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1. The Key To Your Inner World Is “Quieting” (*Sheket*)

There is an outer world, and there is an inner world. The outer world is the one we are familiar with, whereas the inner world is more hidden and concealed. Man’s *avodah* (spiritual task) is to be in this inner world as much as he can, and to lessen his connection to the outer world.

In order to get across a river, we need to build a bridge. What is the ‘bridge’ that can connect us from the outer world into the inner world? If someone isn’t interested in entering the inner world, then he won’t want to cross over into it, but if one does want to know of the inner world, he will need to know: What is that ‘bridge’ to get there? How can we cross over from the outer world into the inner world?

Generally speaking, we have *Torah* and *mitzvos* to get us there. To be more precise, *Torah* is like the inner world, and *mitzvos* are like the outer world, for the *Torah* is entirely an inner matter, whereas *mitzvos* are mostly physical actions that we do on This World. Through *Torah* and *mitzvos* together, a person has the “bridge” to cross into the inner world.

That is all but a general definition, but there is a more precise definition of this “bridge”: At the giving of the *Torah*, the entire Creation was silent. Even the animals were quiet – as the Sages said, a bird didn’t chirp, a donkey did not bray, etc. In order to enter one’s inner world, one needs to silence all of the noises from the outside world. Without this quieting, a person’s outer world and inner world will be mixed with each other and a person will not be able to separate the two.

One cannot only live within, for there is still *Torah*, *mitzvos*, and basic requirements of *derech erez* to keep. But one cannot either survive spiritually if he only lives in the outer world. What is the correct and balanced way to live?

The balance is achieved through using a power that can bridge together the outer world with the inner world. It was the silence of Creation which took place at Har Sinai. It is known as “silence” (*hashkatah*, or *sheket*).

2. The Tool For Quieting - Sitting In The Dark

Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam, in the last chapter of *Sefer HaMaspik L’Oivdei Hashem*, wrote that one needs quiet in order to silence the noise from the world around him. The *Zohar* says that the sense of sight is what connects a person to the world. Therefore, says Rabbi Avraham ben

HaRambam, when a person is in the light of the outside world, he can see everything around him and is thus connected to the outside world, and thus the way to enter the inner world is through sitting in the dark, so that a person doesn't see anything of this world.

In the inner world, there is no difference between light and darkness. There is no need for external light, when one is in the inner world. Only in the outer world is there a need for light, which enables one to see things. Therefore, external light connects you to the outside world. That is the way the ideal way to enter the world is through sitting in the dark, which enables one to quiet the stimuli coming in from the outer, physical world.

Now, if one is afraid of sitting in dark, he will not be able to do any quieting when he sits in the dark, because he is not calm in the dark, and he will only become anxious. His work will be to first conquer his fear of the dark. But if one is not afraid of the dark, he can use the dark in order to quiet the stimuli from the outside world.

To illustrate how this works, when people go to sleep, they will usually sleep in the dark. Darkness creates a certain calmness, allowing a person to drift off, quiet the body, and go to sleep. When entering the inner world, a person needs to quiet the body, so that his physicality is calmed, and now he is free to enter within. So it is similar to going to sleep.

(There are some people who use this *avodah* of quieting the body as a method of falling asleep, but they are not doing so in order to enter their inner world. I met a person who told me that every morning after he prays Shacharis, he lays in bed, so that he can quiet his body.... and he lies in bed underneath his blanket until the afternoon! Clearly, this is not our intention in quieting the body. The more one lives the inner world, the more he quiets the connection to this world, so that he can enter his own inner world. That is the purpose of quieting the body.)

Thus, quieting the body is for the purpose of disconnecting from the outside world. Every person has some connection to some physical desire, as well as a certain evil character trait that remains dominant in him, which remains as a negative force in him as long as he has not yet worked to uproot it. When that is the case, it is difficult to achieve a deep kind of *sheket* quieting and to enter the inner world, because the connection to the physical desire and to the dominant negative character trait will strongly connect him to the outer world. But if a person has weakened these negative forces somewhat, by uprooting them as much as he can, his soul will be calmed to some level, and its connection to This World will be lessened. He will then be able to gain from sitting in the dark as Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam says, and to use it is a tool for quieting.

The more a person lives superficially, this concept of quieting will seem to him like an empty act devoid of any meaning and a waste of time; he may say that it is a path which our Sages did not traverse. But this was actually a path which the Sages did traverse. It is true that not all of our Sages took this path, but it is definitely a valid way used by our Sages. Is it the way of all of our Sages? The answer to this is clearly no. Each one had his own path, for there is no one single path to take in *Avodas Hashem*.

Thus, the purpose of quieting is to create a disconnection from This World.

3. Quietening The Physical Noises and Physical Senses

There are many levels in quieting, just as any other inner matter, which contains level within level. The external level of quieting is to simply disconnect from all that's going on in the outside world and from all its noise. Often when a person is sitting in his home and it seems to be quieter than the streets, he is still very much connected to the world, because he can hear everything going on

outside [i.e. hearing the radio or news or checking his texts], so he still hasn't disconnected from the world outside. Sitting in the dark is the first, basic step in order to disconnect from any visuals.

One should ideally choose a quiet place for this, where he will be able to sit there calmly and quietly. It's up to each person to choose such a place, using his own wisdom of life. It should be a place where you have quiet and calm. There should be no physical noises there.

Now, when a person finds a calm, quiet place where he can sit in the dark, he may discover that while there are no physical noises there, there is "inner noise". There is physical noise, and there is also inner noise.

