time the Chofetz Chaim had a dream in which he won the lottery and became very rich. When he woke up the next day, he fasted. When his students asked him why he is fasting, he replied that he had a bad dream, and he told them what he had dreamed about. The students asked him that it doesn’t say in the Gemara that you

²⁸ *Shir HaShirim 3:1*

have to fast over such a dream. The Chofetz Chaim replied, “Either way, it’s a bad dream. If it really happens and I do win the lottery, being rich is a test that I don’t want to face. And even if the dream isn’t true and I never become rich, how did I ever come to such a dream in the first place? Why am I dreaming about becoming rich?!”

The Chofetz Chaim was scared that his soul is still connected material interests.

Let’s say a person lives in a modest apartment with only two and a half rooms, but he really wants to live in a mansion; his desires are to live in a mansion, and that is what his soul is connected to. The fact that he lives in a modest apartment doesn’t show his true level, because deep down he wishes to live in luxury; those are his true desires.

A person can be sitting in the *beis midrash*, but he’s thinking about Switzerland. His desires are to travel the world – and that is what he really wants in life...

It’s possible that a person is sitting at the Shabbos table and giving *mussar* to his children, but deep down in his heart, he wishes that his wife would just serve the next course already...

In other words, a person can *feel* a certain way about something – but his *thoughts* and *words* are saying something else. He is living a life which, on the outside, seems to be quite alright; but if we check out his heart and what he really wants, he is like someone going to the *mikveh* holding a *sheretz*, which is a pointless immersion. When a person still has desires for the pleasures of this world, he won’t be able to get purified from Yom Kippur.

True Pleasure

What we are saying is a clear concept. The inner point of life is to derive a vitality from living, to experience true pleasure. On Rosh HaShanah, we asked for life – for true life: to enjoy serving Hashem, to enjoy Torah, to enjoy *davening*, to enjoy the *mitzvos*, to enjoy having *emunah*. On Yom Kippur, we are now coming to purify ourselves from a false kind of life.

What do we mean by purifying ourselves from a false kind of life? We do not mean only that we must purify our actions. Our actions are only the external layer of what we need to accomplish; although the first thing we need to do is better our actions, this alone will not be enough. Even if a person is *zocheh* to sit and learn all day in the

beis midrash, and he tries to do all the *mitzvos*, he might still be among those of whom it is said that “*their hearts are far from me.*”

There are people whose hearts are far from Hashem; what does this mean? It means that if we come to a person and ask him what he wants – money or wisdom (just like Hashem came to Shlomo Hamelech and asked him this question), and the person answers, “I want a lot of money, so like this I can sit and learn forever” – such an answer reflects a life of utter falsity.

There is a known story that the late wealthy donor Mr. Reichmann once asked Rav Shach zt”l “Who will have greater *Olam HaBa* – me, for supporting so many *yeshivos*, or the *Rosh Yeshivah*?”, to which Rav Shach replied with a smile, “I don’t know which of us will have a greater share in *Olam HaBa* – I cannot tell you what will be there, because I was never there. But I can tell you that I am here on this world, and I have a better life on this world than you do. This is because Chazal say, “An increase of assets is an increase of worry.” A person who truly sits and learns Torah, however – he is someone who really enjoys life!”

Life is really a true pleasure which Hashem has given us. But just like water can’t be added to a cup filled to the top with soda, so is it impossible for a person to receive the true pleasure when his heart is brimming with all kinds of negative pleasures. The pleasure of spirituality and Torah cannot enter one’s heart when it is already filled with evil pleasure from sin.

Chazal state that “A person merits Torah if he vomits the milk he nursed from his mother.”²⁹ In other words, a person has to vomit his physical pleasures and in its place enter the spiritual pleasures; this is the *avodah* of Yom Kippur: to vomit all our physical pleasures! We need to erase both our pleasures from sin as well as our pleasures from even permitted desires³⁰, which attach us to the materialism of this world.

²⁹ *Yalkut Shimeoni, Mishlei, 964*

³⁰ *The author is probably referring to extreme pleasures that are permitted; that although in essence they are permitted, when pursued in an extreme way, pleasures become unhealthy. In “Getting To Know Your Self”, it is explained that while pleasure is a basic and necessary force in our soul, if pleasure is endlessly pursued with no self-restraint, it is clearly extreme and unhealthy.*

To Know What We Want To Take Out of Yom Kippur

When it comes Motzei Yom Kippur and a person wants to know if he was purified or not from this Yom Kippur, he has to check himself inside. If he feels less of a pull towards worldly pleasures, this is a sign that he became purified on Yom Kippur. But if he still feels just as pulled toward materialism after Yom Kippur is over as he did before Yom Kippur, he is like someone who fell into the *mikveh* without having any intention to be purified by its waters.

The words here are clear and sharp. Before Yom Kippur, it is upon us to understand how we must enter it – and how we must leave it.

When a person goes to the supermarket, he goes in with an empty shopping cart and intends to exit the store with a full one. People want to come out with something from Yom Kippur, but do they know what indeed they want to take out of it?

If a person lives life in an unclear way, on Yom Kippur he will ask for things as well that are unclear. When the end of Yom Kippur comes, he will not be clear in what he came out with.

A person has to know before Yom Kippur what he truly wants. He shouldn't fool anyone; it is between him and his Creator – he has to know the truth, and to see if he is disconnecting from materialistic pleasures. Understandably, one's human efforts alone will not be enough, and one will need to daven to Hashem for help that his heart become purified.

Yet, there is a step that comes before this. In for the heart to become purified, we first need to expel the evil that lurks in it.

The second set of *Luchos* (tablets) was given on Yom Kippur, because of the purity inherent on this day. If not for the purity of this day, the *Luchos* wouldn't have been given.

The first thing a person needs to ask for on Yom Kippur (as well as the last thing) is that Hashem should purify his heart; in other words, that his connection to all materialistic and forbidden pleasures be erased from his heart, that Hashem should take them away from within him. After this, one is able to be purified with the “pure waters” – he can receive purity from Hashem to come upon him, in that his pleasures in life will come from true, inner pleasure.

One has to begin ascending the ladder of levels to be on, step by step.

A True Desire for A Spiritual Life

How does a person disconnect from evil? It is very possible that a person wants to disconnect, and he knows that he does bad things and recognizes evil, but he is still attached to the sin like a dog who laps up its own vomit. What can a person do?

Once there was a story with Baba Sali zt"l, who would often host guests in his house; there was a student who humbly said he cannot eat there, because he resolved never to eat anywhere outside his own house. Baba Sali said to the student that in his house, he is protected by Heaven that no forbidden food ever enters one's mouth there.

How did Baba Sali reach such a level? Of course, he was a *tzaddik* and a very holy person, but it can also be because it is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that if someone truly resolves in his heart that he would rather die rather than eat something forbidden, he is assured that he will be protected by Heaven that he will never stumble.

What Baba Sali reached was an inner kind of protection. When a person is ready to sacrifice himself over the holy Torah and to keep it no matter what, he sanctifies himself a little – and he is sanctified above in Heaven.

Let us take from this the following point. If a person truly wants to disconnect from this world, there is no other way except to fulfill the words of the Sages, “The words of Torah do not exist except in one who kills himself over them.”³¹

The question is: Is a person ready to die for the Torah, or not? If Eliyahu HaNavi would come to a person and reveal to him that if he dies, he will receive the understanding of the whole Torah – what would a person say? If a person isn't ready to die for Torah, it shows that he values his own life more than Torah. If he is ready to die for the Torah, then it shows that Torah to him is more important than his life – because he considers the *Torah* to be life.

When a person realizes that life has no meaning if he is devoid of spirituality, he enters an inner world of purity. But if a person is simply looking for “tips” and “ideas” on how he can get by the *Yom HaDin* and merit a good judgment – then nothing can be done for him!

³¹ *Yalkut Shimeoni*, 762.

There is one test a person has to pass, and this says it all: Is one prepared to give up this materialistic lifestyle for a spiritual one? Or does he want to have the best of both worlds...?

We are living today in a world that is full of mixed up values. It used to be very clear to all the difference between a Torah home and a non-Torah based home. People in the past were either pursuing materialism, or spirituality; it was either or. (There were a few *tzaddikim* who were wealthy too and lived like kings – not because they indulged, but because they resembled the wealth of Rebbi, who knew how to live in luxury yet be totally disconnected from it; we cannot learn from this practically, though). But today, when we walk into a Jewish house, we cannot tell clearly if it is a *Kolel* man's house or a working man's house; we cannot tell if he is a wealthy philanthropist or a poverty-stricken individual. Everything looks basically the same. The Torah of today by many people isn't entirely Torah – it is a Torah mixed with other things....

If a person wants to merit that next year should be a true kind of life, he needs to come to a decision, in his soul, that he really wants to be a *ben Torah*; that he really wants to live a life of spirituality.

Of course one has to eat, drink and clothe himself as usual; but the question is, what does he really want in life? Let's say he wishes deep down that somebody would come and support him for life, and this way he can sit and learn forever, undisturbed; and that this is his true, innermost desire in life. Still, it doesn't show that he's prepared to sacrifice for a spiritual kind of life. If someone would come to him and say, "I will take care of all your physical needs on this world – you just live a life of total spirituality," would he indeed accept this? If the answer is yes, that's excellent; but if a person isn't ready to accept this, then he's obviously not prepared to disconnect from materialism.

It's very easy to say it, but it has to be a resolution that one makes deep inside his soul. Preparing for Yom Kippur is essentially a preparation of how to live a life of a soul, without a body. Don't we have a body, though? Yes, we do have a body, but what we mean is that we need to **resolve** in ourselves that we want a kind of life in which we live through our soul.

This will of course be an *avodah* for us. It is impossible to be perfect in what we are describing here, but it has to be our aspiration. We need to take these words and draw

them close to our hearts – that we should understand the goal of life; to understand that our purity can only come from disconnecting from superficial pleasures, and that instead of superficial pleasure, we need inner pleasure to replace it.

May Hashem merit that all of us be signed and sealed for a good year – that our hearts should only yearn for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, to yearn for His Torah, and that we should yearn to serve Him.

Chapter Ten

*Yom Kippur – A Day of Purity*³²

A Moment of Purity

We are now before the holiest day of the year – Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is time to become purified, as it is written, “*Before Hashem you shall be purified.*” There is a well-known Chazal that Hashem purifies the Jewish people just like a *mikveh* purifies those who are impure.

Let us think a little into this.

The Kotzker Rebbe, may his merit protect us, would say that although usually we find that the rule is “the majority is like the whole”, when it comes to *mikveh*, there is no such concept; either you’re totally in the *mikveh*, or you’re not considered to be in the *mikveh*. If someone is mostly in the *mikveh* but he’s partially outside of it, even a little – he’s not considered to be in the *mikveh*. Why? Because the whole concept of *mikveh* is to be totally in it.

From his words we can compare this to what it means that Hashem purifies us like a *mikveh*. If even one hair on a person’s body is outside the *mikveh*, his immersion doesn’t count. The same can be said with our purification process of *teshuvah*: if we are missing even a little bit of purity from our *teshuvah*, we are missing the entire purity of Yom Kippur.

Of course, it is impossible to be perfect. Even if a person really works on himself, no one can become perfect; even Moshe Rabbeinu got angry once and made a mistake. So we do not mean that one has to become perfect; there is no such thing. We are all

³² Adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim, p. 166*

mere creations, and we are imperfect by definition. What, then, is our mission? How can we “totally be in the *mikveh*”? How are to totally purify all our deeds, *middos* and thoughts? It is simply impossible. If so, what is our mission?

When a person enters the *mikveh*, the purity hasn't begun yet. It is the moment he exits the *mikveh* that he has become purified. If a person sits in the *mikveh* all day, he's not in a state of purity yet; it is only when one exits the *mikveh* that the purity starts. This shows us that a person cannot live all day in the state of Yom Kippur; he has to leave Yom Kippur at some point.

When a person immerses in a *mikveh*, it is enough to be in it for just one second; as long as he's totally immersed in the water. The same is true with Yom Kippur; on Yom Kippur, a person has to come to just one moment of truth, and from that moment onward, he draws forth purity.

Hashem does not demand of any Jew that he live the whole year like how he is on Yom Kippur. There are five kinds of suffering we have on Yom Kippur, and this suffering ends on Motzei Yom Kippur. There is no *halachah* that we have to remain on the level of Yom Kippur. On Motzei Yom Kippur, we return to routine life; it is brought in *halachah* that one must immediately begin to build the *sukkah* after Yom Kippur is over. It is clear to anyone that when we build the *sukkah* on Motzei Yom Kippur, we are no longer on the same level as we were by *Neilah*. If so, what are we supposed to take out from Yom Kippur?

On Yom Kippur, we have to feel as if we have entered the *mikveh*; a person enters the *mikveh* impure, but he emerges from it purified. If we reach a certain point of truth on Yom Kippur, we receive a special purity in our soul – and from it, we can continue into the next year pure, all the way until the next Yom Kippur.

“Before Hashem, Be Purified”

What is that truthful point we are supposed to come to on Yom Kippur and take with us for the rest of the year?

Rabbi Akiva said, “Before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you? Just like a *mikveh* purifies the impure, so does Hashem purify the Jewish people.” What kind of question is this? Do we not know this? It is describing what it means to be pure. We have to reflect into what the special purity on Yom Kippur is, more than on any other day of the year. Doesn't teshuvah help for the entire year round? What is the special

teshuvah which we are able to do on Yom Kippur? It is because only on Yom Kippur we are “before Hashem.” During the rest of the year, we don’t have this.

How exactly on Yom Kippur are we “before Hashem”?

It is written, “*Their sins separated between them and Hashem your G-d.*”³³ Usually, there is a separation between people and Hashem; on Yom Kippur, however, “the essence of the day atones”, and it is a time in which there are no sins, no dividers. We are all like angels, and we wear white. If a person merits to reach the inner point of this day – the point in which one realizes that he is above all sin – for him, there is no separation between him and the Creator, and he can now truly feel Hashem in his heart.

