

Chapter 7 - The Way to Sense Hashem's Existence

The Beginning of our Avodah is "I have Placed Hashem before Me."

Up to this point, we have been dealing with the fundamentals of *avodah*. Now we will begin to present practical guidance. It is best not to actually put these words into action until you have achieved the big picture of the process, but the method will be presented as if you are going to immediately put it into action.

The *Shulchan Aruch* begins with the law, "One must be courageous as a lion to rise in the morning for the service of one's Creator." The Rama there begins his commentary with the words, "I have placed Hashem before me always" (*Tehillim* 16:8). This is a major principle in Torah and the levels of the righteous who walk before G-d."

From the fact that the Rama begins specifically this *shivisi* (the awareness of Hashem's presence), we learn a very fundamental idea: together with the study of Torah, such as *halachah* (practical law), one is expected to constantly strive to achieve this state of *shivisi*. Torah and *shivisi* are not opposing endeavors; they are both needed for the goal. The Torah study of a Jew must progress in the way that is in agreement with *shivisi*.

If not, we would be very troubled by the Rama's placement of that principle in the beginning of his commentary. If that level only applies to the unique few who have reached high levels, how could he begin the part of *Shulchan Aruch* that is a basic manual for every Jew with the idea of *shivisi*?

Evidently, the Rama is telling us that *halachah* study, and in fact, all Torah study, must be carried out together with Hashem! "I have placed Hashem before me always" must be closely bound with Torah study. Our *avodah* must begin with the basic awareness of the presence of Hashem, and after that, we will, with Hashem's help, attain love, fear, attachment, and more.

If one wants to drink water, he must first check if there is water, and then he can ascertain if it is hot or cold. Without water, one cannot check its temperature. So too, before we serve God and reach love and fear, there must first be the simple recognition that there is a Creator!

The first task is for one to reach the state in which he will sense the Master of the World. After that, he can attain love, fear, and *deveikus* (attachment). *Deveikus* means that the person is already attached to Hashem. There is the

existence of the Creator, and one may be distant from Him, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 31:2), "From afar, Hashem appears to me." One may also be close, as David HaMelech said (*Tehillim* 73:28), "Closeness to Hashem is good for me." But before this, there must be the recognition that there is such an entity, and then, one must try to decrease the distance between oneself and one's Creator, but without a sense of His Presence, there is nothing to which to become close.

Therefore, when we come to discuss a practical method, the first goal is to feel Hashem in your heart as a real entity.

How is this accomplished? We will use the principles presented thus far, and see how to apply them.

Stopping to Think about Simple Points

A person must dedicate a quiet hour for contemplation, in which he will be free from all the distractions of the world and can be focused on his thoughts. He must then start with something simple, namely, the questions Avraham Avinu asked when he sought his Creator, such as, "I am in this world; how did I get here?"

This does not mean to ask because we don't know the answer. Obviously, we are believers, the children of believers, but these are like the questions the night of the Pesach seder. The *halachah* is that if there is no son, the wife should ask her husband, and if one is alone, he must ask himself.

Evidently, the story of Pesach, which is the foundation of our faith, must always be learned through the process of question and answer. This is not because the person does not know the answer, but because the method of question and answer clarifies the issue properly, and in this way, one enters the world of clarity mentioned above.

One must present questions to which he already knows the answer. However, it is imperative that he have inner calm, so that he can really ask and answer, and not merely rush through the process in a way that the question and answer come simultaneously.

This is somewhat subtle and deep. A person must devote an hour of quiet and ask, "Am I here?" He feels himself and responds, "Yes!" "Do I exist?" "Yes!" "How did I get here? Who placed me here? Can a chair or a table move by themselves?" Does the light come on by itself? Does water flow on its own (if

not going downwards)?"

In this manner, the person develops in a structured way a sense of clarity that nothing happens on its own. Then, the question screams out: "How did I get here? And further: "How is there an entity called 'I'?"

You must take this question, sit calmly for a minute or two, contemplate and see that this is really a very serious question! The proof is that many people have still not arrived at the true answer. It's wonderful that we know the answer from tradition and from our intellect, but deep down inside us, the answer is not as clear as it seems. We know the truth, it all seems very clear, but deep in the heart, the clarity and certainty are not complete!

In order for the heart to attain total clarity, one must take the basic points and make them clear. We must start with the simplest and most fundamental points that are apparently known in the minds and hearts of all, but are really not all that clear deep down.

A person must take hold of himself and say one clear fact: "Nothing happens on its own! If there is a cabinet in this room, someone must have made the boards and prepared them for the cabinet, and someone must have built it, and someone must have brought it here. Precisely so, I must have been created."

This is the first principle. "I did not have eternal existence; I was created. And if there is a being that was passively created, there must be an active Creator. The question is, who is the Creator?"

Avraham Avinu lived with this question for a very long time. We have no doubt that there is an omnipotent Creator, and in fact, it is not worthwhile to spend a lot of time analyzing this, because few people have minds great enough for such speculation, but the basic point that there is a Creator must be clarified and repeated tens and hundreds of times, without rushing to proceed further.

A person should take this simple point and say to himself, "Could I have been made without a Maker? Is it possible that "yesterday" I did not exist, and today I exist automatically? Now that I came into existence, Who put me in this world?" A person must take these questions and repeat them again and again, speaking to himself and saying, "Am I certain or not?" Do I entertain the possibility that everything happened on its own?"

A person must talk to himself for a day, then a second day, and at least for

months, until he realizes a very simple point: "It is clear to me in the depth of my heart that the world has a Master! If I was created, there must be a Creator!"