[First we will explain how to calm physical noise]. Physical noise is mostly activated through our sense of sight, so we need to disconnect from physical sight by sitting in the dark. Anyone can disconnect from physical noise of the world by finding a quiet place. One should also silence all of the senses - sight, smell, hearing, speech (and touch) - as follows:

1. Speech - One can quiet the sense of speech by simply not talking.
2. Smell - One can quiet the sense of smell by smelling something pleasant, such as fruits, trees, etc. Anyone can choose what he likes to smell; some need to make more use of this, and some need this part less, but this has been written about by the *Raavad* (Rabbi Avraham ben David)[\[1\]](#), to use pleasant-smelling things in order to calm the sense of smell. It goes without saying that there should be nothing in the room with a foul odor, but in order to truly calm the sense of smell, one should smell something he finds pleasant.
3. Hearing - To quiet the sense of hearing, one should not be hearing any noise from the outside world.
4. Sight - To quiet the sense of sight, one sits in the dark, as mentioned.

This is how a person can quiet all of his five physical senses.

4. Quieting Inner Noise, Stage 1 - Sitting In The Dark

The next step is to silence the inner senses of the soul - the inner noise. There are a few steps in this. The first basic step, as we have mentioned, is to sit in the dark.

4a) Recognizing The Importance of Quiet Time Every Day - One will have to come to terms with this, because he may find it boring and non-active, and he may feel that it is a waste of time, for we live in a "world of action" and the main thing is action, etc. This is all true, but everything is true only when applied correctly. You must come to a firm inner decision that just as you have a time to eat and you have time to go to sleep, and you have the time when you *daven* and time to learn Torah (each person on his own level), so does your soul require times every day where it can be calmed.

The Chofetz Chaim required all of the *bochurim* in the yeshivah of Radin to have an hour each day to have simple quiet walks, where they would just take in the good air outside. Today, this is non-existent and no one would want to do it. In the yeshivah of Ponovezh, the Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Gershon Edelstein, would require each *bochur* to go for a walk each day for a half-hour.

This may seem to us as something extreme. But if you learn the words of our Sages of previous generations, you will see that there is much written about this, and it is not a product of our generation.

Of course, not every place is suitable to go to. There are places that are questionable where they may be improper sights, and this makes it complicated. It is therefore up to each person to go about this sensibly and to be wise about it. But in any case, the very idea of it needs to be practiced by every

person – to have quiet time to yourself every day, where you can simply calm down and feel relaxed.

When one is unaware that the Sages have written about the importance of this, he will look at this practice with disdain, viewing it as something new which has come to the world, and naturally, he will feel opposed to it. But when one becomes aware that this has been written about by the Sages, he must then firmly decide that this is absolutely necessary, and that it must become a part of his day.

First contemplate the importance of it on an intellectual level, until you internalize it in your heart and you come to feel it. You may view it as either a time to relax which helps you learn Torah better (*bitulah zeh kiyuma* – when ceasing from Torah study is a way to upkeep it), or you may view it as no less important than sleep, or you may view it as a need of the soul, or you may call it “*derech erez precedes Torah*” – whatever you want to call it. But the common denominator is that you need to firmly decide that you need quiet time every day where you can calm yourself.

Without coming to that decision, it will be very hard for a person to try to do it. A Torah scholar or a *masmid* (person who learns Torah diligently) will view it as a form of *bittul Torah*, and a working person will view it as a waste of time and he will want to fill his time with other things he can get done during that time. There will be all kinds of arguments not to do it, if a person hasn't yet firmly decided that he needs it.

As we explained, the decision must come from both intellectually contemplating its importance, as well as a feeling for it you have to come, after you have thought well about why it is so important. Compare it to a person who has just gone through a physical illness, and he is told that every day from now, he will have to engage in certain physical activities, in order to become fully healed. The person realizes that even though he didn't need to do this in the past, this is what his body needs right now. In the same way, one should understand that having quiet time every day is a need of the soul, which you need every day. It should not be viewed as *b'dieved* – it is *l'chatchilah*. Decide that it should become a part of your life, a part of your daily schedule.

It may be hard to get used to this change and to incorporate it permanently into your schedule. It is like a person who was used to eating everything he wanted, and then he is having problems in his health, so he gets evaluated by a nutritionist, and he is given a specific diet, and to eat at specific times of the day, etc. He finds these changes to be very hard. He can't eat anymore everything he wanted, and he finds that his whole schedule has been overturned. It takes him a long time to slowly digest this new lifestyle. As hard as it is, this is what he will have to do in order to stay healthy. In the same way, when people hear that they will need to make changes in their *Avodas Hashem*, they may have a hard time with it because it involves changes in their schedule that they aren't used to.

4b) Sitting In The Dark - When one finally does absorb that he needs to have times of quiet every day, he must become comfortable with the decision to have times of sitting in the dark every day.

We have explained that when one begins to sit in the dark, he should quiet the physical senses, as described earlier.

5) Calming The Emotions

The next step is to quiet the “inner” noises. The first step in this, as we explained, is to conquer the opposition to sitting in the dark. After one has gotten this kind of inner “noise” – of not wanting to sit in the dark – there are now two additional kinds of inner noises to overcome: There is ‘noise’ coming from the heart (emotions), and there is also ‘noise’ coming from the intellect (the thoughts).

5a) Quieting The Emotions - “Emotional noise” will be stronger in a person with a more emotional kind of personality, who experiences more intense emotions, in varying levels of intensity. When sitting in

the dark, a person may begin to hear all of his “emotional noise”. He might think of someone he hates or dislikes, someone he fears, and any other negative emotions that are awakened. The quietness of sitting in the dark may awaken all of his emotions, from this lifetime as well from previous lifetimes. This is a complicated matter to understand.

Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam writes that in order to reach final stage of this quieting as “Encounter” (*pegiah*) with G-d, which is the complete level of “attachment” (*d'veykus*), one needs to silence all noises, both physical and inner noise, including his emotions – to reach a point where there is “no emotion”. This is a very high level, and if one reaches it, he reaches a state where his emotions are not active. Here we will speak of the level that most people can reach: One needs to reach a point where he simply **becomes aware of what he’s feeling**.

The calmer a person becomes, the higher quality of **awareness** he can have. He will be able to hear subtler sounds of the soul. This is a very big change and overhaul for a person’s soul, once one reaches it. These inner sounds, which can only be heard in utter quiet and calmness, are really the most subtle feelings that speak to a person, from within the soul. One will then be able to recognize his own soul, to understand it, to feel its subtleties and what it is communicating. A person will feel subtleties in his soul which he never paid attention to until now because he had been so busy and bombarded.

Thus, when quieting the inner senses, the first step is to become aware of what you are feeling. When your emotions start surfacing, there may be emotions which are hard for you to accept that they are taking place in you. Do not deny what you are feeling, and do not try to battle these feelings. The point in this stage is to simply become *aware* of what you are feeling, without trying to change the feelings.

This will be very hard when you first try it, because you may become overwhelmed from all of the emotions that are suddenly being released from within you, and it is much more than what you are used to. You might want to erase all of them at once, as if they are all the nation of Amalek. But the reality is that you cannot do this. You should just simply accept that these emotions have been dormant in your soul, and now they have been awakened, now that you have some quiet. Now that you have quiet and you are calm, you can feel more sharply these inner noises and you can feel these emotions more clearly and deeply.

The first step, as mentioned, is to become aware of these emotions. Without being calm, you cannot become fully aware, and it will feel like a battle to do so. But once you have become calm, you can become easily aware of what you are feeling. When you are calm, you should not try to battle these emotions, because that will only take you out of your calmness. You will feel a certain emotion or thought and just become aware of it; you are leaving it aside for now.

This can only happen when you have quiet calmness, because when you are not in a quiet calm place, you will not be at peace with the negative feelings or thoughts you discover in yourself, and leaving it to the side will not seem sensible to you, especially if the emotion feels so intense. But when you are in a quiet place and you have begun to calm yourself, you can have the calmness to be able to ‘put aside’ any negative emotions you discover and to not engage in battle with them. When you are in the calmness, there is no pressure or forcing to do anything or fight any feelings or thoughts.

Having this quiet time every day to yourself is not simply physical quiet. It creates inner quiet, which is the goal of all that we are saying here. When you gain inner quiet, all of the inner movements and ‘noises’ in the soul become calmed. Once you enter into quiet calmness, even the most intense emotions in you become calmed, a “Shabbos”-like state in the soul, which brings *menuchah* (serenity) to the raging emotions of the soul and calms them. You put aside any negative emotions you discover

in yourself, and you will deal with it at a later time, not now.

By getting used to this, you slowly train your soul to experience and become aware of whatever you are feeling, amidst calmness, and remaining calm. Sometimes you will be less or more successful in putting aside the negative feelings that come up, but either way, you will be training yourself to have some level of control over your feelings. Either you will be able to put aside your feelings completely, or you will be able to put aside some of them.

Alternatively, when your negative feelings become awakened, you can try awakening positive emotions. Do not do this in order to counter and fight the negative emotions, because we do not want to create a battle with the emotions. Instead, simply awaken positive emotions in yourself [and they will do their work on their own].

Every person must know what his strongest positive emotions are, which he finds pleasant. It may be a feeling of love to someone, or any emotion which he finds pleasant to feel. One should write down a list of strong positive emotions which he enjoys feeling, and to use those positive emotions at his disposal, as if he is removing his favorite books from a shelf. One needs some understanding about his own inner world in order to get to know his strongest positive emotions, and he may also need *siyata d'shmaya* for this, but as a general definition, one needs a wide array of different positive "feelings" in his "collection", and make use of them at times, when he needs to.

Slowly, one can learn how to calm his physical senses and his emotions, removing his negative feelings as much as he can, and replacing them with positive feelings which calm him.

5b) Emotional Relaxation Through Taste - Sometimes, a person may need to also calm himself [his emotions] by tasting something that relaxes him somewhat. We do not mean overeating or indulgence, but to simply taste something, for the purpose of causing some relaxation. This advice is written about by the *Raavad* and others.

If one uses this for the purposes of simply indulging in physical desire, he will not be calmed by it, for it will simply awaken his physical desires to desire even more, as "one who has a hundred, will want two hundred." A person with a tendency to indulge in food should therefore not make use of this advice. Even if he does use it, he must only eat things that calm him, not things which increase his physical desires. This is a subtle matter which every person needs to go about sensibly, using his own wisdom. When this advice is used sensibly and correctly, one uses the sense of taste to calm himself.

5c) Emotional Relaxation Through Niggun - Furthermore, listening to a *niggun* (Jewish melody) is also a tool used to calm down. In previous times, one would simply sing to himself and thereby calm himself. In our times, where there is a wide array of *niggunim* available, a person can listen to any *niggun* which he finds calming. This also calms the emotions, because song can awaken different emotions and change a person's emotional direction.

What kind of *niggun* does a person listen to, though? In most instances, listening to a *niggun* does not calm a person. In certain cases, listening to a loud song may be helpful, if a person is experiencing intense emotions and the only thing that will calm him down is to drown out all of his "inner noise" through the noise of loud music. This is a subtle matter, which should be used sensibly. Even in the event that one does need to use loud music in order to calm down, it should be a *niggun* rooted within the parameters of *kedushah* (holiness), and not of the outside world.