During the rest of the year, a person doesn’t feel Hashem in his heart, for two reasons: Either because of his sins, or because he is attached to materialism (which might even be permitted desires; yet we have a *mitzvah* of “*You shall be holy*”, and the Ramban’s explanation of this is well-known³⁴). On Yom Kippur, both of these barriers are removed. Our materialism is removed due to our five forms of physical suffering on this day; when we fast, we are disconnected from materialism. And the barriers caused by our sins are removed as well on this day, because “the essence of the day atones.”

This is the opportunity available on Yom Kippur: all barriers are removed, and we are thus able to come to truly feel Hashem in our heart. However, just because it is a special time doesn’t mean that people come to automatically utilize it. Shabbos and the other Yomim Tovim are also special times, yet people don’t necessarily utilize those times.

There is a concept that the time itself is an opportunity to receive spiritual growth, but it doesn’t work unless we access it. The special time can only affect us if we draw the matter close to ourselves. Otherwise, a person can go a whole Shabbos or Yom Tov without feeling a thing. It’s possible that a person goes by Yom Kippur and doesn’t feel anything, in spite of the fact that “the essence of the day atones.” So although it is a special time, we have to go ahead and actually tap into its power; it’s not automatic.

³³ *Yeshayahu 59: 2*

³⁴ *See Ramban, Vayikra 19: 2, who discusses that the mitzvah of “You shall be holy” refers to how we must sanctify even our permitted desires.*

A Day of No Barriers

The fasting and atonement of our sins on Yom Kippur are not a goal unto itself. They are just a tool to help us recognize the Creator in our **hearts**.

“Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned.” Why are we asking for forgiveness? There is no obligation to ask forgiveness; we are obligated to regret our sins, to confess them, and to resolve never to do them again – but there is no *mitzvah* to ask Hashem to forgive us! Why, then, do we ask Hashem to forgive us?

It is because Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah*³⁵ that besides for begin forgiven, we also want to find favor in Hashem’s eyes. A person might be forgiven for his wrongs, but that doesn’t mean that he has gotten his favor back in the eyes of the one he wronged. We don’t just want to be forgiven for the sin - we also want to win Hashem’s favor back.

The depth of this is that when we ask to be forgiven, we are not just doing it to be saved from suffering, in this world or in the next world. We know that there is a higher purpose to Creation than this. A person might go his whole life and never commit one sin, but he can still be very far from fulfilling the purpose of Creation. Hashem created the world so that His creations can come close to Him. Sins prevent this, and so does an attachment to materialism in general. But even if a person hasn’t sinned or isn’t stuck to materialism, he can still have problem in that he is just living his life in a very routine way, and he will never search for the Creator in his life.

Fasting and asking Hashem for forgiveness is just as a means to help a person reach the inner point of Yom Kippur – which is *“Before Hashem, be purified.”* In others, we need to reach a palpable recognition in our heart of Hashem.

How can a person reach it? Don’t our sins and attachment to materialism hold us back? Normally, they do. For this reason, Hashem gives us one day a year in which nothing holds us back.³⁶

Chazal state that Yom Kippur is “the day of Hashem.” What does this mean? Are there days that aren’t a “day of Hashem”?! Don’t we serve Hashem every day?

³⁵ 42.

³⁶ See *Eliyahu Rabbah, 1*.

What it means is that it is the day of the year in which a person can feel Hashem in his life, by very nature of this day. It is a “day of Hashem” – **for us**. During the rest of the year, one’s sins and pull towards materialism acts as a barrier in between him and becoming close to Hashem; even if he fasts, he still has his sins. Yom Kippur, though, is day which Hashem has given us that has no sins and no pull towards materialism. It is a “day of Hashem” – a day in which a person must come to truly feel Hashem’s existence, in his heart.

It is not that this doesn’t apply to the rest of the year as well, but that on Yom Kippur, the day of Yom Kippur itself gives a person the opportunity to have this.

Asking Forgiveness – A Tool, Not A Goal

Every person prepares himself for the holy day of Yom Kippur. A person accepts upon himself to regret his sins, to confess them, and to resolve never to commit them again; each person according to how much he feels he is capable of doing. But why are we asking Hashem for forgiveness?

A superficial person, as he davens “*Zochreinu l’chaim tovim*” (Remember us for a good life), is already thinking about “*Chosmeinu b’sefer chaim tovim*” (Seal us in the book of life) – that he be written in the “*sefer parnassah v’chalkalah*” (the book of livelihood and support); he’s just thinking that he wants to have a good and sweet year. He realizes that his sins will get in the way of this, so he asks Hashem for forgiveness.

This is not the true perspective. Hashem gave us one day a year in which we can feel Hashem in our heart, and from that we can come to understand what our mission is during the rest of the year.

“*Taste it and see, that Hashem is good.*” When a person doesn’t taste or see Hashem’s existence, it is very unlikely that he will be pulled after Hashem like a magnet. He doesn’t feel close to Hashem – he just believes that it’s possible. But this alone will not suffice. Who among us can feel what we believe? It is not enough just to believe. There are some rare individuals who are able to survive just on belief alone in Hashem without feeling Him, but most people need to feel Hashem in order to survive. If they just believe in Hashem and don’t feel Him, they are less likely to act upon their beliefs; we need to feel Hashem, and it is not enough just to believe in Him.

Hashem gave us one day a year in which He removes all barriers so we can feel Him. Thus, the first preparation one needs to make for Yom Kippur is that the five forms of physical suffering on this day are to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* (which includes regretting the sin, confessing the sin, and resolving not to do the sin again) – but that the purpose of all these mitzvos is to come **to feel the existence of Hashem!**

A person awaits the spiritual light of Yom Kippur. What is the spiritual light that a person should want to take with him from Yom Kippur? If a person is just looking forward to his sins being forgiven, maybe his sins will be forgiven, but as Rabbeinu Yonah writes, he has lost the whole purpose of the day; he forgot to search for Hashem. Even if a person davens from the depths of his heart and cries to Hashem that his sins be forgiven – and Hashem answers him and indeed forgives him – now what? What is the point of this?

A person has to know what the purpose of Yom Kippur is – to ask for forgiveness, and to ask that he draw close to the goal of all this. A person has to know that sins and an attachment to materialism are what holds him back from feeling Hashem; to remove our sins and our attachment to materialism is just one aspect of Yom Kippur, but it is not yet the essence of Yom Kippur.

Only on Yom Kippur one is purified “*before Hashem.*” If the purpose would be that we just become purified from sin, it wouldn’t have anything to do with “*before Hashem.*” Being purified on Yom Kippur is not the regular kind of purity that we understand from learning the laws of purity and impurity. It is a purity of being “before Hashem”, and it is not just about becoming pure. It is a purity so that we can come to remove the barriers that hold us back from being close to Hashem – and when we remove those barriers, one can come to truly recognize the reality of Hashem in his heart.

All of Life Is One Piece

What we are discussing here is not just an issue of how to look at Yom Kippur. It is an issue of how a person looks at everything in the world before him.

A person might live *Yiddishkeit* very superficially and view everything he does as random acts: we learn Torah, we do the *mitzvos*, we daven...and then we also have to go through a Yom Kippur, which is day to ask Hashem to be forgiven for our sins. He doesn’t see any connection between all the *mitzvos* of life. He doesn’t see how it all relates automatically to his connection he has with the Torah. If he’s a little bit of a

thinker, maybe he realizes that he needs his sins to be forgiven so he can learn Torah better, but beyond that, he doesn't see the connection.

The truth, though, is that all of life is one piece – just like how the Menorah was made all from one piece.

We need Hashem revealed in our life, though, to show us how all of life is one piece.

The Torah Can Only Be Received After Being Purified from Yom Kippur

When Moshe came back down with the second set of Luchos, it was the day after Yom Kippur – after the Jewish people were forgiven and purified. This was not by chance. After the sin with the Golden Calf, the Torah could not be given to the people unless they were to be purified.

Why did it have to be this way, though – do sins contradict the Torah so much? Don't we see people who learn Torah all day and even put out *sefarim*, and wonderful *Chiddushei Torah* – yet they speak tons of *lashon hora* and do other sins? Why, then, did the *Luchos* have to wait until after Yom Kippur – why did they need Yom Kippur for the Torah?

The answer to this is that it's very possible that a person is connected to the superficial layer of Torah, but the true reality of Torah – the kind of Torah that is “one piece” – does not exist by a person who hasn't revealed Hashem in his heart. Thus, only after Yom Kippur did we receive the Torah, after we were purified and forgiven.

When a person sees how all of life is really one unit, when he sees how all of the Torah is really one piece, a tool that can reveal the One Creator of the world in his heart – such a person, when he comes to Yom Kippur, realizes that the whole idea of Yom Kippur is for this purpose. He sees how the five forms of physical affliction on this day are essentially a tool to remove the barriers that hold a person back from revealing Hashem in the heart.

But if a person views Torah as a goal unto itself, a Torah that doesn't necessarily involve the revelation of Hashem's in one's personal life – then he views the *Yomim Tovim* with the same attitude: it's all just happenstance to him. To him, Rosh Hashanah is nothing more than a day of judgment; Yom Kippur to him is a day to

have his sins forgiven, and Sukkos is a time of happiness. He doesn't see a connection between any of the *Yomim Tovim*.

However, when a person lives with the recognition that the purpose of his life is to reveal Hashem in the heart, then Rosh Hashanah to him is a tool to get there; he sees Yom Kippur as another tool to get there – it's all about how to reveal Hashem in the heart. A person can only come to this recognition when he looks at all of life as a means to reveal Hashem.

The Proper Way To Prepare

Everything needs preparation. What preparation is required for the *Yomim Noraim*? First, one has to acquire for himself the proper attitude – he has to know towards where he is aspiring to. *Sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah* – “the end of actions is first in the thoughts.”

What exactly should a person want to take out of Yom Kippur?

In order to question, one has to answer a question that comes far before this. It is not a question of what I want to take out of Yom Kippur – but a question of what I must take out of the first day of Elul, the fifteenth day of Elul, the fourth of Tishrei, the fifth of Tishrei. What does a person want then?

If a person wants a certain thing in life on the fifth or sixth of Tishrei, and then it comes Yom Kippur and he wants something else – he is attempting to reach a level he isn't holding at, and he might *chas v'shalom* have a fallout. When a person jumps to a level he isn't at, he's not there, and if he isn't there, it's not his true level. He will fall from it.

Thus, we cannot look at Yom Kippur as a day that is separate from the rest of the year, and to attempt to live it during the rest of the year. What we must understand is that all of life is a means to reveal Hashem in the heart.

Why Do We Wait For Moshiach?

One of the thirteen principles of our faith is that we must wait for Moshiach every day. Yet, it's possible a person is waiting for Moshiach – but not for Hashem!

Who - and what - is Moshiach? When Moshiach comes, the world will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem.³⁷ Moshiach will come to reveal Hashem onto the world.

Why are we commanded to wait for Moshiach every day? So that he can redeem us from our suffering? So that he can give us all health and livelihood? This is not the point of Moshiach. For this, we wouldn't need Moshiach – we could have any miracle worker come and solve all the problems for us.

The concept of Moshiach is that he will come to reveal Hashem in the hearts of people. This is why we await for him to come – we are awaiting that inner light to become revealed.

When a person wishes he could have Hashem's reality revealed to him in his heart, even if he has sinned during the year or is pulled towards materialism in general, he will be able to utilize Yom Kippur and reach this aspiration. Yom Kippur is able to elevate a person to a higher level he isn't normally on. But in order to receive that higher level, a person needs to indeed yearn for this. If a person has a longing for something, he will be able to receive what it has to offer him, but if this aspiration isn't present, he won't reach the high levels.

The relationship between the Creator and the Jewish people is compared to that of a bride and a groom. A person only has this intense relationship with Hashem if he longs for it – if he lives the rest of the year with Hashem. If he doesn't live with Hashem during the year, at least he should long for the relationship. If he has that longing, he will be able to gain from what Yom Kippur has to offer – that even though he normally isn't on such a high level, Yom Kippur can elevate him to indeed feel Hashem in his heart.

The purpose of Creation is so that we become close to Hashem. Hashem took us out of Egypt, He gave us the Torah – but He was only revealed to us for this short amount of time, because we still hadn't reached our purpose. Our purpose was reached with the building of the *Beis Hamikdash* – “*And I will dwell amongst them.*” Each person is supposed to come to have Hashem's presence dwell in his own heart. The purpose of everything is that Hashem should be felt in each person's heart.

When a person reaches with clarity that this is the ultimate purpose of life, even if he knows he hasn't reached it, at least he should yearn for it. He can long for Rosh

³⁷ See *Yeshayahu 11:9*

Hashanah because it is a day in which he can search for how to become closer to Hashem, and he longs for Yom Kippur because it is a day in which he can become close to Hashem.

It is not only during *Yomim Noraim* that a person can become close to Hashem. A person can search for closeness to Hashem even if it is the second day of Tishrei, the second day of Cheshvan, or the second day of Kislev. It is just that *Yomim Noraim* are special times in which a person can reach closeness to Hashem even if he isn't on such a high level – as long as he aspires for this and longs for this.

“*You have chosen us from all the nations, You loved us and desired us...*” These words of the *Shemoneh Esrei* we daven on Yom Tov mean that these days are really a spiritual level that is above us, but since Hashem loves us so much, He reveals Himself to us through Yom Tov. Yom Tov is called “*moed*”, which comes from the word “*vaad*” – a “meeting.” Yom Tov is a meeting between the Jewish people and their Father in Heaven.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Show Us What Life Is All About

We need a clear way to live life, and it shouldn't be limited just to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We all know that these days of *Yomim Noraim* will come and go, and then we will go back to our routine life. What then? There will be no more lectures for Yom Kippur. What will we do then?