That is to say, first of all, we must attain the intellectual awareness of the existence of the Creator. Certainly, everyone knows about this, but it must become absolutely clear. After that, it must be instilled deep in the heart.

Constant Contemplation without Distraction

Any point one is developing, such as this point that there is a Creator, must be remembered all day. Every half hour, one must stop for a few seconds and say to himself, "I was created and there is One Who created me. I was created and there is One Who created me." More than this is not necessary.

Thus, throughout the day, a person stops himself at intervals and says, "I was created and there is One Who created me," so that this will be a unifying thought to connect the entire day. Gradually, the mind will become accustomed to thinking about this and feeling it. This is how we begin to instill the concept. It is a gradual process, but very solid and definite.

That is to say, besides the time devoted to contemplation for clarifying the matter, the goal is for the mind to be constantly involved in it. It cannot be an ordinary piece of information that one merely has to learn and needs to do no more, but it must be alive and clear in his mind.

There are two ways in which an idea can be alive with a person. On one level, the person needs to be awakened to the matter so that it lives with him, but otherwise, he is "sleeping." On a higher level, he is always alert, and he walks all day with the idea he wants to attain.

This is a fundamental rule about the ways of *avodah*. Anything a person wants to internalize, settle, and build within must not be out of mind for the rest of the day that is not his contemplation time. If it is, it will be too sporadic, and the idea cannot be attained.

The way to attain levels in the service of Hashem is to keep awakening the matter again and again, with only brief intervals between the reminders. One must determine a certain point to develop throughout the day, and go through the day with that point, with absolute clarity.

If not, it is like the example mentioned by Rav Chaim Shmuelevits zt"l, in which one puts the kettle on a fire for a minute and then removes it for a

minute, and keeps repeating the process. The water in it will never boil!

We are not talking inner "boiling" and excitement, but rather, inner awareness. If a person wants *da'as*, not just knowledge and understanding, but a real connection to an idea (it will be alive with him, as it says, "With *da'as*, the chambers will be filled with precious and pleasant riches - *Mishlei* 24:4), he must not allow even a half hour without remembering the true point he wants to attain!

Of course, at first, one will be affected by forgetfulness, and one will meet with defeat many times, but one who panics because of defeat has not yet attained the concept of *avodah*. The rule (*Mishlei* 24:16), "A *tzaddik* falls seven times and rises" is an axiom of anyone who lives in the inner world. Even if one forgets about all this for half a day, he must not panic. He simply will return to the basic point and set up external reminders to alert him to the matter, but he will never give up. He will continue working on the simple point, and remind himself each half hour, "There is a Master of the world! I am a creation! If I was created, there must be a Creator," and so on.

Understandably, it will take much longer to apply this than to talk about it. If one wishes to buy a house, he is given the key, but then he needs to enter the house and live in it. How long does it take to receive the key? Just a second. How long does it take to inspect the house, see what is needed, and settle in it? A long time!

Words are like a key, and the individual must take the key and see how to instill the teaching in each of his inner "chambers," as it says, "With *da'as*, the chambers will be filled."

Advancing Slowly, not Hastily

You must know that there is an inherent problem with the way this message is being presented. The pace at which the concepts are stated is very fast, and the readers need to gain the big picture of the matter. However, to put all this in action takes a very long time. Therefore, as long as one is working on a specific matter, one must review the relevant material again and again, to the extent possible. This is needed to keep the topic alive in ones heart and make it clearer.

One who wishes to rush and advance very quickly is building a tower in the sky, which will have no permanence. When developing a quality in a solid and healthy fashion, everything built on top of it will be good and sound. But one's reaction might be, "Well, I know there is a Creator, I know I am created,

so do I need to spend three weeks on this. It is a waste of time, I want to progress! I was hoping to learn here some practical advice about becoming close to Hashem, so I could achieve *deveikus* (cleaving) quickly!" This is a guaranteed formula for failure!

We must know that just as there is a holy quickness and alacrity of the soul, so is there the haste and rashness of the evil side. It removes from man the trait of patience, and takes from him the simple understanding that this is like planting a seed in the earth, which can take half a year until something sprouts. Likewise, a tree cannot be enjoyed (because of the laws of *arlah* and *neta reva'i*) until the fifth year. That is to say, a person invests days, weeks, and months in the tree, until three years are complete, and he still cannot benefit from even a single fruit!

But in fact, this is how building, planting, and growing works. Results are never instant. The process takes years from the time of planting, but after the fourth year, there are good, ripe fruit that one can properly enjoy.

When the world was created, it took but six days, and man could have entered to partake of the "feast" immediately. *Chazal* say that if he had not sinned, he would have entered the ultimate Shabbos, with eternal and total rest and repose. This is still a potential contained in the soul. Each of us feels the inner element that expects to quickly enter "the world that is wholly good." This element is hidden deep in the soul. But since our sins place us after the sin, not before it, we cannot in reality achieve what would have only taken until that original Shabbos, but we must wait until the end of the sixth thousand to reach that world that is wholly good.

"A thousand years in Your eyes are like the day that passed" (*Tehillim* 90:4). Instead of requiring a few moments to enter the world that is wholly good, man entered the world of "In the morning, plant your seeds" (*Kohelles* 11:6), and *Chazal* say that one must always be involved in "planting," but we cannot know exactly when we will be able to harvest.

Had Adam guarded himself for a few hours, he would have seen the "building," the day that is entirely rest and repose for all eternity. But once the sin came, all of this changed, and now, much time and patience is needed.

In summary, we must be very firm in our work. 1) One must think about the ideas throughout the day, not just once a day or night. 2) One must proceed slowly, without haste.

May Hashem help all of us to build a true structure and truly cleave to our

Creator.