5d) Emotional Relaxation Through Physical Stillness - The physical posture of a person can also affect a person's calmness, or lack thereof. The physical posture plays a large role in attaining inner calm. One needs to feel physically calm in his bodily movements, but at the same time, one must avoid

anything that will lead to lethargy and sleepiness. There are some people who will gain calmness from lying down in bed and remaining still, while there are others who will simply fall asleep from this. Therefore, one must go about this idea sensibly and know himself well.

5e) Emotional Relaxation By Sitting In A Pleasant Place - Our Sages, in the times of *Rishonim*, would go even further than the above. They would find places where they could have solitude. One needs to find a place he finds pleasant, where he can become more expansive.

There are some people who will not gain from this at all. They do not feel a difference between being in a bank with being in a place out of civilization. But if one does feel calmed by going to a place far from people, this is a great tool he can use in order to reach quiet calmness. This also needs to be done sensibly, because we do not mean for one to leave his house and search the streets until he finds a quiet place to go to. Rather, go to a place you find pleasant to be in, on condition that it does not awaken a stronger connection to the desires for This World.

In summation, all of the above methods contain subtlety, and they should all be used sensibly; and they are all methods written about by our Sages.

6. Quieting The Thoughts

Until now, we have explained how to calm the emotions, which is achieved either through awakening your strongest positive emotions which can calm you, or through reaching a state in which you are not bothered by any intense emotions you are having.

The next step is to calm the “inner noises” of the intellect. There are two kinds of intellectual noise. With most people, “intellectual noise” is not the noise of their actual intellect, but the **noise of their thoughts** - various thoughts which bombard the mind, the “numerous calculations” that people may have, such as preoccupation with thoughts about their business, family, or various fantasies.

A Torah scholar has an additional obstacle to contend with. Since his mind is always occupied with deep Torah thoughts, and he is constantly thinking of inner and analytical kinds of thought, this creates a certain inner noise. This is especially if the Torah scholar has an especially intense way of thinking, if he is very gifted in his ability to produce Torah *chiddushim* and razor-sharp arguments and sharp ways of thinking. While this is beneficial for Torah learning, it still causes the thoughts to become ‘louder’ and stormier in their nature. For this reason, a gifted and brilliant Torah scholar may actually find it harder to stop to one kind of thought and enter a different thought.

The Chazon Ish said that he has a difficulty when he is about to start praying, because he has to stop his thinking Torah thoughts. Most people will never know what this problem is. With most people, the problem is the opposite - their minds are all over the place and they aren’t focused on any one thought in particular. In the yeshiva of Kelm, the students made a resolution upon themselves that if any Torah thoughts came to them during prayer, they would dismiss any of these Torah thoughts and they would not regard them as genuine Torah *chiddushim*, not even writing them down afterwards. That was a resolution in Kelm, but it is not applicable to most people. With most people, the problem is from an altogether different angle.

In any case, when a person is trying to calm himself, he must calm his thoughts. He needs to stop getting involved with thinking about anything to do with the outside world, and he must also stop his involvement with even inner kinds of thoughts, such as his Torah thoughts.

As a general outline, if one’s thoughts are not particularly intense, one should simply become aware of these thoughts and leave them to the side for now (as mentioned before regarding emotions). But if the thoughts are very bothersome, he should think of something positive which is calming to

thinking about, similar to what we mentioned before about calming negative emotions.

When it calms to awakening positive thoughts, there are two mental powers to use for this: thought, or imagination. Or, a person may sit in the dark (which he should have been doing anyhow) and thereby calm his mind from this. One can take a picture that is pleasant to look at, or he may imagine it; it may be a nice-looking picture/vision of a scenic view, or the waves of the ocean, or a palace, etc. Whatever you choose, it should be something which is pleasant and calming to look at.

In Summary

When you are calming yourself through listening to a calming, pleasant *niggun*, combined with thinking or imagining a nice-looking visual scene, you slowly quiet your emotions and thoughts.

Once again, we will mention that the risk contained in this is that it may cause a person to simply become lethargic and doze off as he becomes calmer. On a purely base and physical level, these methods are indeed used by people to fall asleep better. But here we are describing the inner way to use these methods, to use it as a deep power of the soul, and in fact, it can be regarded as a holy kind of “sleep”, in the sense that it calms down all of the physical and inner senses.

In summation, we have described until here how one calms the three outer “garments” of the soul – which were action, emotion, and thought. Now that we have learned how to bypass each of the garments of the soul, we will explain how to reach the essence of the soul itself.

7. Exposing The Essence of the Soul

There is the soul itself, its *etzem* (essence), and its *levushim* (garments). When the garments of the soul are in full force, even if they are being used for holiness, the essence of the soul will remain hidden, because the “garments” are still covering it. Even if a person does *mitzvos* and learns Torah for the sake of Heaven, his “garments” are purified, and they become transparent, so that the soul’s essence can shine through. But that is only true when a person is indeed doing the *mitzvos* with the intention of *lishmah* and he is indeed learning Torah *lishmah*.^[2] Without the intention of *lishmah*, a person’s Torah learning and *mitzvos* are still holy and they still cause some spiritual illumination, but the “garments” will still be covering the soul’s essence, obscuring it almost entirely.

What is the way, then, to reach the inner essence of the soul? The way of the Chazon Ish, and other *Gedolim*, was to learn Torah *lishmah*. When a person learns Torah *lishmah*, he can easily and quickly traverse all that we have said here, because the power of *lishmah* is an inner light of the *neshamah* (Divine soul) which can penetrate powerfully through all of the layers of the soul. Indeed, if a person is at the level of learning Torah *lishmah*, this path will work for him. But here we will speak of a lower method, as we have been describing until now, in which the soul slowly becomes slowly exposed, through bypassing each of the garments of the soul.