If one knows what life is about, then Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to him is the backbone for the rest of the year. These days are supposed to give us the true meaning of our entire life: to understand that Hashem created a world with one goal, a goal that applies even more specifically to the Jewish people: that “we all believe in our G0d and thank Him that He created us, for we have other reason in being created; the Almighty Above has no desire in this world at all except that a person should know and thank his G-d, Who created him.”³⁸

Even if a person knows the purpose of why he was created, how often does he think about it? These words to him might just be something he sees printed in a *chumash*, but he doesn't actualize it in his daily life.

³⁸ *Ramban, in the end of Parshas Bo.*

Preparing for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is really about understanding what life is about. It is to understand that Hashem gave us these ten days so that we can realize that even if we fall to sin during the rest of the year and we have lost sight of our goal, we are given a new year as a new opportunity, to open a fresh new page in our life.

What would we want written in that new page we are turning for ourselves? That we should be forgiven?? If that is where our aspirations end, then when it comes next year as well we will need to once again be “forgiven”...

If we are writing for ourselves new piece of paper, we should want that it should say on it the possuk: “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*” How, indeed, do we become close to Hashem? **Through Torah, through mitzvos, through remembering Him constantly, and through simply talking to Him every day, as a person talks to his friend.**³⁹

The Depth of Our Tefillos on Yom Kippur

The power of Yom Kippur is that it can give a person the ability to change his whole orientation about life. Let us reflect into this.

We are used to thinking differently than what has been said here – and in fact, we never think at all about it. But the power of Yom Kippur is that it can enable us to have our hearts and minds be purified by Hashem. We are able to purify our hearts that we shouldn’t want anything else other than Torah and Avodas Hashem; we are able to purify our minds that it should understand what the depth of life is all about.

What should a person mainly daven for on Yom Kippur? That his sins be forgiven? No. Although that is what it seems to imply from our *davening*, there is more depth to what we saying in the *davening*.

Let us compare this to the following. A person who hasn’t learned Gemara for years and went to work opens a Gemara and starts to learn it. He doesn’t see any logic in it; the Gemara makes no sense to him. If you tell him that there have been hundreds of pages full of writings about the line of Gemara in front of him, he wouldn’t believe you. But we all know that there is depth within depth contained in the words of the Gemara; if someone doesn’t understand the Gemara. it’s simply because he’s unlearned.

³⁹ As the Chazon Ish wrote.

The same goes for the *tefillos* of *Yomim Noraim*. The fact that we ask for forgiveness is really a deep matter, and it requires a lot of in-depth analysis. It is just that we are used to reading it off like when we say *Tehillim*. Even those who have *kavanah* when they say the *tefillos* are only thinking about the simple, basic understanding of the words. But the truth is that these *tefillos* are just as deep as any Gemara. They need to be learned in-depth.

So the first thing one must understand about Yom Kippur is that the point of this day is not about asking for forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness is only a tool to help us reach closeness to Hashem, because it removes the barriers holding us back from this.

The Practical Way To Prepare for Yom Kippur

Let us think in a very practical way how we can prepare for the holy day of Yom Kippur.

Firstly, we need to clearly understand what the general purpose of life is. Then, we can come to understand what the purpose of the day of Yom Kippur is.

After one has clarified what the purpose of Yom Kippur is, and he is also aware of what holds him back from reaching this purpose – he can then ask from Hashem the following: “Hashem, please remove from me all barriers, and reveal to me the inner point of it all. Reveal to me the Torah, which came down on Yom Kippur, the Torah which is clean from sin; the Torah which will enable me to cleave to You.”

In other words – know what the purpose of Yom Kippur is, what the tools are that bring about this purpose, and daven that you receive those tools.

On Yom Kippur, a person has a lot of time to talk to Hashem. One can lengthen his *Shemoneh Esrei* on Yom Kippur and talk more to Hashem. On Rosh Hashanah, this is harder to do, because a person has to be able to hear the *shofar*. But on Yom Kippur, one is free to spend much more time in *Shemoneh Esrei* and speak with Hashem. It is one day of the year in which we have permission to speak freely to Hashem, all day.

And what should we ask Hashem for?

“*Ribono shel olam*. First and foremost, purify my mind, that I should understand what the purpose of life is. Open up my heart to Your Torah. Which kind of Torah? The kind of Torah that brings me close to You, the Torah which came on Yom Kippur,

the Torah that is free from sin, the Torah of which there are no barriers holding me back; that I should merit to truly be close to You.”

There Is Always One Goal

Even if we would be before Chanukah, or before Purim or before Pesach – the words here still remain unchanged. Whether it is Chanukah, or Purim, or Pesach, or Shavuot – the air we breathe always stays the same; something which sustains us always stays the same, it never changes.

However, if a person can't breathe through his nose, he needs to be put on intravenous to help him breathe. The same can be said of our Avodas Hashem throughout the whole year: we always have one goal, we always “breathe the same air.” Hashem gives us each Yom Tov so that we can have different ways how we can breathe that same air – there are many ways to become sick in the spiritual sense, and the cure is always to become close to Hashem. That is the air which we must always breathe, and there are many ways – many Yomim Tovim – how we can “breathe” this air.

Every Yom Tov which we have was given us to by Hashem to get to one purpose alone: to feel in our heart how Hashem exists.

If we absorb these words, the next year will be a totally different year. We will be clear from the beginning of the year until its end what we are searching for – what we want; what holds us back, and the tools we can use to reach our goal. As we mentioned, there are altogether three things that hold us back: being attached to materialism, sins, and acting monotonously. We have several tools we will need to help us get to our goal (closeness to Hashem), and they are: Torah, *mitzvos*, *tefillah*, and *emunah*.

All of these things need to be done with the intention to get to our goal – to become connected to Hashem, every day.

Section III
SUKKOS

Chapter Eleven
*Lulav In Our Heart*⁴⁰

Preface: The Torah Is Eternal, And Its Lessons Are Eternal

In *sefer Toldos*⁴¹, it is brought many times a certain fundamental concept: whatever we find in the Torah is always applicable, no matter the time or place. Since the Torah is eternal, its lessons are not bound to any specific event or person; the lessons of the Torah are able to be applied to any soul, and we only need to learn how it can indeed apply to us in our situations.

Based on this fundamental concept, we can think into the laws of the *lulav* brought in the *Mishnah* in *Sukkah*⁴². Besides for how the laws of the *lulav* need to be carried out in the practical sense, these laws can teach us as well about our own Avodas Hashem.

A “Stolen Lulav”

The first law about *lulav* listed in the *Mishnah* is that a stolen *lulav* is disqualified to be used for the *mitzvah*. Simply speaking, the *Mishnah* is saying that a person does not fulfill the *mitzvah* of *lulav* with a stolen *lulav*.

⁴⁰ This chapter is adapted from the last chapter in *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Sukkos*.

⁴¹ A student of the Baal Shem Tov

⁴² *Sukkah*, 3:1.

But there is an inner meaning behind this as well, and in order to know it, we must understand what *lulav* is in an inner sense – the “*p’nimiyus*” (inner world) behind the *lulav*.

In the Zohar, it is stated that *lulav* comes from a combination of the words “*lo*” (“to him”) and “*lev*” (“heart”); this teaches that a person’s heart has to be “his” - a person needs to be in control of his heart.⁴³ In other words, a person’s heart shouldn’t be swayed by the hearts of others – like when it comes to how we serve Hashem. The way we serve Hashem has to come from within us, an expression of our own individuality – and our Avodas Hashem should not be “stolen” from others.

In terms of our inner world, a stolen *lulav* means a stolen heart – and if our heart gets stolen by others, it is “disqualified”, just like a stolen *lulav* is disqualified. The soul of a person should not be “stolen.”

Let us explain what we mean.

Copying Another Person’s Avodas Hashem

Here is a question: There is a *minbag*⁴⁴ to shake the *lulav* in all four directions. When a person shakes *lulav* in the four directions, is he acting from within himself – or is he just copying what he sees other people doing?

There is a well-known story (with several versions) that once there was a *tzaddik* who would *daven* at the *keasel*, and when he came to certain parts of davening, he would move in a certain way. When he died, someone else took him over – and he would copy the movements of the *tzaddik* when he got to that part in davening. There was a *gadol* who would daven there in the *minyán* every day; but when he noticed that the new *baal tefillah* was copying the *tzaddik*’s movements, he stopped davening there.

The lesson from this story is that a person should not copy how another person serves Hashem.

⁴³ This is stated openly as well in *Beraishis Rabbah* 34: 10.

⁴⁴ custom

Now let us think about our own situation. When we shake the *lulav*, it should be our own act of self-expression. But are we really doing it like that, or are we just moving our body when we do it – leaving our soul out of the equation?

We can compare this to a five year old child who comes to *shul*, and he wants to *daven*, but he doesn't know how. What does he do? He watches his older brother and imitates his body movements; when everyone stands, he stands, and when everyone sits, he sits. When they cover their eyes, he covers his eyes.

Acting like this resembles a stolen *lulav*. It's a stolen heart! When a person copies others' movements, and the movements are not his own – he is just being like a monkey, who can copy other people. When a person copies others' movements, his body may be moving – but his soul isn't.

Copying Is Really Stealing!

We can compare this to the following.

A person sees someone else on the street walking very fast, and he also begins to walk very fast. He catches up to him and is walking fast alongside him. Then, the first person reaches his house, walks inside, and shuts the door – while the second person is left standing on the street – after all, he can't walk into another person's house.

When we shake *lulav*, are we doing this from an inner place in ourselves, or are we just copying everyone else doing it?

During the rest of the year as well, a person subconsciously is copying other people's movements, and he isn't even aware of it. These movements are not his own. (Sometimes the person is aware of this, and sometimes he isn't). It's all just copying another person's body language. It seems as if there is nothing wrong with this; after all, he isn't copying anything that's bad. But when you think about it, to copy another person in any way is a form of stealing, and it has no value whatsoever in one's personal Avodas Hashem. A person has to act from within himself – what he does has to come from his own self-expression. Otherwise, it resembles a stolen *lulav* – which is invalid for use.

A “Dry Lulav”

The Mishnah continues with another law: “A dry *lulav* is disqualified.” In the commentaries, there is a big discussion what is considered “dry”, but regarding us, we need to know what the inner implication of what a “dry *lulav*” is.

The *Talmud Yerushalmi*⁴⁵ states that a dry *lulav* is invalid because it is written, “*The dead do not praise Hashem.*” In other words, a dry *lulav* is considered to be like a dead *lulav*. “*The dead do not praise Hashem*” – but the live ones do. One must understand that shaking the *lulav* is a way to give praise to Hashem – a person praises the Creator for giving him the *mitzvah* of the four species.

On Yom Tov, there is a *mitzvah* to rejoice; “*And you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d*”. Although the possuk is describing the joy one had when he was in the *beis hamikdash*, it really applies to all *mitzvos*; all the *mitzvos* need to be done joyously. It is thus not enough just to take the four species and shake them; we find in *halachah* that the main time to shake them is by *halel*⁴⁶, because the main aspect of the *mitzvah* of the four species is to come to praise Hashem with them. “*The dead do not praise Hashem*”.

Acting By Rote

Thus, a person needs to ask himself the following. When he shakes the *lulav* as he says the words “*Hodu LaHashem, ki tov,*” does he truly feel gratitude to Hashem? If he does, his *lulav* is “alive” – and it’s valid for the *mitzvah*. But if he’s just saying the words and he doesn’t really mean it –as it is written, “*With his mouth and lips he honors Me, but his heart is far from me, and their fear toward me is like commandments learned by rote*”,⁴⁷ then his is among “the dead” who do not praise Hashem! Sure, a person can say the words of *halel*, but does he really feel a vitality in saying them? This is actually the ultimate question that sums up a person’s entire life.

Compare this to a person salivating over a delicious piece of food. When he’s eating, he feels a vitality in what he’s doing; he’s not just moving his body – he’s moving towards the food with vitality surging through his body. It’s enjoyable.

⁴⁵ *Yerushalmi Sukkah 12b*

⁴⁶ *Sukkah 37b.*

⁴⁷ *Yeshayahu 29: 13*

Now let's go back to the person shaking *lulav* by *halel*. He's moving, but is he feeling vitality from those movements? Is he doing it with *chiyus*? If he doesn't feel a *chiyus* as he shakes *lulav*, he is like a dry *lulav*. His *lulav* might be alive and kosher for use of the *mitzvah*, but "*the dead do not praise Hashem.*" The possuk here is coming to awaken a person that he shouldn't be among those who are considered "dead" as they serve Hashem, those who don't serve Hashem with *chiyus*.

It is not only the *lulav* that has to be alive, but the person holding it has to be "alive" as well! If a dry *lulav* is considered to be dead, surely a person has to be alive inside as he does the *mitzvah*. Nothing is more invalid than being dead – that's why a dry *lulav* is invalid for the *mitzvah*.

A Lulav Used For "Idol Worship"

Let us continue with the help of Hashem and learn more of the inner dimension behind the *halachos* of *lulav*.

The Mishnah continues that a "*lulav* of *Asheirah* (a kind of idol worship) is disqualified for use of the *mitzvah*." In our own heart as well, it's possible for a person to resemble a *lulav* used for idol worship. As we brought from the Zohar, the word *lulav* comes from the word *lo* and *lev* – in other words, the heart of a person has to be "his". Before, we said how this applies to shaking the *lulav* with *chiyus* – our hearts have to be in it. Now, we will deal with a different issue: the deep desires found in the heart of a person.

When you play the keys on a piano, it produces a harmonious sound. But if you pound on the keys, it sounds terrible. Our heart as well needs to produce the right sounds – in other words, what we say with our mouth has to match what's on our heart.