This brings a person to the most awesome revelation there is – in which a person reveals that there is a very concept of his own “I” (second only to the revelation of the Creator, which is the most complete revelation there is). This is not the ego, in which a person thinks of his “I” in terms of worrying solely about himself and when he lives only for himself, where each person in the world feels “The entire world was created for me.” The “I” here that we are referring to is the pure “I” – the *neshamah*, which was carved from the Throne of Glory. (A higher level is when one realizes that he is a *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a “portion of G-d from above.”)

As long as a person has not yet risen above his actions, feelings, thoughts, he has not yet encountered his very “I”, only the garments that are atop his “I”. That is why most people have almost no connection to their “I”. Most people are too busy and harried from life to do any personal

reflection, and even those who do have time to reflect will usually think about what they do (action), what they are feeling (emotion) and what they are thinking (thought).

In most cases, if people do get a feeling or thought about their very self, it is only being imagined, and they are not really identifying their actual self. It might seem to the person that he has reached his "I", but this is only because he has not yet become truly self-aware, and therefore he imagines that he has reached it. Indeed, in comparison to other people, one might be a bit closer to reaching his "I", if he can at least have a feeling or thought which seems to personify his "I", but this does not make it a true revelation of the "I". It is simply a recognition of the "I" through the view of the outer "garments" of the soul [which is superficial and not an actual revelation of the "I", only an unclear and incomplete view of it].

We must understand that there are all kinds of methods in which people are taught in how to come to their true self, by way of recognizing what they do, feel, and think. If this is only regarded as a stage of one's life which one must pass through, it would be fine. But when people think that this is the entire way to expose their true self, it is false, because it is really stopping halfway, so it is like dying before getting to the destination point.

After one has bypassed all of the soul's garments – action, feeling, and thought – he begins to reveal the "I". Of this it is said, "You exerted, and you found." [3] When you "find", you do not find it "there" in the sense of something outside of yourself – rather, you find it in yourself.

8. Summary of The Three Stages of Self-Revelation

Most people are as far from their true self as the distance between the sky and the earth. They haven't entered the very first stage of self-revelation, which is to have basic self-awareness towards their actions, feelings, and thoughts.

There are those who have reached the second stage of self-revelation, which is to have self-awareness towards their actions, feelings, and thoughts. They may have begun inner work with themselves by learning the *sefarim* which explain the ways of self-revelation – whether they have learned about this from the *sefarim* of our Sages or from external sources (which is a discussion for itself) – and they reached somewhat of a level of self-awareness, regarding their emotions and thoughts. However, in many cases, people will stop at that point, and they do not enter further into themselves.

Here we are describing the third stage of self-revelation, which is to reach the actual self. It is the point where one crosses over from the world of action, emotion, and thought (of course, this does not mean that one disconnects from observing Torah and *mitzvos*, for one must immediately return to this world of action after he has reached his inner silent point. The outer layers of the soul have their place, and the inner point of the soul has its own place, and one should pass back and forth between these two areas in himself, in a cycle.

9. The Experience of Self-Revelation – A Personal Coming of The Messiah

When one can rise above his own actions, feelings and thoughts, he begins to reveal the "I" in himself. When reaching this point, a person will feel like a convert born anew, like a child that has just been born. His entire sense of self-perception towards himself will feel like a new revelation that has come upon him. To some extent, it will feel to him like "Moshiach" has come. Of course, it is not the general Moshiach who will come to the world; it will be his own private revelation of "Moshiach". He will feel like a completely new being.

It is really not possible to describe this inner experience in the word, but we can give a *moshol*

(parable) to it which can help us have some understanding of it. It is like when a father bears his first child, where he has the feeling that a totally new being has come into the world and into his life. Before a person reveals his "I", he had a certain self-perception towards himself, and after he begins to reveal his "I", the self-perception will change entirely.

Although this discovery will be a major revelation and it is coming from within, it is still not the actual revelation of the very essence of the soul. But once a person reaches this [beginning level of the] revelation of his "I", he has a major achievement. He will feel that his life until now was "before" and now he is "after" - as if he had been living in a dream until now.

10. Living In Reality vs. Living In a Dream\Fantasy

The truth is that the entire outer world is really a "dream", from the perspective of one's inner world. After reaching self-revelation, a person will feel what it means to exist, and he will realize that until this point, his entire life has been like one big fantasy. When he walks in the street and sees other people, he will see people who are consumed by nothing but fantasies.

It is like if you would see a group of children who are playing a game with each other, where they make believe that there are no parents, i.e. they pretend that they are robots. When you observe them playing this make believe kind of game, you realize that they are reveling in a fantasy together, for their game is not possible in real life. In real life, everyone is born from parents, or else they do not become born. They think they are having a good time, but that is only true in their imagination.

The world is one big world of fantasy, where people are involved in their fantasies all day. Even though an observant Jew keeps the mitzvos, his very way of living is spent in a fantasy-like kind of existence, as long as he hasn't yet gotten in touch with his own inner world.

Compare it to a person putting on *tefillin* in a dream. People may be doing *mitzvos*, but they are living in a dreamlike state. This does not mean that they are living incorrectly and making mistakes. Rather, they are living with a perspective of imagination towards life. While it is true that every Jew is a "portion of G-d from above", and there is a "spark of truth" in every Jew, it can only be a "spark of truth" in comparison to the rest of the world, which lives in dreams and frivolous pursuits. The Sages said that every dream contains some truth, but that doesn't mean it's not a dream...

11. The Inner World Is A Disconnection From This World

When one reaches self-revelation, he should then understand the following deep point, about the inner world. It is essentially a strong disconnection from the outer world, where a person has passed from one world to another.