When a person is sick, *rachmana litzlan*, he has a lot of *kavanah* when he davens *Refoeinu*. He is saying with his mouth what is true to his heart – he wants to be healed, and so he davens for this. But when a person davens *Hoshiva Shofteinu* (Return our judges), even if he is paying attention to the words he is saying, does he really desire in his heart that Hashem should return to us our judges?

This is the big question a person must ask himself: When I ask for something from Hashem, is that what I truly want in my heart? Or am I just saying it?

A Person Has To Want What He Does

Now we will explain how this applies to a “*lulav* used for idol worship.” The Gemara says, “A person should not hire himself for idol worship purposes, and he should not come to need people. What is idol worship? Anything which is strange to him.”⁴⁸ The Gemara there goes on to say that if someone had a prestigious job, such as a doctor, and now he needs money, he shouldn’t take the job of cleaning the streets to make money. If a doctor cleans the streets, the Gemara says, it’s like *avodah zarah* for him – it’s like idol worship, because he’s doing something that’s “strange” (*zarah*) for him to do. However, the Gemara says that it is permitted to take a job that’s beneath his dignity in order rather than become a beggar.

When a person does something that isn’t for him to do, his heart deep down is cringing at what he’s doing. What he wants is contradicting what he’s doing, and he suffers inside.

Now let’s go back to a person doing a mitzvah: does he really want he’s doing, or is it like a strange practice to him? Sure, his deeds seem to imply that he’s serving Hashem. But what is he desiring in his heart? Is his heart filled with thoughts of holiness, with yearnings for Hashem and for His Torah and *mitzvos*? Or is his heart, *chas v’shalom*, so materialistic and affected by all kinds of negative influences?

When a person shakes *lulav* and he stirs his heart in the process, he increases the desires in his heart for holiness; but if he has negative desires in his heart, desires for strange things – then when he shakes *lulav*, it resembles a *lulav* used for idol worship. The shaking of the *lulav* will only increase the strange desires, and he will harm himself spiritually in the process. He resembles someone who shakes a *lulav* that’s rotted and has a foul smell; as he shakes the *lulav*, the foul smell begins to fill the room. Instead of sanctifying himself through the *mitzvah*, he sinks lower into the impurity of his evil desires, *rachmana litzlan*.

⁴⁸ *Bava Basra 110a*

An Adult With A Childish Heart

When a person has strange desires in his heart – desires that are not for Avodas Hashem – then when he shakes *lulav*, he’s endangering himself and causing Heaven to examine his deeds. He’s not having thoughts of gratitude to Hashem as he shakes *lulav*, and his heart is filled with various desires for other things.

We can compare this to a father who gives a treat to a child, and he tells the child, “You have to say thank you, and then I’ll give it to you.” The child, of course, says “Thank You”, but it’s without any true feeling of gratitude; he is thinking all about the treat. The father knows that the child doesn’t mean it, and he’d rather not hear such a meaningless “Thank You”; the “Thank You” of the child does not increase the father’s love toward him at all. It’s an empty expression. But what can we expect from a child? We just hope from the child that he will mature one day, and that he will really want in his heart what he’s doing and saying.

The same goes for an adult, who is mature on the outside – but inside, he’s still like a child. A person can be a fully grown adult, yet he is still immature when it comes to *ruchmiyus*. He must develop and mature his heart at some point. If he doesn’t have a mature heart yet, he should still do as everyone else is doing; but he has to at least have a desire to mature. If he doesn’t, then shaking the *lulav* awakens Heaven to judge him.

Thus, shaking the *lulav* only has meaning when one wants in his heart what he’s doing and saying – when he’s doing the *mitzvah* with *chiyus*. The Gemara⁴⁹ brings that in the Jerusalem of old, a person would leave his house holding the *lulav*, he would take it with him to *shul*, and he would hold it by *Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei*; and he would visit the sick or comfort the mourning as he held his *lulav*. When he came to the *beis midrash* to learn, he would let his son or servant hold the *lulav* for him.”

Anyone who could take the *lulav* with him wherever he went obviously derived *chiyus* from the mitzvah of *lulav*. A person doesn’t carry a sack of stones on his shoulder wherever he goes, because he doesn’t get *chiyus* from this.

If the heart of a person wants other things than Avodas Hashem, the heart is getting *chiyus* from those other things, things that contradict holiness. Such a heart resembles a *lulav* used for idol worship – and it cannot get *chiyus* from the *lulav*.

⁴⁹ *Sukkah 41b*

“How Is Work Going...”

Let us reflect more into how far people can be from yearnings for holiness.

A person meets his friend in the street and asks him, “So, how’s work going?”

His friend thinks that he is being asked about how he’s doing financially. He answers, “Oh, *Baruch Hashem*; I’m making it by.” He never entertains a thought that maybe he was being asked about he’s doing spiritually, how his *Avodas Hashem* is going...and why should he? After all, the main part of his life is his livelihood, his ambitions to make money, to pay his debts, to buy stuff for the house.

Now, if he would be getting his *chiyus* in life from *Avodas Hashem*, he would interpret his friend’s question differently. He would hear a different question – and he would give a different answer. He would tell his friend about his successes – and his failures – in his *Avodas Hashem*.

Let’s give another example. A person had a child who was sick, but *Baruch Hashem*, the child recovered. If someone meets him on the street and asks him, “What’s new?” he is likely to answer about how his child got better, *Baruch Hashem*; he doesn’t even think that maybe the person is asking how his *Avodas Hashem* is going. But who says that his friend was asking him about how his child is doing? Maybe he’s asking him about how his spiritual situation is? A person hears what his heart is hearing – and his heart has *avodah zarah* dwelling in it. We don’t mean real idol worship like they are still practicing today in India. We mean *avodah zarah* in the sense that “*avodah*” to the person doesn’t mean “*Avodas Hashem*”, but how it’s going at his workplace.

If someone’s heart is clean from the strange desires, though, when he hears the word “*avodah*”, he hears it in terms of *Avodas Hashem*, not in terms of “work”.

Maybe he can tell the person, “Oh, you are asking about how my *Avodas Hashem* is going...?”

The asker might of course respond, “No, I’m not asking how your *Avodas Hashem* is going. I meant to ask how your *job* is going.”

Hopefully, the other person will respond – “Ah, you are referring to the curse placed on Adam – “*By the sweat of your brow you shall have to eat bread...*”

“How Was Your Yom Tov?”

A person has to pay attention to the whole orientation of the way he is living his life.

We can give another example of what we mean. A person is asked by his friend, “So, how was your Yom Tov?”

What does the person respond? “I went on this trip and that trip. I visited my parents and my in-laws; etc.” He never thinks that maybe he was being asked about how elated he felt from the Yom Tov, like if he fulfilled the *mitzvah* of rejoicing on Yom Tov.

Of course, we don’t mean that one shouldn’t visit his parents, and we do not mean to say that it is forbidden to plan any activities throughout *Chol HaMoed*. What we are trying to get at here is: how is a person going through his life - what is his attitude? Is a person living his life for Avodas Hashem? In the depths of a person’s heart, does he really value Avodas Hashem? Is it a priority by him?

As we said before, *Lulav* is a combination of the words *lo* (his) and *lev* (heart) – a person’s heart has to be involved in a life of Avodas Hashem; he has to have a real heart, and not a heart full of extraneous desires - not to have a heart that resembles idol worship.

Lulav From A “Condemned City”

The Mishnah continues that a *lulav* which comes from an *ir nidachas* (a city condemned to be burned, due to a majority population of idol worshippers) is invalid for use of the *mitzvah*. The previous case of the Mishnah also dealt with a *lulav* used for idol worship, but there is a difference. In the previous case of the Mishnah, a *lulav* of *Asheirah* \idol worship, the problem was with the individual who holds the *lulav*. In the case of a *lulav* from a condemned city, the problem is with the general population as a whole.

This problem can be seen with the superficiality of the public. If the headlines on the newspapers say, “People are working hard”, it is always talking about jobs, and never about the “hard work” of Avodas Hashem.

Our Physical Heart and Our Spiritual Heart

To give an example of what we mean, let's say we ask a person, "Is your heart okay?" the usual answer will be, "*Baruch Hashem*, I don't get heart attacks."

However, the question "Is your heart okay?" can have a whole new meaning to it than what we are used to.

In the right chamber of our heart is our *yetzer tov* (good inclination), and in the left chamber of our heart resides our *yetzer hora* (evil inclination).⁵⁰ So when someone asks another how his heart is, the real question should be: "What kind of struggles are taking place in your heart between good and evil?"

Of course, we are not suggesting that everyone respond in the like. But what we mean is that unfortunately, no one is asking about another person's spiritual situation, about what's really going on in his heart. People only ask each other "Is your heart okay?" only when something scary happens, like a heart attack. It is rare for a person to meet someone and ask him, "How much evil have you managed to expel from your heart? How much has your *yetzer tov* overpowered your *yetzer hora*?"

The Torah teaches us that "*the inclination of a man is evil from his youth.*" When a person becomes 20, or 40, or 60, or 80 years old – has his heart changed at all?? Where is his head at, where is his heart at? Has he even begun to be among "the righteous, whose hearts are in their control, in contrast to the wicked, who are controlled by their hearts"⁵¹?

A Lulav With Its Tip Chopped Off

The next law in the Mishnah is that a *lulav* with a chopped off head\tip is invalid for the *mitzvah*. In the soul of a person, there can also be a "chopped off head" as well.

When the *lulav* grows on the date tree, its leaves are pointed upwards. Since it grows upwards, one has to shake the *lulav* with its tip pointed upwards, because the *halachah*

⁵⁰ Zohar, Terumah 162b; see Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 9.

⁵¹ Beraishis Rabbah, 34: 10

is that the *lulav* has to be shaken in the way it is grown.⁵² If a person shakes the *lulav* and it is pointed downwards, he hasn't fulfilled the *mitzvah*.

The *sefer Bikkurei Yaakov*⁵³ asks the following interesting question: If a *lulav* grew in Eretz Yisrael, and its owner is holding it in a different country, must he hold it turn it upside down, so it can face Eretz Yisrael?

From the viewpoint of our inner world, it is simple why we cannot turn the *lulav* upside down. A person has to go upwards in Avodas Hashem, not downwards. All of the *mitzvos* are here to elevate a person. The inner reason why a *lulav* has to be shaken with its tip pointed upwards is because it has to be shaken “in the way it grows” – in other words, the *mitzvah* of *lulav* is to elevate a person upwards.

A *lulav* grows sharper as it grows more and more upwards. This hints to growth in Avodas Hashem, how one has to be like “*a tzaddik, who blossoms like a date tree.*” Everyone has some growth, but most people reach a certain point where they stop growing. A few rare individuals reach the sharpest, uppermost point. However, every person at least has to have an aspiration to get to the highest level.

There is a very big difference between those who aspire to get to the top to those who never aspire to get there. If someone doesn't have any desire whatsoever to aspire for the highest levels in Avodas Hashem – if he doesn't believe in himself at all that it's possible for him to get there – he resembles a *lulav* with a chopped off tip.

People with high aspirations are often dubbed “delusional” and “unrealistic”, but this is a mistake. There can be such a problem in which a person is delusion in Avodas Hashem and acts unrealistic, but when we say that one has to have high aspirations, we do not mean to be delusional. We mean for one **to know exactly at what level he is at, yet at the same time he is aware that he has a higher purpose than where he stands.** A person can always be growing spiritually – like “*a tzaddik, who blossoms like a date tree.*” A person can have his ups and downs, but he should always be moving toward his goal. One needs to have an ambition to get to the highest level he can reach in Avodas Hashem.

We do not know if we will indeed get to the highest level possible, and we know how difficult this will be. We can daven and cry to Hashem that we reach it.

⁵² *Sukkah 45b*

⁵³ *Bikkurei Yaakov, Hilchos Sukkah, 651.*

If someone doesn't have high aspirations in Avodas Hashem, he resembles a *lulan* with a chopped off tip. He has no aspiration to get to the goal – so he won't get there.

There is a very big difference between someone who aspires to get to the top – even though he's far from it – to someone who has no aspiration whatsoever to get there.

We Must Have A Desire Human Perfection

When a person has no aspiration whatsoever for human perfection, this is really the greatest sin possible! He is going against the whole purpose of Creation in thinking so, because the purpose of Creation is so that people should perfect themselves. Thus, a person shouldn't feel broken-hearted if he's not perfect yet; one has to know that it takes a lot of work to get to perfection.

One can know that although he's not at perfection yet, he still believes that he can get there – he can definitely get there, with hard work. There is a hope that must always be alive in a person's heart: that it is possible for him to reach the greatest human perfection, because since we all believe firmly that the purpose of Creation is to perfect ourselves, it must be that it is possible for us to perfect ourselves.

When a person doesn't have aspirations, he harms himself a lot in another way than what we have said so far. Reb Yisrael Salanter said on himself: "I aspired to become like the Vilna Gaon – and therefore I became Reb Yisrael Salanter. If I would have aspired to become Reb Yisrael Salanter, I never would have become who I am today." In other words, a person reaches much more perfection when he aspires for it, than when he doesn't aspire for it.

If a person is always saying, "I know that it's impossible for me to reach the ultimate perfection", such a statement ices him up inside from spiritual growth, like an evil Amalek within. It's a lukewarm feeling toward *Yiddishkeit* – a lethargic attitude of "Hard enough just to be on an average level of *Yiddishkeit*." Of course, we all know that not everyone can be *tzaddikim* – that's reality – but when a person says "*I'll never be a tzaddik*," it's a different story; he's harming himself a lot by saying this! He's denying the purpose of Creation, which is to come to human perfection.

The Ponovozher Rov zt"l had an idea once to open up a yeshivah for intellectually gifted students. The Chazon Ish did not agree with his idea, and he told him as

follows: “Every person has to believe that he is an excellent student. If you open up a yeshiva that is exclusively for the best students, you are basically sending a message to boys who aren’t in this yeshiva that they are hopeless.”

*We Aspire For Perfection Although
We Cannot Reach It Through Our Human Efforts*

Yet, there is a fundamental point to bear in mind with all this. We must know that we cannot ever achieve human perfection through our human efforts alone. The Mishnah in *Avos*⁵⁴ states, “The task is not upon you to finish, nor are you exempt from it.” A person has to do whatever he can to reach perfection, but to actually get there is a gift from the Creator. Of this, it is written, “*I toiled, (thus) I found.*”⁵⁵ After a person tries his hardest – then he can “find”; he receives the spiritual growth as a gift from Hashem. This is the way of the Torah – try your hardest, and then, you will “find.” But without trying, a person will definitely never “find.”

The *lulav* represents how we must try to reach the pinnacle of growth – from the way the leaves are designed, getting sharper and sharper upwards until they reach the highest, sharpest point. With a person’s own abilities, he cannot reach perfection, and therefore, perfection is not demanded of us. But what is demanded of us is that we must aspire for perfection – to try our hardest!

There are people who are very disoriented in their Avodas Hashem. They are trying to go way above their level in how they act, yet their aspirations are only to aim for a mediocre level.

There Are Levels To Perfection

One’s Avodas Hashem should be clear to him. On one hand, we need to aspire for the greatest perfection. On the other hand, we must not act too much above our current level. A person has to know that it is not considered being delusional to aspire for high levels; the higher levels are able to become realized. We do not know when those aspirations will finally be realized – we have been waiting for this for at least

⁵⁴ *Avos 2: 16*

⁵⁵ *Megillah 6b*

5770 years, and we still haven't reached our perfection yet. But in the end, we will get there. Our faith that we will get there is represented by how the *lulav* must have its tip intact.

One must also bear in mind that there are levels to perfection. A person can reach a certain level of perfection, and upon acquiring that, it is now upon him to aspire for even higher perfection.

Stages In Life

We can compare this to our life stages. When a person is a child, the perfection which he strives for is his *bar mitzvah*. Later on in life, he needs to reach higher perfection – a man is like “half a body” until he gets married. After he gets married, he needs to acquire more perfection by becoming a father to his children.

When it comes to Avodas Hashem, one has to strive for a certain area of perfection, and then upon reaching that, there is more. A person has to keep perfecting himself more and more until he reaches the greatest perfection – a total *d'veykus* (attachment) with Hashem. A person who does the *mitzvos* properly, who learns Torah in the way he should, whose entire heart is involved with serving Hashem – such a person will find the great connection to Hashem there. All other areas of perfection are only partial perfection in comparison to this.

Realistic Aspirations

Compare the difference between the weeks with the months of the year, and the months of the year with the year as a whole. A week is complete in and of itself, but when you compare it to the month, it is missing. A month is complete to itself, but in comparison to the year as a whole, it is missing. Each year is only a seventh of *shemittah*, and *shemittah* is only a seventh of *yovel*.

All areas of perfection we know of are only in partial areas, but we must aspire for the complete and ultimate perfection.

Many people think that someone with high aspirations is being delusional, and that he's a bit mentally unstable. After all, everyone knows that mentally ill people are

disconnected from reality. Aspirations in Avodas Hashem indeed need to be done right; we need to avoid becoming disconnected from reality.

How can we avoid this problem?

A person has a two-fold job. On one hand, a person has to be fully aware of the level he is at, and he needs to be painfully honest with himself. He should be aware of his qualities – as well as his weak areas. He has to be aware that he is really very far from perfection. Yet, this shouldn't kill a person's hopes – not even for a moment. This is how the Torah tells us to reach perfection. A person can't reach perfection through his human efforts – “it is not upon you to complete the task.” One has to do his best, according to his ability. The rest is all a gift from Hashem.

Our human actions will never bring us to perfection, but we have to try our best, according to our ability – that is what we can do; Hashem does the rest (after we try our hardest).

“I’m Realistic.”

This point, because it is not understood by many, causes a lot of people to make a grave mistake. People slacken off from trying to perfect themselves, because they do not believe in having high aspirations. This really stems from a lack of belief in why we were created - and we were created to perfect ourselves.

Already at the beginning of time, man already slackened off from perfection. Had Adam not sinned, he would have gone straight into the ultimate Shabbos of Creation, and the greatest perfection of man would have been reached. But he failed the test, and ever since, the way to get back to our perfection has become very long. Yet, in the end we will get there again, and it will not happen later than the year 6,000. Man will then once again become perfected.

The aspiration to reach perfection is often not alive within most people. This is usually because people feel, “I’m very realistic.” People are painfully aware of their deficiencies – “*A heart knows the bitterness of its soul*”⁵⁶ – and therefore they give up on reaching that perfection, resembling a *lulav* whose tip has been chopped off. They are

⁵⁶ *Mishlei 14: 10*

missing that ladder of growth which is “*footed on the earth, but its head reaches the heavens.*”⁵⁷

When a person is missing the aspiration for ultimate perfection, he is denying the purpose of why we were created. People excuse themselves by saying, “It’s enough if we just settle with who we are; we should just be happy the way we are.”⁵⁸ Although it is true that a happy person is one who is “happy with his lot⁵⁹,” that is only if someone really believes with *emunah* that he will indeed have everything in the end, and he trusts that Hashem will help him get there.

If one really has this trust in Hashem, it doesn’t matter to him what his current level is – and he is like a *lulav* with its tip intact.

A Lulav With Severed Leaves

The next *halachah* in the Mishnah is that a *lulav* with severed leaves is invalid. *Rashi* explains that the leaves have become separated from the spine, and there is nothing connecting them.

However, we can ask: What is the problem here? Just tie it together with something and it will be considered connected!

It must be, however, that since the leaves are separated from the spine, they can no longer be sustained by the nutrients of the spine. They might be able to survive independently without the spine of the *lulav*, but the Torah requires that the leaves of the *lulav* get its vitality from the spine.

In terms of our soul, this applies as follows.

Are We Connected To Our Mitzvos?

A person does many wonderful things, but he has to ask himself how connected he is to them. When a person does a *mitzvah*, does he feel like it’s his very life – or is he just forcing himself to do the *mitzvah*?

⁵⁷ *Beraishis* 28:12

⁵⁸ See *Mesillas Yesharim*, chapter 4.

⁵⁹ *Avos* 4:1

When a person eats his food, he feels very connected to it. He knows he's getting vitality from the food. When a woman puts on perfume to go to a wedding, she feels very connected to her perfume and gets a vitality out of it. What about when a person puts on *tefillin*? Does he feel connected to the act?

Is *Tefillin* just being worn on us – or is the person wearing the *Tefillin*? If one is just wearing his *Tefillin* as a superficial act, he resembles a *lulav* whose leaves have been severed. He is doing everything he is supposed to do, but he's not getting vitality out of what he does.

You can have a person who does everything he is supposed to – he has all his “leaves” – but he is lacking a connection to what he does. Chazal refer to this problem as “His wisdom is more than his deeds.”⁶⁰ He might have been taught all the *mitzvos* or he has read about them in the sefarim, and he knows that one who doesn't do the *mitzvos* goes to Gehinnom...so he forces himself to do the *mitzvos*. He never grows from the deeds he's performing.

We can compare this to a father who cares for his child's physical needs, feeding him and clothing him and buying him toys – but he doesn't feel a connection in his heart toward the child. He is missing the natural love and warmth that a father is supposed to have toward his child, and the child feels this. It's easy to imagine what the child is going to look like – he will grow up very sad. Such a father, who gives everything his child needs physically – but not emotionally – gives to the child only because he is afraid of what will be after 120, when he stands in front of the Heavenly court. He won't even be rewarded, though, for even what he has given to children – he neglected his children emotionally with the excuse that he gives to them all their physical needs, so all of his giving will be worthless when he comes to Heaven.

A Lulav With Spread Out Leaves

The next *halachah* in the Mishnah is that a *lulav* with spread out leaves is kosher, *b'dieved*; it is not invalid, but it's not the best thing either. It's not *mehudar*.⁶¹ When the leaves of the *lulav* are spread out, they are pointing in all directions, and the leaves of the *lulav* are supposed to all point to one direction.

⁶⁰ Avos 3: 9

⁶¹ Halachically “beautiful”

In terms of our soul, this applies as follows.

Sometimes a person is in general heading towards the right direction in life. He knows in general what his purpose in life is, why he lives – and he is beginning to steer himself in that direction. But slowly more and more, as he is actively pursuing this goal, he gets caught up in various deeds which deter him from the goal.

Let us give of a more specific example of what we mean. A person opens up a *chessed* organization – he is motivated to do kindness, to resemble Hashem who is kind and merciful. He truly had good intentions when he started the organization. The money begins to pour in, and he distributes the money to those in need. But as more and more money comes in, he slowly begins to feel, “What’s wrong if I make a little money here in the process....”

It’s a well-known fact. Many people who started *chessed* organizations ended up taking some of the donations for themselves; they couldn’t help it. They caved in due to the pressures they never dreamed it would entail, and decided to pocket some of the money from the donors. Some of these people even pocketed a little money here and there so that their daughter can go on her dream vacation. The person diverged from his original goal of doing *chessed* – due to all sorts of pressures, of course. Yet, in spite of all this corruption, those very same *chessed* organizations continue to exist – and people are happy that these organizations are still around to provide them with relief...

“They Seek Many Calculations”

How does one fix this “spread out *lulav*” in himself? The answer is as we continue the words of the Mishnah. Rebbi Yehudah says that it should be tied from the upper part. In actual *halachah*, we do not practice this; but let us understand Rebbi Yehuda’s solution to the spread out *lulav*.

The inner meaning behind Rebbi Yehuda’s words is that when it comes to one’s Avodas Hashem, a person has to take all his weaknesses and connect them all together, giving direction to them. Sometimes this is feasible, but sometimes the weaknesses have “spread out” so much that it cannot be fixed in the regular way, and the only solution is to start over again from scratch.

If a person started out something with good intentions, and he had an earnest desire for something worthy – but along the way, his personal interests swayed him a little – what he can do is attempt to return to the original, straight path which he set for himself. He should remember where he came from – and to where he is going. He must not let other personal interests sway him from his goal.

The spine of the *lulav*, naturally, is straight. A person as well is created straight-minded, as the possuk says, “G-d made man upright.”⁶² But when the leaves of the *lulav* spread out, it resembles the end of the possuk: “And they seek many calculations.” The “many calculations” (*cheshbonos rabim*) in a person are his *negios* – his personal interests that sway him from the goal.

Yaakov Avinu was able to deal with Lavan and even act suave with him without getting affected by this. But not everyone can be like Yaakov Avinu. People have to lie sometimes to the government, and this presents a danger to our souls. (It is said of the Brisker Rov that he was against joining the Knesset, not because of the Satmar Rebbe’s reason, but because being on the government negatively affects the purity of one’s soul.)

*Lulav of the Har HaBarzel*⁶³

The next *halachah* in the Mishnah is that the *lulav* which grows on the *Har HaBarzel* is kosher. However, the Gemara⁶⁴ says that it depends on how the leaves grow. If the bottom leaf is covering a little bit of the leaf above it, it is kosher; but if the lower leaf does not come at all over the leaf above it, it is invalid, because then the leaves are totally disconnected.

Let us think about how this applies to our own soul.

The leaves of the spine on the *lulav* represent a person’s offspring – what comes out of a person. The leaves of the *lulav* don’t always stay united with each other, like we see in the case of the *lulav* of *Har HaBarzel*. A person’s children as well don’t always stay connected; we see that siblings live all over the world. When families are

⁶² *Koheles* 7: 29

⁶³ “Iron Mountain”, an area in Eretz Yisrael in which the *lulav* grew in an unusual shape.

⁶⁴ *Sukkah* 32a

disconnected from each other, it resembles the *lulav* of the *Har HaBarzel* – which is invalid (in the case where the leaves are totally disconnected).

(In other words, whatever “results” from a person is ideally supposed to be connected – such as our *mitzvos*. Our *mitzvos* have to all become connected in one unit, not just as separate acts that we do.)

Chazal⁶⁵ state that even the emptiest Jew contains as much *mitzvos* in him as the amount of seeds in a pomegranate. There is a famous question on this Chazal: If even the most wicked Jews are full of *mitzvos*, why then are they considered “empty”? Even more so, the *Malbim*⁶⁶ points out that a pomegranate can contain 613 seeds, the amount of all the *mitzvos*. If even the worst Jew is full of the 613 *mitzvos*, why then are they called “empty”?

Rov Dovid Povarsky zt”l⁶⁷ answered that in a pomegranate, all the seeds stand separate from each other, and that is why wicked people are called “empty”, even though they are full of *mitzvos*. There is no connection between all the *mitzvos* they do. They are not “one piece”.

Such people resemble the *lulav* of *Har HaBarzel*, whose leaves do not overlap each other – leaves that are disconnected from each other.

Designating Our Heart Towards Hashem

When we daven for rain on Sukkos, in the *Tefillas Geshem*, we mention how Yaakov Avinu was a “*yichad lev*” – one whose heart was designated totally for Hashem.

Let us ask ourselves: Is our heart dedicated toward Hashem?

The Gemara⁶⁸ says that if one sees a *lulav* in a dream, it is a sign that “he only has one heart, towards his Father in Heaven.” This hints to what we mentioned earlier, that *lulav* is a combination of the words *lo* and *lev*; that one’s heart has to be “his”, that he’s in control of his heart, directing it towards fulfilling the will of Hashem. If someone is in control of his heart’s desires, he is called someone who “only has one heart,

⁶⁵ *Berachos 57a*

⁶⁶ *Malbim, Shir HaShirim 4: 13*

⁶⁷ *Rosh Yeshivas Ponovozeh.*

⁶⁸ *Berachos 57a*

towards his Father in Heaven.” But if someone is being controlled by the various passions of his heart, it cannot be said of him that he has only one heart towards his Father in Heaven.