Sometimes when a person reaches it, he may actually feel a certain sense of loneliness, because he will feel that he is on one side of the world and that the rest of the world is on the opposite side, like the prophet Yonah, who wanted to die because he felt so secluded from the rest of the world. He may feel the meaning of the statement of the Sages, "Either a friend or death."^[4] The person sees himself living in a different place than the rest of the world. He sees how the rest of the world is living in their fantasies, while he is living in a genuine, tangible existent reality.^[5]

It is like the difference between an old person's perspective about life, compared to how a young person usually views life. Most people, in their younger years, will view weddings as the apex experience of life. They will think very much about weddings and how to prepare for it. What about the day of death? Perhaps they know in the back of their minds that it eventually comes, but they are not really thinking about it. Younger people are usually far from any thought about the day of death. As a person gets older and matures, he views a wedding as a certain stage in life, but he sees that it

is not everything, and that there is a lot more to life than the day a person gets married. But younger people are usually far from thinking about the day of death, and all that they will think look forward to is: their own wedding, the weddings of others, and then their children's weddings.

People prepare weeks in advance for a wedding, to make sure that is the best wedding possible. What difference does it really make if the chairs look a certain way in the wedding hall, for an event that is only a few hours long? Is it the World To Come, which is eternal?! It is a meaningless pursuit, and it is all an involvement in fantasy world.

This is a classic example of the idea, but the world is full of such examples. When people are consumed by the temporal and transient things on this world, they slowly become further and further from their real, inner, spiritual world. This is not an issue of doing spiritual *avodah* or not [it is simply living in an imaginary kind of existence]. Imagine if we would tell a person who is 40, 50, or 60 years old that he should live in a playgroup with little children. Such a person is not really connected to life, for he is living with children, who are each apart from each other and who can't connect with each other.

When one realizes the point of what we are saying here, he is able to separate himself far from This World and give it a divorce document. He disconnects from the entire reality that is in This World. Of course, he will still have a family to take care of, and when people go overboard with this idea, they become spiritually delusional and they think they can be like Moshe Rabbeinu who separated from his wife, taking on all kinds of stringencies and discomfort. The point is not to become like this. Rather, one should simply gain a perspective of disconnection from This World, of divorcing one's connection to This World. It takes much wisdom about life to live with this concept sensibly and realistically, to be deeply connected to the inner world and to simultaneously be functional in the reality of This World.

12. In Your Inner World There Is No Sense of Competitiveness With Others

When one separates from This World and he realizes that he has an inner reality of his own, his own spiritual and inner world, he has his own "room befitting his honor" (*mador l'fi kevodo*). Each person has his own spiritual place, the unique place where he stands in the spiritual world.

Your unique spiritual place does not mean that you see that you compare yourself with others and you feel that you are spiritually "better off" than others. It does not mean to be like some people who, in their conceitedness, feel that they are always "better" than others and therefore they are *someiach b'chelko* (happy with his lot). We are referring here to a deeper perception than this. One can realize that he has a unique spiritual place of his own, and that this is what he has; he is not comparing his situation with others. Let them be as they are and let them have whatever they have; what difference does it make what they have, when you have your own world, and that is where you live?

The more a person enters inward, entering into "chamber within chamber" [within his heart][6] depth within depth, he gains an inner world of his own. In your inner world, there is no place for competing and jealousy with others. In contrast to this, the more a person lives in the outer world, the more he will be affected by the three traits that remove a person from the world - jealousy, lust, and seeking honor. Your own inner world is your true *cheilek* (portion) that you have in the true world. There, there is no place for thinking "Maybe I could have something else, which would be better", or "If only I would have that other person's spiritual share".

This contains a very deep point to understand. Most people do not have that much self-awareness, and those who do are not always spiritually connected to themselves, because they do not want to face their own shortcomings and deficiencies, and therefore they choose not to enter inward. What fuels this avoidance? It is because they live so much on the outer world, which is filled with jealousy,

desires, and seeking honor. Therefore, a person will take on this same competitive attitude when it comes to his spirituality as well. The person cannot handle if another person has better character traits than he does, i.e. if another person has less lusts than he does, if another has less conceitedness than he does, etc. He would like to switch places with another person, when he sees that others are faring better spiritually than he is and are more purified; it is painful to him.

But the more a person enters inward, into his own inner world, which contains his unique spiritual abilities, he is not interested in switching places with others. He realizes that whatever characteristics he has is all that he has, and he has nothing else than this. This is the depth of the statement of the Sages, "Therefore, man was created individual." The true individuality of man is to go deep into your own inner world and to realize that this is your world, and that this is what has been prepared for you, so there is no place to think about what others have [spiritually speaking].

A higher level than this is to believe with *emunah* that Hashem has given you exactly all of the tools and abilities that you need, not less and not more, thus there is no place to question Hashem's design of you and how this compares to others. But here we are not speaking of an acceptance that comes from *emunah*, which is certainly a fundamental aspect in all of our *avodah*. Here we are coming from an entirely different perspective [which is more basic and which does not require a high level of *emunah*]. It is to simply accept that you can't switch your situation with others, whether in the physical or the spiritual.

The more you enter inward, the thoughts about what others, and the possibilities of what would be if your situation was otherwise, do not exist.

The words here will be a bit difficult to understand, and perhaps even more difficult to understand, for one who is not there. When one is not there, he is concerned of what others have, if they are faring better or worse than he is, and therefore he would like to switch places with others. From an intellectual perspective, why not switch places with others, if the other person really does have it better than you do? But when you live your own inner world, you realize that this is what you have, this is your share. This is your reality, this is your *havayah* (existence).^[7]

13. The Way To View Your Shortcomings

This is your inner world, where you own all of your special qualities you have been graced with, and you also own your shortcomings, seeing them as a part of your inner work. Instead of ignoring your weaknesses, you take ownership of them and you realize how they contribute to your inner work. You see that you have certain qualities, *Baruch Hashem*; and you see that you also have what to work on, which you will have to deal with, as a part of your inner task.