Similarly, the Gemara⁶⁹ says that a *lulav* comes from a date tree, because “just as a date tree has only one heart, so does the Jewish people have only one heart, towards their Father in Heaven.”

There is a Gemara⁷⁰ that says that “before a person eats and drinks, he has two hearts; after he eats and drinks, he only has one heart.” Simply, this is because when a person hasn’t eaten yet, he is hungry and thus he is anxious. After he eats, he is calmer.⁷¹ But we can give another explanation: the Gemara is referring to spiritual food and drink. Before a person “eats” and “drinks” spiritually, he has two hearts – his *yetzer hora* and his *yetzer tov* are fighting. After he is satisfied spiritually, the *yetzer hora* subsides, and the person remains with only one heart – a heart designated for Hashem.

The *yetzer hora*, who resides in the heart of a person, is essentially the various desires in a person that are extraneous. A person’s various *retzonos* (desires\passions) are responsible for causing a disconnect in one’s *mitzvos*, that they shouldn’t be all one unit. Instead of resembling a *lulav* of “*lo*” and “*lev*” together – “his heart” – he resembles a different meaning of “*lo lev*”: “no heart”!

When a person likes different things – he likes music, candies, trips, etc. – there is nothing binding together all these desires. They are just a bunch of random desires. But when a person has only “one heart” – a heart devoted towards Hashem – he knows how to utilize everything he likes to bring him to one central point. He is like a *lulav* of “*lo* and “*lev*”, “his heart”, and not a *lulav* of *lo lev*, “no heart.”

The *Rokeiach* says a hint in the Torah how we see that *lulav* comes to unify all of a person’s desires for Hashem. The first letter of the Torah is *beis*. The last letter of the Torah is *lamed*. The first letter of *Navi* is a *vov*, and the last letter of *Navi* is *lamed*. This spells the word *lulav*. If so, *lulav* unifies the entire Torah (and *Navi*) together.

The same goes for someone who only has “one heart towards his Father in Heaven.” To him, all of the Torah is one piece.

⁶⁹ *Sukkah 45b*

⁷⁰ *Bava Basra 12b*

⁷¹ *Rabbeinu Gershom and Rashbam, ibid.*

Having One Heart – Only One Desire

We shake the *lulav* in four directions, as well as up and down. Why do we shake it up and down as well? We can compare this to someone building a structure, with four sides. Just having four walls will not be enough – he needs a roof and a floor as well. The roof and the floor are what connect the four walls together.

A *lulav* which grows on the *Har HaBarzel* represent a lack of connection between the *mitzvos*. Each leaf is separated from the one on top of it. It might be kosher, but we are supposed to have a *lulav* which is *mehudar* – a beautiful *lulav*. Only a beautiful *lulav*, which does not contain any of the deficiencies taught in this Mishnah, represents the revelation of the purpose of Creation. Hashem chose us and gave us the Torah; the first letter of the Torah is *beis*, and the last letter of the Torah is *lamed*. This spells the word *lev* – heart.

May it be the will of Hashem that He help us receive the Torah in the inner depths of our heart, that we merit to have only one heart – that our whole desire should be just one desire alone: to do the will of our Father in Heaven.⁷²

⁷² To reveal your inner will, see *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. 4, Chapters 15-22.

Chapter Twelve

Sefer Koheles – Everything Is “Hevel Havalim”⁷³

“Moed” – A “Meeting” With Hashem

Yom Tov is called *moed*. *Moed* comes from the word *vaad*, which means “gathering” or “meeting.” Who are we meeting with? With Hashem! When a person makes up to meet with his friend, they make up that they will meet in a certain place. Where is the place that Hashem would meet us in? In the *Beis Hamikdash*. In the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*, there was a *mitzvah* three times a year to go up to the *Beis Hamikdash*. It was an eye-to-eye meeting with Hashem, just like when two friends meet each other and make eye contact.

Nowadays, we have no *Beis Hamikdash*. Where then can we meet with Hashem?

Yom Tov is our meeting with Hashem. It continues to exist, long after we no longer have a *Beis Hamikdash*.

Hashem is fully ready to meet us – He is everywhere. Nothing is holding Him back. The only thing that prevents a person from meeting with Hashem is his very *self*. If a person manages to remove the barrier holding him back – his very self – he would then be able to meet Hashem, wherever he is. *The Mesillas Yesharim*⁷⁴ writes that a person who is constantly connected with Hashem is considered to always be walking with Him, even as he lives here on this physical world.

⁷³ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, p.277 – 280.

⁷⁴ chapter 26

When a person is always connected to Hashem in his life, even though he has no *Beis Hamikdash* to meet with Him, he himself has become like a *Beis Hamikdash* – and he can meet with Him.

Every Yom Tov has an inner power in it that enables a person to meet with Hashem. A person has to receive the inner point of each Yom Tov which will connect him with Hashem.

On Sukkos, what is that inner point of Yom Tov that can connect a person with Hashem?

Removing the Barriers

On Shabbos of *Chol HaMoed Sukkos*, Chazal established that we read the book of Koheles.⁷⁵ This is not a coincidence that we read Koheles specifically on Sukkos. There must be some connection between the book of Koheles and the theme of Sukkos; otherwise, why would Chazal establish that we read Koheles on Sukkos?

Shlomo Hamelech begins the book of Koheles with, “*Hevel havalim* (“futility of futilities”), so says Koheles; *hevel havalim*, everything is *hevel havalim*.” Rashi brings from Chazal the following: “Koheles is making an announcement and saying that all of Creation is futile; he says “*hevel*” seven times in the possuk, corresponding to the seven days of Creation.”

The commentators are perplexed: How could Shlomo HaMelech say such a thing?! How could he say that Hashem’s Creation is all futility and vanity?

The depth of the matter appears to be as follows. The world is called “*olam*”, from the word “*he’elam*” – “concealment.” This world really conceals Hashem from being revealed to us. The world – this world of *he’elam* – was created in seven days; in other words, there are seven levels of *he’elam*. A person’s job on this world is to remove all the *he’elam* – to remove all the barriers between him and Hashem – and come to reveal Hashem. All of a person’s avodah is essentially to show how all of creation is one big *he’elam*.

When a person comes to really feel that all of Creation is *hevel* - in that it conceals Hashem from us – he personally reveals Hashem in his life. He essentially enters the state of before Creation, in which there was no *he’elam* yet; he will be able to become

⁷⁵ *Ecclesiasties*

constantly attached to Hashem as a result. Anything which deters a person from being attached with Hashem is a kind of *he'elam*. When a person manages to remove that barrier from upon himself – he views everything as *hevel*, since it's all getting in the way of revealing Hashem onto the world – he will be able to always become attached to Hashem.

This is the inner point that one can reveal on Sukkos. This is the way how one meets with Hashem on the Yom Tov of Sukkos.

Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l once said that it's not enough for a person to read the book of Koheles written by Shlomo Hamelech; every single person has to write the words "*Hevel havalim...everything is hevel havalim*", and these words have to be ingrained in one's blood. A person has to feel clearly in his heart that this world is completely *hevel* – it leads us astray from Hashem. This is the Avodah of Sukkos: write your own personal *sefer* Koheles!

Before and After the Beis Hamikdash

When the *Beis Hamikdash* was around, a person had special Heavenly assistance to reach utter closeness with Hashem and get past all the barriers of this world. He would bring the *korbonos* (sacrifices) and eliminate the physical aspect of the animal, transforming the physical into the spiritual. He would reveal G-dliness in what was previously something totally physical, something that was a kind of *he'elam*.

Now that the *Beis Hamikdash* isn't around, we have to accomplish this very same goal, but through the abilities of our soul. We need to eradicate the *he'elam* of this world and instead to come meet with the Creator of the world – the state of total attachment with Him that existed before creation, when there was no *he'elam* yet.

Chapter Thirteen

The Joy of Shemini Atzeres \ Simchas Torah ⁷⁶

Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah: Two Different Aspects of Joy

Shemini Atzeres is called by two names: *Shemini Atzeres*, and *Simchas Torah*. They represent two different kinds of joy. One kind of joy is the joy of “*Atzeres*”. “*Atzeres*” means to “remain”. This is hinting to the *Midrash* that says that Hashem desired to remain with the Jewish people even after Sukkos ends, saying to them, “Remain with me one more day.”

What exactly is this joy? It is the joy that one can have just in being attached to Hashem, to simply feel with Him a sense of companionship.

Simchas Torah offers a different kind of joy. It is the joy one has in being attached to the Torah, and thus we make a celebration that we have completed the Torah.

Joy Within Nature and Joy Above Nature

A *chosson* and *kallab*⁷⁷ have a certain joy; and it lasts for seven days. The joy of *Shemini Atzeres* is a joy found on the “eighth day”, hinting to the fact that it is a joy that has to do with “eight.” In other words, the regular kind of joy is represented by the number seven, while the higher joy is represented by the number eight. We always find how “seven” corresponds with nature, such as that there are seven days of the week. The joy of a *chosson* and *kallab*, which lasts for seven days, represents the natural joy; the

⁷⁶ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, p.284-286.

⁷⁷ groom and bride

joy is that two natures are fusing together. Such joy is a joy within the bounds of nature.

But there is a higher kind of joy, the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*. It is a joy that is above nature – “eight” is above “seven.” Let us explain what it is.

Above Nature

It is the custom that when we finish the Torah, we immediately begin with *Beraishis*. The reason behind this is because the Torah is unlimited and endless, and we want to show that it has no end. The last letter of the Torah is *lamed*, and the first letter of the Torah is *beis*, which forms the word *lev* (heart). The heart is king of the body; a king is above his people. A king is allowed to break fences, and no one can protest him.⁷⁸ A king – or the heart of a person – is not bound to the regular rules.

This is the joy of *Simchas Torah*; it represents the heart of a person, which is above the regular limits, for it is king over the body. The joy of *Simchas Torah* is thus a joy that is above the natural kind of joy. It is the unlimited joy one can have in the Torah.

The same is true for the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*. Our Avodah during the seven days of Sukkos is to realize how all of the world and nature is futile, to erase our attachment to this world (see the chapter before)⁷⁹. After a person has hopefully nullified his attachment to this world – and there are seven traits inherent in nature for one to overcome⁸⁰ – he is now able to connect totally to Hashem, a state of being that is essentially above nature; that is the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*.

Within The Struggles, and Above the Struggles

The word *simcha* (joy) comes from word *someach*, and if we rearrange the letters, we get the word *chamesh*. *Chamesh* can mean two different things:

1. The number “five.”
2. From the word “*chamushim*”, which means “armies”; we find this when the Jewish people left Egypt, that they left in “armies.”⁸¹ Rashi states that these armies were unarmed with any weapons. From here we see that the word “*chamesh*” normally refers to weapons of war.

⁷⁸ *Pesachim 110a*

⁷⁹ Hence, we read *Koheles on Sukkos*, which talks about how futile this physical world is.

⁸⁰ the seven middos: *chessed, gevurah, tiferes, etc.*

⁸¹ *Shemos 13: 18*

Simcha and *chamesh* have the same root letters (*shin*, *mem* and *ches*); there is a rule in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that whenever there is a root word⁸², there are two opposite meanings to it. In our case, this will apply as follows.

Simcha is when a person ends his wars, representing a level that is above nature. He has left the level of “*Seven times a righteous person falls and gets up*”, and he is above the regular ups and downs. He is above “seven” – and he is now on the level of “eight”. He no longer has the normal, natural struggles he used to deal with.

Chamesh represents the lower kind of joy – when one is happy upon overcoming challenges. He wages war with the seven “nations” inside him – the seven primary bad *middos*. He still hasn’t completely overcome them yet – he’s still within the normal fights of nature, fighting with his natural abilities.

After Yom Tov Is Over

When *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is over, what does a person remain with? The higher joy of “eight” reached on *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is gone; what does a person have left from Yom Tov?

Simcha is when a person is happy with something that got added onto my essence. People don’t find happiness in the fact that they merely exist; people are naturally unhappy. (There is a kind of happiness that a person can have in just being happy with what he has, but no one is happy with their mere existence.) *Simcha* is only present when a person gets something. If a person would take something he gets and make it a part of his essence, he would no longer be happy with what he has gotten, because now it’s part of who he is – and he needs something *more* than what he is in order to be happy.

Yet, this is actually our avodah: we need to take what we have gained and make it a part of our essence. Our avodah on *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is to find joy in Hashem and in His Torah – a joy that is above nature. After a person merits this joy, he has to take it and make it a part of who he is. One needs to feel a total connection with Hashem that transcends nature, and an attachment with Torah that transcends nature. When a person takes the happiness of being attached to Hashem and the Torah (and this happiness can be reached on the Yom Tov) and

⁸² *shoresh*

he makes into a part of himself, the *simcha* goes away with this, because now there is nothing “more” to be happy about, for it is now part of the person.

For this reason, there is no *simcha* after Yom Tov ends. There can't be. It is not because the great spirituality of Yom Tov has gone, but rather – it is the opposite! If we have succeeded in our avodah on Yom Tov, that means we have transformed the spirituality of Yom Tov into a part of our essence. It has gone from being something great that surrounded us into something that has been absorbed into our being.⁸³ With this attainment, our *simcha* has to go away, but the gain is far worth it.

What is the avodah now as we start the rest of the year? It is now upon us to aspire for an even higher level than what we gained until now – and from there we will derive our next upgrade to our *simcha*.

⁸³ In the Hebrew sefer, the author calls this “going from the “*ohr makif*” (“surrounding light”) to an “*ohr penimi*” (inner light).

Chapter Fourteen

*Internalizing Sukkos For the Rest of the Year*⁸⁴

Carrying Over the Yom Tov into the Year

In the *Shemoneh Esrei* of the Three Festivals (Sukkos, Pesach and Shavuot), we say, “*And lift us, Hashem our G-d, the blessings of Your festival, for life and peace, happiness and gladdening.*”

There are those who explain⁸⁵ this prayer to mean that we are asking Hashem to let the blessings of Yom Tov carry over into the rest of the year. “Blessing”, *berachah* in Hebrew, comes from word *beraicha* – a pool, connoting that we want Hashem to pool upon us His sustenance⁸⁶; in other words, we want to be affected by the special power of the Yom Tov for the rest of the year as well.

It is well-known that not only is Yom Tov an opportunity for immense holiness and growth, but even *Chol HaMoed* is a holy time; Chazal forbade certain activities on *Chol HaMoed* so that we can be free to rejoice in festivity and have time to learn Torah.⁸⁷

Having free time on *Chol HaMoed* is not simply meant to have free time – although that is certainly true in the simple sense; it is really because having this extra time on our hands give us the opportunity to have a calm and relaxed soul, so we can focus on more on serving the Creator and learning the Torah.

When a person is busy with various matters other than Avodas Hashem and learning Torah, his soul is less open to receive matters of holiness. But on Yom Tov, a person

⁸⁴ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Sukkos, chap. 1*.

⁸⁵ *Bad Kodosh on Moadim* (Rav Baruch Dov Povarski), p.416. See also *Birchas Moadecha* (of Rav Margolin) on *Tishrei*.

⁸⁶ See *Rabbeinu Bachye, Parshas Eikev, 8:10*.

⁸⁷ *Yerushalmi Moed Kattan, 9a*.

is able to learn how to acquire spirituality, Avodas Hashem and learning Torah – and all of this is because on Yom Tov we are disconnected from materialism. (It is not a total disconnection from materialism, only partial; as we see that certain labors are permitted on *Chol HaMoed*, in certain situations).

Yom Tov can show us that even after Yom Tov, our Avodas Hashem and our learning of the Torah should be from a disconnection from the material world, a disconnection from how the rest of the world thinks – and from this, we come to truly learn the Torah and have true Avodas Hashem.

Accessing the State of Yom Tov Even During The Year

Yom Tov is supposed to affect us and fuel us up with spiritual energy to last until the next Yom Tov. We need this burst of spirituality to keep us going. The days of Yom Tov are few, in comparison to the rest of the year which is much longer; if a person doesn't get affected by Yom Tov, he won't be able to acquire any matter of holiness during the rest of the year.

Let us think into how Yom Tov can affect our soul for the rest of the year.

On Yom Tov, a person is calm and relaxed from the busyness of the world. His mind is settled and he is a bit calmer than he is normally; each to his own level. On *Chol HaMoed*, we buy only food that we will need for Yom Tov, and not more than that. We are frugal and satisfied just with that amount of shopping. We also don't do any work on *Chol HaMoed* unless it will cause us to have a loss. Most stores are closed. Of course, a person might use the relaxation of *Chol HaMoed* for the wrong purposes and waste his time, *chas v'shalom*; but that is a different problem which we are not currently discussing.

It is impossible to live in Yom Tov during the year – that is, in the external sense. But in our inner world of the soul, we can live in a state of calmness that we have on Yom Tov, even when it's not Yom Tov – if we gain the proper kind of mind to do so.

When Yom Tov ends, we go back to our prospective jobs. Even a *Kolel avreich* has his jobs; life is full of responsibilities that surround us all day. Anyone who is married and has children has responsibilities to his family. He has to make sure that his wife and kids have a roof over their heads; that they have food, clothing, doctor visits, etc. That is one side of our life. But there is another side going on in our life – the fact that we are in between one Yom Tov and the next.

The Ramban writes that *Sefiras HaOmer* is like *Chol HaMoed*, and that Shavuos is like the *Shemini Atzeres* (of Pesach). By the same token, perhaps we can say also that the days in between Shavuos and Sukkos – and from Sukkos to Pesach – are like one big *Chol HaMoed*, the bridge that connects one Yom to another. There is a holiness we can gain from our “*Chol HaMoed*” year-round.

In Between Yomim Tovim

Perhaps we can say also that Yom Tov is like a Shabbos, while the rest of the year is like the six days of the week. We find that Pesach is called “Shabbos”,⁸⁸ and Yom Kippur is called “*Shabbos Shabboson*.”⁸⁹ This is because our whole essence is that we were redeemed from Egypt so that we could become a nation to receive the Torah, and we also know that every Yom Tov is *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim* – to remember our redemption from Egypt. Shabbos is also *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim*. If so, Yom Tov and Shabbos can be compared to each other. The rest of the year, by contrast, is like the six days of the week.

The six days of the week are blessed by Shabbos.⁹⁰ Perhaps we can also say that the days in between each Yom Tov are sustained by the blessings of the Yom Tov. Just like we have a concept of the afternoon⁹¹ and a concept of “*bein hashemashos*”⁹² (twilight) – times “in between” that serve to connect different times – so can we say that the days in between Yomim Tovim are what connect the previous Yom Tov to the next Yom Tov. If so, the rest of the year is in a sense like a Yom Tov of its own; it is a certain time, a bridge between the Yomim Tovim.

What are the days of the rest of the year like? They are not like Yom Tov itself, but they resemble *Chol HaMoed* – the time which connects one part of Yom Tov to the next. *Chol HaMoed* is the lower level of Yom Tov, and so can we say that the rest of the year is a lower level of Yom Tov, serving to connect Yom Tov to another.

The Gemara⁹³ says that when Haman wanted to get the Jews in trouble, he pointed out to Achashveirosh that the Jews are always busy keeping Yom Tov; “today is Shabbos, today is Pesach.” This hints to the fact that the Jewish people are always in a

⁸⁸ *Menachos 65b*

⁸⁹ *Vayikra 16: 31*

⁹⁰ *Zohar II, Yisro, 88a*

⁹¹ *Rashi, Shemos 12: 6*

⁹² *Avos 5: 6*

⁹³ *Rashi, Megillah 13b*

“Yom Tov” – because the whole year is really like a Yom Tov! (Just that it is on a lower level than the actual Yom Tov.)

What We Learn From Yom Tov For The Rest of the Year

The Yomim Tovim given to us are not simply defined by their individual concepts they represent, but they are more than that: they reflect the level we are at during the time that the Yom Tov sets in. That is why we daven in *Shemoneh Esrei* of Yom Tov, “*You chose us from all the nations*”, and we also mention in the davening how Yom Tov is *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim* – that only the we, the Jewish people, merited to leave Egypt, while the other nations did not merit this special event. Yom Tov expresses how the Jewish people were formed into a nation, and how Hashem chose us as His nation. The world stands on three pillars⁹⁴, and so does the Jewish people stand on three things – the three Yomim Tovim⁹⁵. The Yomim Tovim help the Jewish people survive for the rest of the year. There is much to learn from each aspect of Yom Tov.

For example, on *Chol HaMoed*, one is only allowed to purchase items that are necessary for Yom Tov.⁹⁶ We can learn two things from this. Firstly, we see that you only need to buy things for your house that you need right now, and not to shop for things you'll only need in the future. Secondly, you have to be frugal and only buy things that you really need, not luxuries.

This is how someone lives throughout the rest of the year as well, when he has a deep connection in his soul with the Creator – he takes the lessons of Yom Tov with him for the rest of the year as well.

Yom Tov – Our Meeting With Hashem

Yom Tov is called *moed*, which comes from the word *vaad* (meeting). The place where we would meet with Hashem was the *Beis Hamikdash*, and from it a Jew would derive vitality from it for the rest of the year by visiting it three times a year. The *Shechinah* was there. Now that it is gone, we express our loss in the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Yom Tov, “*And because of our sins, we have been exiled from our land, and we have been distanced from our earth.*”

⁹⁴ *Avos* 1:2 and 1:17

⁹⁵ These are called *Shalosh Regalim*, the “Three Festivals”: *Pesach*, *Shavuos*, and *Sukkos*.

⁹⁶ *Tur*, *Orach Chaim*, 130.

What do we mean that we have been exiled from our land? We are able to stand in Eretz Yisrael today. How are we exiled from it?

Simply, it is because the incredible holiness of Eretz Yisrael, the holiness of the *Beis Hamikdash*, has gone away. There is a discussion if the land of Eretz Yisrael still maintains its sanctity even though we have no *Beis Hamikdash*.⁹⁷

But there is a deeper meaning behind the *tefillah* we are saying. We have been exiled and distanced from our land, in the sense that we are far from the great spiritual revelations that one would experience on Yom Tov by the *Beis Hamikdash*. That spiritual light would illuminate the entire Eretz Yisrael. Although this reality still continues to exist in our inner world, it isn't revealed out in the open in the world we see, and thus we are "exiled" from our land. So although a person can be in Eretz Yisrael today, he is still exiled from it – he is missing what Eretz Yisrael used to be like.

When a person went up to the *Beis Hamikdash* three times a year, he saw the *Shechinah*. What does this mean? It means that he revealed in his heart a deep connection with Hashem, an utter awareness of His existence. It was called "*aliyah l'regel*," (ascending on Yom Tov) – going up to the *Beis Hamikdash*. It was an ascension in the sense that one who ascended spiritually from Yom Tov would stay at that high level, and he was able to maintain it and not to fall from it back to routine. This is the meaning of the possuk, "*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy place*"⁹⁸ – in other words, the possuk is praising the one who would gain from the holy spiritual elevation of Yom Tov and maintain his level throughout the rest of the year.

Yom Tov- The Shechinah Within

The Torah is eternal, and thus whatever it imparts is eternal. If there is such a concept of Yom Tov in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash* – when the *Shechinah* was revealed out in the open – then that concept, that point, continues to exist. We have no *Beis Hamikdash* today, but we still have Yom Tov, and we can have *aliyah l'regel* every Yom Tov, even nowadays. This is what we ask for in the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Yom Tov: "*V'hasieinu es birkas moedecha*" – ("And carry over the blessings of Your festivals..."). Our avodah on Yom Tov is that we ask Hashem to let the holiness of Yom Tov carry

⁹⁷ See *Megillah 6a* and *Rambam Hilchos Beis HaBechirah 6: 16*

⁹⁸ *Tehillim 24:3*

into the rest of the year, in spite of the fact that our level of revelation isn't the same as it used to be.

It is written, “*And I will dwell amongst them.*”⁹⁹ The *Alsbich* explains that the possuk is saying that Hashem dwells in the heart of each Jew! In our own heart within us, we can still have *aliyah l'regel* three times a year, on Yom Tov¹⁰⁰ – and see Hashem, so to speak; on our own level. We can access the *Shechinah* in our hearts, three times a year – each Yom Tov – and extend it to the rest of the year. But in order for this to happen, we need to know what Yom Tov really is.

If a person came to a stronger recognition of Hashem's existence on Yom Tov, then the Torah he learns during the rest of the year will become more internalized in his mind and heart, as a result. If someone is truly searching for Hashem, the Torah he learns will become the real Torah – “*For from Zion comes forth Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.*”¹⁰¹ The true Torah of Hashem becomes revealed to a person, in his heart, when he earnestly pursues Hashem.

Thus, the inner implication of Yom Tov is for one to connect to Hashem in his heart. What will result from this? “*For Hashem gives wisdom, from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.*”¹⁰²

Experience the Elation of Yom Tov and Then Seek To Maintain It

If someone reaches this on Yom Tov, he has gained immensely; now it is his avodah to continue that growth into the rest of the year. This will fulfill the meaning of what we daven for on Yom Tov – “*And carry over the blessings of Your festivals...*”

But if a person didn't try to grow from Yom Tov in the way described here, and he didn't come to have a new feeling of a relationship with Hashem from the Yom Tov – then there is no point for him to wait to see if he will be inspired for the rest of the year. He hasn't invested in anything over Yom Tov, so he won't see any of the profits during the rest of the year. Only if a person is clear what he has gained from Yom Tov can he hope to maintain his inspiration for the rest of the year.

⁹⁹ *Shemos* 25: 8

¹⁰⁰ *Yom Tov* here refers uniquely to the Three Festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkos.

¹⁰¹ *Yeshayahu* 2:3

¹⁰² *Mishlei* 2:6

So first, a person has to make sure that he has gained from Yom Tov in the first place – before he seeks to let Yom Tov carry over into the rest of the year. Even if he has felt a small amount of recognition of Hashem over Yom Tov, at least he has gained somewhat, and he has now what to grow upon for the rest of the year.

On *Simchas Torah*, a person has to have at least felt a minimal amount of closeness towards the Torah. One has to feel the Yom Tov, to feel the *Simchas Torah*, to feel *Shemini Atzeres* – of which Hashem said, “Remain with me one more day.”¹⁰³ He has to feel that it was hard to part from Hashem after such a period of closeness, just as Hashem finds it hard to leave us at the end of Sukkos. He has to have felt that he has the opportunity to feel the reality of Hashem for at least one more day.

The Custom In Kelm of “Asiri Kodesh”

Let us think into how we can hold onto our gains from Yom Tov for the rest of the year.

In Kelm, there was a custom called “*Asiri Kodesh*.”¹⁰⁴ Every ten days following Yom Kippur, people who lived in Kelm would make for themselves a mini Yom Kippur and check to see if they had kept to the resolutions they made last Yom Kippur. They started this custom because they realized that most people are only able to hold onto their inspiration during *Yomim Noraim*, and a few are able to keep the inspiration going until after Sukkos, but not beyond that; *Asiri Kodesh* made a person do some introspection every ten days and ask himself if he was still keeping to his level he reached on *Yomim Noraim*.

We can learn from this something very important: how to hold onto our gains from Yom Tov. If we really want to have a good year, we need to see after *Yomim Noraim* and *Sukkos* if we are still feeling that closeness to Hashem we felt during these holy times. For every ten days that go by – or once a week, for those who are able to – we should set aside time and see if we’re keeping to the level we were on during those days.