Instead of dismissing your weaknesses, you are aware of them, but from an entirely different perspective. You see them as the meaning of the verse, "*Man was born to toil*". You have been given these personal shortcomings, and this is the "share" that Hashem has given you to work on. Instead of viewing your shortcomings and weaknesses with an attitude of *shiflus* (lowliness) that comes from the "*nefesh habehaimis*" (animal level of the soul), you view those shortcomings as a part of your *avodah* on this world, realizing that it is part of your task to fix them and rectify them.

14. Seeing Yourself As One Unified Structure

This awareness unifies all the parts in your soul together, making them into "one structure" (*miksheh achas*). It enables one to be deeply connected to his very inner reality. At this level of awareness, a person can absorb all of the entire inner workings of the soul, its complexity, and the very perspective of the soul. When one hasn't yet entered inward, he may think of his soul in terms of many parts of

himself randomly mixed together as a bunch of scattered forces. The Vilna Gaon says that there are 70 forces of the soul, so a person may view himself as 70 different scattered parts, with nothing unifying him together. But when one enters more and more inward, he can see how the parts are all parts of one structure, which can connect together.

When living in this way, one can be aware of the general structure of the soul and its complexity, and how all the parts of himself are one structure, which can all become interconnected. He can know where he currently stands and the next step that he needs to take.

15. Separate From The World, But Deeply Connected With Others

This place of awareness in the soul, this perspective that comes from one's inner world, is not worked upon through "*hisbodedus*" (meditation). It is just a place in yourself that is simply apart and secluded from the rest of the world.

A person will of course still have to provide his family's needs and attend to all of his other physical needs; there are various difficult times every person goes through, and no one is spared from difficulties with the evil inclination (the only exception to this was our three forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, who reached a level where their evil inclination was removed from them). But one can always live in a reality of his own, in his own inner world.

One's true life consists of a deep connection to Hashem, Torah, and *ahavas Yisrael*. But it is one's own reality. Even when he connects to others and to do kindness with others, he does not lose his own identity. It is as the *Chovos HaLevovos* says, that a person can be amongst many people yet he is secluded from them, for he is deeply found in his own inner world.

This does not mean *chas v'shalom* that a person becomes apathetic towards other people and feels no love for them. Rather, it means that his very existence is connected to all others – in the same way that he is deeply connected to his own reality, he is connected to others, from that very deep inner connection that he has with himself. Such a person is far more connected to other Jews, with a very deep love for them, much more than people in the streets [who have not yet entered inward] who smile at each other and gladden others [who can only connect to others superficially, for they are not living inwardly].

In Conclusion

The words here have been brief, in describing the concept. But it has described the way life looks like for one who lives in his inner world. The more a person enters into the path described here and he penetrates further and further into himself, that is his own unique *cheilek* (portion) which becomes his "world".

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH THE RAV

Q1: How much time does a person need, in order to disconnect from the outer world [and enter his inner world]?

A: You cannot do it all day, because there's not simply enough time to spend all of the day in this *avodah*, and it is not to become an *avodah* which takes up your entire life. Also, even spending a lot of time on trying to reach it won't help, because you can only get there through slowly training yourself to a new perspective. You should only work on this according to your natural abilities, to slowly get used to this path. But on the other hand, if you have only very little time for this, you won't be able to

get anywhere. So it requires a very subtle balance.

Q2: Should a person start this quieting by sitting in the dark, if it doesn't calm him?

A: If the dark doesn't calm a person, he should not sit in the dark. He first has to overcome his fear of the dark, and then sitting in the dark can calm him. Only after he finds the dark calming should he sit in it for a few minutes a day, and this will enable him to enter inward. If the dark isn't calming to him, it will only make him anxious.

Q3: What should a person do if he becomes anxious as soon as he sits down to silence everything, because he very much wants to become calm, and this very *ratzon* (will) itself is making him anxious?

A: The power of *ratzon* (will) is also known as enthusiasm (*hislahatus*). It is like the concept of the *parah adumah* (red heifer), which "contaminates the pure, and purifies the contaminated". On one hand, enthusiasm and excitement [for the spiritual] is constructive, but when one wants to reach *hashkatakah*\quieting, it is detrimental to use the powers of enthusiasm and excitement.

When a person is first beginning to enter *Avodas Hashem*, it is positive and constructive to become enthused and excited about it. It has value then. But [at a later stage of one's *Avodas Hashem*], when one needs to work on acquiring the power of *hashkatakah*\quieting, it is detrimental to try to excite oneself about it, because the excitement doesn't allow for any calmness. When you are trying to attain *hashkatakah*, you need to minimize and lessen your state of enthusiasm and excitement - but only in a way that doesn't take away your *ratzon* (will) to grow in *Avodas Hashem*.

This is a subtle point, because if one weakens his excitement so much to the point that he loses any will to do anything, he loses more than whatever he gains. Generally speaking, after a person has become excited about *Avodas Hashem* and he is already connected to the inner world on a more permanent basis, he can then gain from *hashkatakah* and it is appropriate at that point for him to work on this. But if he tries working on *hashkatakah* way before he even has an excitement in the first place for *Avodas Hashem*, this is detrimental.