“*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy place.*” This is not just a possuk, it is telling us the avodah we need to do throughout the year: we need to see where we are holding. We all know that Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkos

¹⁰³ See Rashi, Vayikra 23: 36

¹⁰⁴ lit. “Tenth Day Is Holy”.

and Simchas Torah will once again be here next year, and that we will once again return to making resolutions, developing our will for spirituality, to have yearnings for spirituality, to dance again on *Simchas Torah*. We will do it all again next year – with the help of Hashem. But are we losing all of this, *chas v'shalom*, as the year goes on – and then we are just beginning again from scratch next year? Are we going to start over again next year simply because we have lost all those yearnings?

The truth is that the reason why many people can't keep their resolutions for the new year is because they don't believe in themselves enough. They didn't believe to begin with that they were able to keep to what they took upon themselves. But this is really a denial of the words of Chazal. If Chazal established that we daven in *Shemoneh Esrei* the *tefillah* of "*V'hasieinu*", it must be that it is definitely possible for us to keep to what we took upon ourselves for the coming year; even if we can't keep to them as perfectly as we had hoped to, we can still keep to them on our own level.

The Advice of the Ramchal

If someone doesn't seek advice on how he can keep to his resolutions, we all know that it will be pointless for him to try to keep to them. There is one single advice we have for this, from the *Ramchal*, (author of *Mesillas Yesharim*) in sefer *Derech Eitz Chaim*. He writes as follows¹⁰⁵:

“It is therefore a duty upon each person to reflect with himself. If he doesn't reflect and think, wisdom will not come after him...a person, for many years of his life, thinks a lot about his various responsibilities, which are only his temporary responsibilities. Why can't he think for an hour about the things that really matter, such as: Who am I? Why did I come onto this world? What does Hashem want from me? What will be with my end?

“This (an hour of self-introspection every day) is the greatest remedy once can have against his evil inclination. It is easy, yet it does so much. It bears much results. Every day, a person should reflect for at least an hour a day, and empty himself from the rest of his thoughts so that he can only think about just this (what he have said).

“And he should ask himself in his heart: “What did the forefathers do, whom Hashem found desirable? What did Moshe Rabbeinu do? What did Dovid HaMelech do? What did all the great leaders before me do?

¹⁰⁵ This has been loosely translated and is fairly literal to the text.

“And he should realize in his mind how good it is to do this for all his life.”

What the Ramchal is saying is not just inspiration for Elul. It is something to think about the entire year. If we are really truthful with ourselves, and if we really want to gain from *Yomim Noraim* for the rest of the year – then we have to learn how we can protect what we have gained from *Yomim Noraim*.¹⁰⁶

Make A Self Accounting

The Ramchal has taught us that that the essential tool we need is to set aside time for self-introspection. It can be every ten days; once a week is even better, and if one can do it every day, that’s the most preferable. During the time you set aside, make the following self-accounting: “On Rosh Hashanah, I reached a certain level. Have I succeeded in keeping to it? How much have I kept to it? If I haven’t kept to it, what can I do to make sure I keep to it?”

Hashem has decreed on each person on Rosh Hashanah whatever has been decreed upon him. But it is upon us to make sure that we aren’t among those who don’t keep to their words. We all know that the coming year will have its full amount of responsibilities, challenges, and difficulties. It will definitely not be that simple to keep to the level we reached *Yomim Noraim* during the year. But we at least need to have a hope that we *can* succeed; of course, we cannot blindly trust ourselves that we will for sure see success, but we must try to at least be *eligible* for success.

What a person has to do is designate for himself times of quiet in which he can make a self-accounting. We must bring our life to a halt and think about the purpose of life. We must be truthful with ourselves, and remember what we said to Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. You can write down what you said this way you don’t forget it; take out the paper and read it during this time of quiet you set aside for yourself. One has to see if he’s really keeping to what he took upon himself, and if he sees that he isn’t, he has to ask himself: “How will I face Hashem next Rosh Hashanah...?”

One should be aware that he has free will to decide if he will be among those who merit the blessings of Yom Tov for the rest of the year, or if *chas v’shalom* he will not be among those who merit it.

¹⁰⁶ See also *Kedushas Levi: Shavuos*, and also *Ramban: Emunah UBitachon*, chap. 19

How To Avoid The Sleepiness of the Winter

Anyone who doesn't follow the *Ramchal's* advice can testify that he has never succeeding in keeping to his resolutions he made during *Yomim Noraim*. But if someone follows the *Ramchal's* advice and he sets aside time to think about what's important, he will definitely see results.

If someone sees a different piece of advice in another *sefer*, that's wonderful. But in Kelm, and in other places, they followed the *Ramchal's* advice, which is that one should set aside time to bring his life to a halt and see if he is keeping to his *Yomim Noraim* level.

We hope that those who are reading this feel that this advice is simple and true; it is the words of our great teachers, and nothing has been added here to their words. Anyone who is truthful with himself knows how necessary it is to make this self-accounting.

These words are not meant to be an inspiring lecture. Inspiration is for Elul and *Yomim Noraim*, and it doesn't last for the winter, when people get sleepy and lethargic. If we want to avoid becoming sleep-like to our spiritual situation during the winter, we need to make sure we are keeping to our level throughout the rest of the year. During *Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah*, a person is supposed to act above his normal level.¹⁰⁷ The rest of the year, however, we go back to our normal level. The high level of spirituality of *Yomim Noraim* has ended – each person, on whatever level he is at. But if we want to at least be on the true level we are supposed to be on, than we must take with us a point that we will have from the beginning of the year until its end.

May Hashem merit us that we should be able to set aside time to think about the purpose of life¹⁰⁸, and that we should maintain our level for the rest of the year – and that we shouldn't be among those who only wait for the next Elul to become inspired.

¹⁰⁷ *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim: 203*

¹⁰⁸ *For more specific guidance on how to make a cheshbon hanefesh, see Bilvavi Vol. IV, chapters 3-5.*

Epilogue: The Rav's Personal Journey

Feeling Empty

I remember how, about 17 or 18 years ago, when *Yomim Noraim* was approaching, I saw that on the calendar, it will soon be *Rosh HaShanah*.

I knew that I must feel something, but I didn't know what to feel. I didn't see anything in my life that is missing. I knew that I felt empty, but I didn't know what it was that I was missing.

Why did I feel so empty? I learned all day; I had three full *sedarim* in the day where I learned. I *davened* and did all the *mitzvos*. So why did I feel empty inside?

I sat and thought: Am I missing something? Why do I feel empty if I am doing everything I am supposed to?

It bothered me very, very much.

I started to look at others to see if I could know how others are happy, and I saw that everyone else was happy except myself. Then I became very lonely, because I felt that everyone else was happy and enjoying their learning – everyone except me.

After many years, I met many people who felt what I felt then – people who feel like they're empty inside and haven't found themselves in life. There is no one here in Eretz Yisrael who hasn't found themselves when it comes to *mitzvos* and *Halacha*. So what was missing in my life that I have to change myself?

I began to ask people if they felt like me. No one understood me – they were like Pharaoh’s servants who couldn’t interpret his dream. No one gave me answers I was satisfied with.

This was one of the hardest times in my life – I can’t forget it. I had no idea what to do and where to go in my life. But I knew that I shouldn’t give up; I knew I’m not an old person at the end of his life, that I’m young and that I have hope.

I davened to Hashem to help me

After some time, I went to a private room and cried to Hashem. I asked Hashem, “Hashem, I know there is no more prophecy anymore, but what do You want from me? Tell me what You want from me!”

I cried terribly to Hashem. But I had faith that Hashem would send me my answers and show me what He wants from me in my life.

I hope no one goes through what I went through then. But if you ever went through this too, I want you to know that I was there too and went through it – and I came out of it.

After this, I remember that I made a list of all the things I was unhappy with my life, and I wrote how I feel like an old person who has no satisfaction in life. But I told myself not to give up, and I knew that Hashem will help me and show me what He wants from me. I didn’t know where my answer would come from, but I trusted in Hashem that He would send me the answer. How?

I knew it wouldn’t come from my mind. I knew that when Hashem opens up my **heart**, it will be then that I understand – to understand what the reality of this world is.

The Realization

I remember this clearly. I was sitting and learning with a *sefer*, and suddenly it hit me: I felt the reality that Hashem exists. Then, everything became clear to me.

I grew up in a *frum* home and learned in a good yeshivah, and I knew all about *Emunah* that a person is supposed to have. I was taught the 13 principles of faith of the Rambam about belief in G-d. But I realized that although I *knew* a lot, I didn’t *feel* what I knew.

Then I knew what I was missing.

This is what I realized: There is a place in one's heart where he can feel the Endlessness of Hashem's existence, and when a person doesn't feel this, he feels empty. He will search and search and he will not find the answers to his emptiness.

Some people were not blessed by Hashem with much feeling, and this emptiness doesn't bother them, the same way a table doesn't feel anything. They get up and go to work or even if they go learn, they simply don't feel this emptiness. They feel fine. But any person with a little feeling can see how this world is full of so much emptiness – *tobu* and *vobu*, and utter darkness. They want light – the light of Hashem – to illuminate their darkness.

There are a few people who are very deeply feeling people and they are in a lot of pain. They see others who are fine and look happy, and they don't know why they themselves aren't happy. These people suffer greatly inside. In addition to this, they are searching to fill their emptiness, and they don't know how.

The more feeling a person is, the more unhappy he is with what the reality is. He sees others sitting and learning and enjoying their learning – he sees how by others, the Torah is their life. But he doesn't feel in his own life how the Torah is life. He knows that it is supposed to give him life, but he doesn't feel it. He feels that Torah doesn't give him life, so maybe life is found elsewhere... such as the streets...

We must know one thing. The world is full of false pleasures; the Sages say that our soul will never be satisfied with this world's pleasures, whether it is forbidden pleasure or whether it is permissible pleasure. Why? It is because our soul comes from Heaven; it wants something else.

The Root Of All Problems

At one point in my life, I realized what the root of all problems in the world is.

Baruch Hashem, people know most of the statements of Chazal, but they only *know* it intellectually - and that's it. People *know* that Chazal say that the world stands on Torah, and that Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world, etc. But what is missing from us? We only *know* it – but we **feel** differently in our own life.

What we need to do is truly **feel** the truths about Torah and how it is everything, and then everything will change.

Falafel and Vacations

For many years, I thought about this until I finally came to this conclusion.

One time I passed by a falafel store and I saw a long line waiting out the store; a new kind of falafel came out, and everyone was waiting in line to try it. I thought to myself, “Maybe they’re right – maybe there really is something to this falafel? Maybe this falafel will make me happy?”

I waited on line, I bought it, I ate it – and I was very disappointed.

I began to think about what makes people feel more happy and alive.

I realized that some people feel a certain vitality from the honor they receive from other people, but I knew right away that that this was a false kind of vitality.

I saw people who were always going on vacations who seemed to really be enjoying it, though. I thought maybe there really is something special to all these vacations. I went on one of these vacations, but I was terribly disappointed. I rented a car, checked out into the hotel room, and as soon as I got into the room, I threw the keys onto the bed in frustration. I realized that while going to a hotel may have given me some more relaxation, it didn’t make me feel happier with my life.

It took many years for me to go deep into my soul and realize that I couldn’t be happy with my life based on anything external, but that it has to come from within myself. The more connected I felt to Torah and to Hashem, the more alive I felt. The more I would run after pleasure from the outside of myself, the more I realized I was chasing wind.

This is not a lecture. I am talking about a true story of my life – I am talking about my search, and what I found. Candies, cigarettes and walking on the beach can all give a person relaxation, and sometimes a person does need to relax in order to have some *yishuv badaas*, but these things don’t give a person life. A person can only feel alive when he is truly connected to Hashem and the Torah.

More Frustration

It took me a lot of time to come to this conclusion.

One of the hardest times in my life I remember was when I learned in Yeshivah. I learned in Yeshivas Ponovezh, and I learned a lot. But I didn’t feel that my learning

was giving me more life. I knew that the Torah is supposed to give me life, but I didn't feel it. I thought that maybe I am the kind of student that the Sages say doesn't see success in his learning. It wasn't that I didn't know how to learn; I knew how to learn very well. I was regarded as an excellent student. But I didn't feel like the Torah is what is giving me life, which is what I am supposed to feel.

I thought maybe I should leave yeshiva – I didn't feel like I came onto the world to learn Torah. I knew that there are people who feel that they came onto this world to learn Torah, but I just didn't feel that way.

I went to Jerusalem and decided that I will speak to one of the Gedolim who was there and ask him for his advice.

I went to his house, but he wasn't available. I was very frustrated that I didn't get into him, and I didn't know what to do. I was very, very frustrated!

The Answer

At some point later, I realized what the answer was.

I thought to myself and realized clearly that if Hashem was the one who said that the Torah is our life – "*Ki heim chayeinu*" – then it must be so, and that I should never give up.

My Message To You

Don't ever give up, even for one moment. Hashem is *Avinu Av Harachaman* – He is a merciful Father, and He wants you to have life. If you really want to find life in the Torah, you will find it.

If someone feels empty inside – or even if he doesn't – he must know that he will not find anything pleasurable on this world; it's all in his imagination that maybe there is something good out there other than the Torah.

Any pleasure on this world is fleeting and will not give a person enjoyment out of his life. If you really want to have a true life, cry to Hashem from the depths of your heart, "*Open my heart to Your Torah*" – not just that Hashem should open your mind, but to open your **heart** that you should have the true life – and then you will become a truly happy person, plain and simple.

I hope with all my heart that all of you should merit this and that Hashem should open up your hearts to realize that besides for a deep connection to Hashem and learning the Torah, there is nothing else we have that will give us enjoyment out of life.