This is especially applicable to young teenagers and adolescents, who need to first enter *Avodas Hashem* through gaining an enthusiasm and excitement for *Avodas Hashem*. If they first work on *hashkatakah*\quieting, before they have even felt any enthusiasm for *Avodas Hashem* in the first place, they will quiet down all of their desires, physical and spiritual, and they will lose their entire *ratzon* for anything, as well for holiness. It is not appropriate at that stage to work on acquiring *hashkatakah*. The stage of *hashkatakah* must only be worked upon at a later stage in *Avodas Hashem*, long after one is already used to living his inner world - **it must not be a starting point in one's *Avodas Hashem*.**[\[8\]](#)

Q4: Is it natural for any normal person to reach *hashkatakah*\silence, or is it only natural only for a person who is drawn towards the quiet?

A: It depends on a person's dominant element of his soul. Someone with a stronger element of fire will have a harder time getting used to *hashkatakah*\quieting, because he is more drawn towards excitement, rather than the quietness. In contrast, someone with a strong element of earth, who requires much less excitement, can identify much more with *hashkatakah*\quieting, and it will come much more naturally to him.

However, every person does need excitement. The only issue is how to balance out one's excitement, with an ability to also have some quiet calmness. It is like the question above, if a person can start *hisbodedus* [*hashkatakah*] without feeling any excitement for it. Someone with a stronger element of

earth, or someone who is very internal, can start without feeling any excitement for it. But someone with a strong element of fire, who requires more excitement, will naturally have a harder time with 'calming' down his fire when trying to attain *hashkatah*. But if a person has an ability to be very stubborn in his decisions, he can be very persistent in attaining this quieting even without feeling excited about it, because he can strongly motivate himself to do it and persist with it.

Therefore, the success in this will depend on a person's motivation of why he wants to enter this *avodah*, so one must try to figure out what is motivating him to enter this *avodah*, and **to see if entering this kind of *avodah* will cause him to grow more, or if it will only cause him to become complacent.** One has to know himself well for this.

Understandably, sometimes people make mistakes like this [because they did not reflect about what their true motivations are] and therefore they come to make many errors in their *Avodas Hashem*, and much of their life suffers from this, and they become lost and misguided as they are traversing their path. There are many subtle kinds of errors a person may make in his *Avodas Hashem*. But when done correctly, a person becomes calmed at a certain point, from practicing *hashkatah*.

There are people who are full of enthusiasm, who have a strong element of fire, and who are considered to be in the category of "*Oivdei Hashem*" (devout servants of G-d), but since they never work on acquiring any *hashkatah*\quieting, they are entirely "fire" - with no inner world of their own.

Others go in the opposite extreme. They identify very well with the need for *hashkatah* very much, but too much - they become so "calm" that it makes them complacent, and they stop having any aspirations to grow. Everything by them is just "*Baruch Hashem*", with a relaxed but apathetic attitude towards spiritual growth: "Take it easy...Hashem is not demanding that much of us...we are in *ikvesa d'meshicha* (the footsteps of Mashiach)" - all kinds of expressions that people have, which they use in order to exempt themselves from striving for growth.

There is some truth to these arguments, because Rav Chaim Vital writes that Hashem is more merciful and forgiving towards the later generations. But a person may become so calmed and relaxed from this attitude that he becomes totally complacent and he doesn't demand any growth from himself, moving forward only very slowly. It's like a person learning a *daf* (page) of Gemara for an entire year, slowly analyzing every word on the page....there is no drive in the person to pick up the pace a bit.[\[9\]](#) So these are all subtle matters.

Q5: What should a person do if he has a difficulty with getting used to sitting in the dark, because he is afraid of it?

A: For someone who has a fear of the dark, he should not yet attempt this *avodah* of sitting in the dark, for now.

Q6: When sitting in the dark, should it be totally dark?

A: It doesn't have to be. That is why I stressed that if someone has any fear of the dark, he should skip this stage [for now]. There is nothing wrong with you if you fear the dark. There are different personalities. For example, you may have children who fear certain things, while other children do not have those fears all. Some people are fine sitting in a totally dark room, while others will not be comfortable in a totally dark room. Each soul is different.

Q7: After I have begun to calm myself, what now am I supposed to feel?

A: You cannot be calm if you are thinking about where you have to get to now and you are wondering about what you are supposed to feel when you get there. Rather, when you do get there, you will then

see and feel what you were supposed to reach, and the same goes for the stage after that. It does not become totally clear to you right away. Rather, it is reached in stages. With each stage you reach, you gain more clarity than the stage before it.

Q8: How does sitting in the dark make a person more connected to others?

A: You can see that when two people are in the dark together, any of the disagreements or misunderstandings they may have with each other are greatly lessened. People connect on a deeper level with each other when they are in the dark - this we can see clearly.

[1] Raavad (Rabbi Avraham ben David) was one of the foremost kabbalists of the 10th century

[2] For more on how to develop the power of lishmah, refer to **Bilvavi Part 6_06_Lishmah - Part 1** and **Bilvavi Part 6_07_Lishmah - Part 2**

[3] Megillah 6b

[4] Taanis 22a

[5] How should one deal with this loneliness if he feels it? Refer to **Tefillah_073_The Source of All Sickness**, where the Rav explains that this feeling of loneliness is actually a positive and necessary feeling for one to have.

[6] "chadrei halev" - "chambers of the heart" - an expression cited in Igros Chazon Ish

[7] For more on this point, refer to **Fixing Your Fire-Anger_016_Changing A Terrible Temper**

[8] Refer to **Fixing Your Fire-Anger_004_Frequent Anger**, in the subsection entitled "**Proper Spiritual Development**".

[9] Refer to **Fixing Your Fire-Conceit_011_Burnout**

Source: <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/droschos-everything-you-need-know-about-attaining-inner-silence>